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Female entrepreneurs' strategies to mitigate work-family conflict

Estratégias de atenuação do conflito trabalho-família utilizadas por empreendedoras

Estrategias de mitigación de conflictos trabajo-familia utilizadas por mujeres emprendedoras

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed female entrepreneur's strategies to mitigate work-family conflict through qualitative and descriptive research using interviews with nine businesswomen. The results show that sharing roles by hiring professionals to help run the business, outsourcing domestic work, and family management are the main mitigation strategies. The study contributes to the incipient discussion about the positive effects of motherhood for the field of management, highlighting the reduction of conflicts, and business' professionalization and growth. The research suggests public policies designed to help coordinating family and work demands, contributing to the development of women-led enterprises.

Keywords: work-family conflict; mitigation strategies; female entrepreneurship; motherhood; businesswomen.

RESUMO

O estudo analisou as estratégias de atenuação do conflito trabalho-família utilizadas por mulheres empreendedoras. Para tal, realizou-se pesquisa qualitativa e descritiva, mediante entrevista com 9 empresárias. Os resultados indicam que a principal estratégia de atenuação é o compartilhamento de papéis por meio da gestão profissional, terceirização doméstica e gestão familiar. O estudo contribui para a incipiente discussão sobre os efeitos positivos da maternidade para o campo da gestão, destacando-se a redução dos conflitos, a profissionalização e o crescimento dos negócios. Sugerem-se políticas públicas que forneçam serviços de cuidado capazes de auxiliar na conciliação das demandas domésticas e profissionais, repercutindo na gestão dos empreendimentos geridos por mulheres.

Palavras-chave: conflito trabalho-família; estratégias de atenuação; empreendedorismo feminino; maternidade; empresárias.

RESUMEN

El estudio analizó las estrategias para mitigar el conflicto trabajo-familia utilizadas por las mujeres emprendedoras. Con este fin, se realizó una investigación cualitativa y descriptiva, a través de entrevistas con 9 empresarias. Los resultados indican que la principal estrategia de mitigación es compartir roles a través de la gestión profesional, la tercerización de servicios doméstico y la gestión familiar. El estudio contribuye a la incipiente discusión sobre los efectos positivos de la maternidad en el campo de la gestión, destacándose la reducción de conflictos, la profesionalización y el crecimiento empresarial. Se sugieren políticas públicas que ofrezcan servicios de atención capaces de ayudar a conciliar las demandas domésticas y profesionales, afectando la gestión de las empresas gestionadas por mujeres.

Palabras clave: conflicto trabajo-familia; estrategias de mitigación; emprendimiento femenino; maternidad; mujer de negocios.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Studies on the professional family interface identify negative and positive aspects. In the first case, authors such as Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams (2000) point out that combining work and family leads, mostly, to conflicts because of the incompatibilities of demands from these two domains of life. As for the positive aspects, Barney and Hyde (2001) argue that the accumulation of the roles of worker and family member may bring important benefits for men and women.

Although recognizing the relevance of the positive aspects of this interface, the dominant view is still negative (Furtado, 2012; Grzywacz, Carlson, & Shulkin, 2008; Monteiro & Portugal, 2013). In addition, the experience of work interference with family (WIF) was reported as a construct three times stronger than family interference with work (FIW), the relationship between them being more negative for women than for men (Koyuncu, Burke, & Wolpin, 2012). Tameirão and Nunes (2017) concluded that work-related stressors are the most influential factors in work-family conflict. Medeiros (2018) and Bianchim (2019) reiterate that most researchers have focused on conflicts experienced by women, as they tend to have a greater sense of guilt due to the lack of time dedicated to their children.

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) defined the work-family conflict as a form of conflict between roles, in which pressures from work and family are, somehow, mutually incompatible, and the involvement in one of the roles jeopardizes the individual's performance in the other. The authors developed a multidimensional model to explain the three possible origins of the conflict (time, tension, and behavior), which has become hegemonic and continues to be used as a theoretical basis.

The issue of work-family conflict appeared especially in the second half of the twentieth century, after the Second World War. It gained attention from the 1970s onwards, due to the increase in the number of women entering the labor market and having to manage their family and professional roles (Araújo & Scalon, 2005; Silva, Silva, Santana, & Queiroz, 2017). In an attempt to mitigate some of these conflicts and have a better quality of life at work, women have been using alternative strategies to formal employment, among which entrepreneurship stands out. Entrepreneurship became a career option that can facilitate a better work-family balance due to the characteristics of the work, such as autonomy and schedule flexibility, even if working more hours (Quental & Wetzel, 2002; Sevä & Öun, 2015; Teixeira & Bomfim, 2016). In this sense, Bianchim (2019) and Fiksenbaum (2014) show that flexibility is the most helpful policy for overcoming work-family conflict.

The literature has emphasized the importance of schedule flexibility as one of the main motivations for women to start their own business (Gomes & Santana, 2004; Lindo, Cardoso, Rodrigues, & Wetzel, 2007; Quental & Wetzel, 2002). DeMartino, Barbato and Jacques (2006)

confirmed that female entrepreneurs are more dedicated to find a balance in their work, family, and personal lives than other female workers are. The study by Jonathan and Silvia (2007) confirms that finding this balance is a top priority of Brazilian female entrepreneurs. Jennings and McDougald (2007) also highlight that family conditions are more likely to influence female entrepreneurs than their male counterparts. Therefore, studies that investigate in-depth the characteristics of domestic life and its relationships with personal and professional life are essential to understand the motivations behind female entrepreneurship (Nel, Maritz, & Thongprovati, 2010; Tanure, 2014).

The issue of work-family conflict has gained the attention of several scholars internationally since the 1970s (Aguar, 2018). Among the most important works, the studies by Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), Kanter (1977), and Pleck, Staines and Lang (1980) stand out. However, the research on women's double burden tends to prioritize the phenomenon in executive positions (Tanure, 2014).

In addition, Brazilian research on female entrepreneurship focuses on the profile of female entrepreneurs or their companies (Machado, St-Cyr, Mione, & Alves, 2003). When approached, the work-family relationship tends to be addressed in a more peripheral way, showing certain dilemmas, challenges, and fears that women experience in their multiple roles. In this sense, Tanure (2014) points out that few studies emphasize this relationship, specifically among female entrepreneurs. Studying the literature in Brazil, the author identified only six articles focusing on the connection between female entrepreneurship and work-family conflict. This work seeks to validate and expand Tanure's (2014) findings in her literature study, searching publications on the Google Scholar database using the term "*conflito trabalho família E empreendedorismo feminino*" (work-family conflict AND female entrepreneurship), without a delimited period. After due exclusions, the search identified eight studies, which were used to guide this work: Quental and Wetzel (2002), Silva (2006), Lindo et al. (2007), Jonathan and Silva (2007), Strobino and Teixeira (2014), Tanure (2014), Teixeira and Bomfim (2016), and Bandeira, Cabral, Santos, Ipiranga and Paiva (2017).

In general, the studies discuss work-family balance or conflict experienced by female entrepreneurs. However, equally, if not more, important than reporting the difficulties of coordinating work and family life is to identify forms to overcome such challenges. This approach to conflict management is not common, and the few national and international studies focus on the psychological means of dealing with emotions around work-family conflict, such as Ashforth (2000), Edwards and Rothbard (2000), Greenhaus and Parasuraman (1999), and Jonathan and Silva (2007). Few studies investigate structural strategies to change interferences between work and family (Shelton, 2006).

Shelton (2006) presented strategies to mitigate work-family conflict, recognizing this issue as an important element conditioning the growth and development of the

entrepreneurial activity. For the author, the fewer conflicts, the greater the female entrepreneur's well-being, which leads to higher business performance (Shelton, 2006). Wu, Chang and Zhuang (2010) corroborated this finding, reporting that the work-family conflict is negatively related to commercial success and satisfaction with marriage.

After examining both Brazilian and international incipient studies on strategies to mitigate the work-family conflict and their implication on business performance, this research contributes to explain how organizational practices can help in mitigating such conflict, which can exponentially affect the management of small companies – enterprises where people are more likely to mix domestic and professional demands (Nelson & Pimentel, 2015).

The research question guiding this study is, 'how are strategies to reduce work-family conflict characterized?' The general objective, therefore, is to analyze the strategies that female entrepreneurs adopt to mitigate work-family conflict. The study seeks first to understand what motivates women to start a business, investigating whether this decision has to do with the need to combine work and family life better, and then identify conflict mitigation strategies.

The intention of this study is to expand the scientific understanding of work-family interfaces, seeking validation, review, and (re)construction of the negative perspective around such interfaces. In this sense, Bianchim (2019) clarifies the relevance of the implications of the work-family relationship on the individual, family, and the organization, suggesting that research on this subject can contribute to the field of organizational behavior. In addition, considering that the balance between professional and family life is an issue that left the sphere of private life and gained space in the formulation of public policies in developed countries, this study supports the development of practices that facilitate work-family balance, reducing the gender inequalities created from a patriarchal society.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Motivations for female entrepreneurship

The feminist revolution of the 1960s brought the change in women's roles in a process intensified with their insertion in the labor market. In this context, the constant management of work and family demands directly affects women's participation in the labor market, and their professional progress (Guiginski & Simone Wajnman, 2019; Madalozzo & Blofield, 2017; Woolnough & Redshaw, 2016).

For Barham and Vanalli (2012), women spend, on average, 14 hours more per week on domestic work and 5 hours less on paid work compared to their male partners. Sociocultural norms allow men to assume fewer family responsibilities and have more time to invest in their careers, which contributes to gender-related roles being decisive in the incidence of work-family conflict and career expectations. Berlato, Fernandes and Mantovani (2018) demonstrate that traces of the traditional model remain in Brazilian families. Regardless of whether they are employed

or not, men are still seen as the 'foundation' of the home. Baluta and Moreira (2019) corroborate these findings, showing that women's professional achievements have not reduced their family responsibilities, implying that being a woman means an overload of work. Cabrera (2009) suggests that it is not the notion of the glass ceiling that prevents the rise of women, but the decisions they make after childbirth, suggesting a social filter of women – or the "leaky pipeline" phenomenon. For the author, women are constrained by the values of the patriarchal society to leave their careers or create new ones to manage work-family demands better. For Brown (2010), this phenomenon is the most notable trend in relation to the path following motherhood.

Corroborating the above, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) shows inequalities between men and women: despite representing 54% of the labor market, women's compensation is an average of 23% less even though they have more schooling. According to the institute, Brazilian women dedicate 73% more time to household chores in comparison to men (IBGE, 2018). The UN reports that women hold between 5% and 10% of leadership positions in Brazil, holding 9% of the seats in the country's National Congress. Also, one in four Brazilian women have already left their jobs to look after their children or relatives (UNO, 2015). Thus, the need to manage multiple roles in addition to the challenges of the career advancement has motivated women to start their own businesses (Gomes, Guerra, & Vieira, 2011; RME, 2017). According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, the increasing rate of female entrepreneurship may be a consequence of the inequality demonstrated above. Also, women may be understanding that starting a new business is a more interesting career option. Thus, women are already the majority of new entrepreneurs in four of the five Brazilian regions (GEM, 2018).

In addition to the wage gap and family motivations, other reasons drive women to start their own businesses. Among them, are the personal financial need, professional independence, the difficulty to break through the 'glass ceiling,' the possibility of working from home, dissatisfaction with the previous job, the search for greater autonomy and flexible jobs (Demartino, Barbato, & Jacques, 2006; Jonathan & Silva, 2007; Lindo et al., 2007; Possatti & Dias, 2002). For Teixeira and Bomfim (2016), other motivations are the perception of an opportunity, necessity, personal fulfillment, difficulty in career advancement, and the possibility of reconciling work and family. It is also noteworthy that women belonging to families of entrepreneurs are influenced to choose self-employment as a family tradition (Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio, 2004; Vale & Serafim, 2010). In line with the above, the *Rede Mulheres Empreendedoras* (RME) (female entrepreneur network) informs that among the reasons to start a business are working with what you like/making dreams come true (66%), flexibility (52%), more time for the family (30%) and working from home (24%) (RME, 2016).

It is noteworthy that motherhood is a considerable trigger to start a business. According to the study of the RME, 75% of Brazilian women decided to take the entrepreneurship path after having a child, and 55% of entrepreneurs are mothers (RME, 2016). In this sense, Lewis, Harris, Morrison, and Ho (2015) emphasize how motherhood can have a significant influence on the transition to an entrepreneurial career. Brush, Bruin and Welter (2009) warn of the need for research that addresses the specifics of female entrepreneurship, placing motherhood at the center of this analysis. Nel, Maritz and Thongprovati (2010) report that both academic research and the global media have shown the relationship between the role of mother and that of an entrepreneur, portrayed in international literature such as the 'momprenuer' phenomenon, that is, mothers involved in entrepreneurial activities. The uniqueness of being a mompreneur is to balance work and family, gain fulfillment and self-satisfaction, increase income, earn respect to equalize gender imbalance and become independent. For Khan and Rowlands (2018), mompreneurs are a subgroup of female entrepreneurs with children who aspire to stand out simultaneously in their personal and professional life, therefore seeking entrepreneurship. Leung (2011) questions the tendency of the literature to consider, unilaterally, the identity of the gender role, especially the role of mother, as a restriction on the female career, highlighting it, on the contrary, as a facilitating factor for female entrepreneurship. In addition, the author considers that motherhood can be a significant resource that leads to a competitive advantage in defining organizational structure and practices that are more appropriate to a mother's reality. This fact is corroborated by Breen and Leung (2020), who, in addition to criticizing the focus of research on female entrepreneurship in the difficulties arising from motherhood, reinforce their broader, integrated, and positive perspective for the field of management.

Kepler and Shane (2007) found empirically that gender does not affect the performance of new ventures. According to the authors, what differentiates businessmen from businesswomen are the reasons for starting an enterprise, the growth prospects, and the opportunities received. Men tend to invest and risk more than women, who prefer a lower risk and return business, using equity and prioritizing quality of life. Corroborating the above, Lindo et al. (2007) point out that the businesswomen have the intention to keep their businesses small so as not to bear the burden of greater dedication to work, thus privileging the family relationship and avoiding a work-family conflict. For Edelman, Manolova, and Brush (2008), the motivations to start a business vary according to gender: men are motivated by financial gains and autonomy, while status is a significant additional motivating factor for women. Vázquez-Carrasco, López-Pérez, and Centeno (2012) argue that women are less motivated to make money and more concerned with the quality of the product they offer.

Despite initial motivation, studies by Bandeira et al. (2017), Jonathan (2011), Jonathan and Silva (2007), Lindo et al. (2007), Moletta (2020), Quental and Wetzel (2002), Silva (2006), and Strobino and Teixeira (2014) indicate that, for women, being an entrepreneur provides a sense of personal and professional fulfillment, leading to high self-esteem, good quality of life, personal and professional satisfaction, love of work, and psychological involvement with the business.

Greenhaus and Powell (2012) suggest that the family strongly influences female entrepreneurs' decision-making regarding work. On this matter, Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio (2004) report that, regardless of the profiles of businesswomen, female entrepreneurship patterns are a reflection of women's private lives and are located at the intersection between the reproductive life cycle (absence of children, rearing children, empty nest, prolonged maternity) and the entrepreneurial project (interruptions, business discontinuities, ways to plan for the future). At this intersection, the motivation for women to open their own businesses appears to be a complex mix of constraints and opportunities. In other words, business plans are not distinguished from personal plans; public and private go simultaneously, demanding greater flexibility and creativity (Adkins, Samaras, Gilfillan, & Mcwee, 2013; Gouvêa, Machado, & Silveira, 2013). Machado (2002) found the existence of cyclical relationships between business growth and the stages of the female entrepreneur's identity. For the author, the female entrepreneur establishes different goals and develops new conceptions of success in each of their identity's stages.

2.2 Strategies for reducing work-family conflict

According to Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio (2004), studies conducted in most Western countries identified three main types of barriers to female entrepreneurship. First, the socio-cultural status, which essentially relates women with their domestic roles and reduces their credibility with the business. Second, the lack of access to information and assistance networks, which ends up configuring a common practice of gender exclusion. Finally, the difficulty of accessing capital, since the assumption that "women cannot manage money" is common among financing institutions.

Fabício and Machado (2013) corroborated and complemented the findings by Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio (2004). They list the main difficulties for women to open their own businesses: i) obtaining financing and lack of information; ii) obtaining credibility in the market and building a team of employees; iii) coordinating between work and family; iv) obtaining credit and initial capital; v) little or no experience in business management; vi) choice of partners; vii) participation in social networks; and viii) cultural barriers related to gender roles and low self-esteem. The work by Alperstedt, Ferreira, and Serafim (2014) follows the same line, pointing challenges such as personal, family, and financial problems, management difficulties, lack of

credibility, and market difficulties. The authors also highlight the difficulty of coordinating the multiple roles of mother, wife, and entrepreneur.

Once overcoming the initial barriers to credit and access to information, women face difficulties with a clear gender bias: matching the growing demands of a new venture with family demands, which are generally not shared with men (Madalozzo & Blofield, 2017; Sevä & Öun, 2015). Teixeira and Bomfim (2016) and the study by RME (2019) confirm this fact. In both works, the greatest challenge of female entrepreneurs is the work-family balance. Thus, given that women have more responsibility for the home, those who own their own businesses may find themselves motivated to become involved with work, but unable or unwilling to reduce their involvement in the family domain, increasing work-family conflicts (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001).

These conflicts can be even greater when women become mothers. Examples of how this issue has been portrayed in the literature are the study by Madalozzo and Blofield (2017), who show that the impacts of family responsibilities are disproportionate to mothers, whether or not they remain in the labor market; the contribution by Brown (2010), discussing the "price of motherhood," where motherhood reduces the chances of professional advancement; the Williams's (2004) discussion about the time spent looking after the children, which reduces the time dedicated to the enterprise; and the study by Wallace and Young (2008), who pointed out that the presence of children is negatively related to women's productivity. Khan and Rowlands (2018) add that the main challenges faced by 'mompreneurs' are time management, slow growth, initial business financing, the stigma that their business is a hobby, and achieving family balance. In view of these factors, the work-family conflict is indeed a difficult barrier, especially for mothers that own their own businesses and desire to build a high-performance enterprise.

In an attempt to mitigate part of these conflicts, Shelton (2006) presented strategies to deal with the demands of work and family, showing that the reduction of conflicts is an important condition for the growth and development of the entrepreneurial activity. The fewer the number of conflicts, the greater the entrepreneur's well-being and, the greater the entrepreneur's well-being, the greater the business performance.

Shelton (2006) suggested three structural strategies for female entrepreneurs to deal with work-family conflicts while building high-performance businesses: i) elimination of role, choosing not to have a family; ii) role reduction, planning a small family or postponing the family; and iii) role sharing, delegating professional activities through participatory management or outsourcing family obligations. Jonathan and Silva (2007) report that female entrepreneurs who seek to deal with competing demands use the following actions: self-organization of time, the establishment of partnerships, and the use of tension relief strategies.

Strobino and Teixeira (2014) indicated emotional control as the most cited strategy.

Successful female entrepreneurs can be more inclined to management that does not require much involvement and constant presence. They tend to delegate parts of their professional functions, making use of participatory management models and investing in training, competitive remuneration, and innovative people management practices to qualify workers (Hornsby & Kuratko 2003). In line with the above, family functions, such as childcare and household chores, can also be delegated to third parties (Shelton, 2006).

The delegation of professional tasks is essential for female entrepreneurs who are also dedicated to family roles. Training and strengthening of work teams allow women to get involved with family emergencies without paralyzing business flows (Shelton, 2006; Wu, Chang, & Zhuang, 2010). Shared management is especially relevant in the case of small companies, where short discontinuities can permanently compromise business survival and performance (Hornsby & Kuratko, 2003).

Machado, St-Cyr, Mione, and Alves (2003) compared the female entrepreneurs' management models and the way they run their homes, using practices of cooperation and power-sharing. According to Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio (2004), the literature considers the businesswomen's concern with relational aspects and their flexibility – developed over time by performing many support functions – as organizational resources to be explored, and this management style may contribute to increasing female-led companies' survival. Gouvêa, Machado, and Silveira (2013) point to the same direction, emphasizing that, due to the multiple roles they play, women are more versatile and creative, obtaining different perspectives for the same situations. The authors also show differences between male and female entrepreneurship. While for men, objectivity and centralization of information are predominant, for women power-sharing, the multiple roles and the attempt to provide satisfaction to the entire work team stand out.

In this context, the participatory managerial style, predominant in women-led enterprises, may be connected to the attention of female entrepreneurs to work-family conflicts. Therefore, the preference for shared management strategies may be an alternative to reduce conflicts related to the different roles performed and contribute to improving businesses (Shelton, 2006).

3 METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research adopts a descriptive approach, which is used to analyze a group, its values, characteristics, or situations that involve its culture, and seeks to identify and transcribe the characteristics of a given scenario (Souza, Santos, & Dias, 2013). This study examines – with the least possible distance from the natural environment under observation (Souza, 2014) – the situation of a group of businesswomen, identifying their

motivations to start businesses and strategies they adopted to mitigate work-family conflicts.

Whether by identification or accessibility, women manage most Brazilian clothing companies, in addition to representing 75% of employed labor in the sector. The textile and clothing industry is significant in the Brazilian economy and represents the fifth largest textile industry in the world (Associação Brasileira da Indústria Têxtil e de Confecção, 2019). The Brazilian state of Ceará is considered the fifth largest clothing center in the country and, despite the decrease of 12% in the sector due to a national economic crisis, it grew 3% between 2012 and 2016 (Sindicato das Indústrias de Confecção do Ceará, 2018). Due to the expressiveness of this sector in the country and the state, and considering the female predominance – it is possible to say that a large part of the women population in the state has some experience working in the sector – this research focuses on women-led clothing companies in the State of Ceará, Brazil.

The questions asked to participants of this study were prepared based on interview scripts proposed in the dissertations by Strobino (2009) and Tanure (2014). In the first study, female entrepreneurship and the work-family conflict were investigated through 55 items directed at the female entrepreneur and 39 at her partner. As for Tenure (2014), the author addressed entrepreneurship, family, and schedule flexibility based on 34 questions asked to female entrepreneurs.

In this research, a pre-test was conducted with two female entrepreneurs, both single without children. The test allowed checking the consistency of elements studied and guided adjustments such as the combination or elimination of questions. The results of the pre-test led to the decision to exclude single-women since several items to assess work-family dynamics did not apply to women with this profile. Therefore, the research approached women who had started a family, disregarding the participants of the pre-test.

As for the participant's profile, they are women who are or have been in a stable union, with or without children – since, as observed in the literature, family issues make women more prone to entrepreneurship, aiming to spend more time with their children and partner (Vita, Mari, & Poggesi, 2014). The expectation when choosing the profile was to capture work-family conflicts that result from the female entrepreneurs' experience of playing multiple roles (such as wife, mother, businesswoman, housewife, caregiver of elderly parents).

The research approached nine female entrepreneurs who own stores in the cities of Fortaleza and Sobral, chosen according to the following criteria: i) work in small companies in the clothing sector; ii) accessible for the researchers; iii) are the company's manager; iv) have been working as entrepreneurs for at least one year; v) do not have any other professional activity; and vi) have formed a family.

The participants were submitted to a semi-structured interview for data collection. The interview was based on 30

questions, covering two topics: motivation for entrepreneurship and strategies to mitigate work-family conflicts. In addition, before starting the interview, the participants answered questions about family and personal matters, and about their business.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, in a location of the participant's preference. Most of them occurred on the companies' premises, and only one was conducted in the businesswoman's house. The opportunity of visiting the businesses helped to observe the work dynamics, which facilitated the analysis. The interviews took place from July 28 to September 2, 2016, in the city of Fortaleza. They were recorded and transcribed, forming a database of 9 hours and 35 seconds of audio, transcribed in 139 pages. Each interview lasted an average of 62 minutes, and the information collected was submitted to content analysis (Bardin, 2009) using the software ATLAS.ti 7 for organizing and categorizing the reports, as well as creating analytical categories and units of coding.

Laville and Dionne (1999) present three ways of defining the analytical categories: a) the open model, in which the categories are defined during the analysis; b) the closed model, in which the researcher decides the categories a priori, based on a theoretical model; c) and the mixed model, which was used in this study, where the categories are developed before the analysis such as in the closed model, but they can change during the analysis. Based on the theoretical review presented and on elements that emerged during the analysis, two analytical categories (motivation to start a business and mitigation strategies) and nine units of coding were defined (Table 1).

Table 1
Analysis categories and units of coding

Analysis categories	Units of coding
Motivation to start a business	Personal fulfillment
	Dissatisfaction with the previous job
	Opportunity identified
	Financial necessity
Mitigation strategies	Schedule flexibility
	Business complications
	Exclude roles
	Reduce roles
	Share roles

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The category 'motivation to start a business' was designed to analyze whether the choice for entrepreneurship is linked to the attempt to achieve work-family balance, as indicated by Lindo et al. (2007), Quental and Wetzel (2002) and Sevä and Öun (2015). The interviewees mentioned five different reasons to start a business, shown in the units of coding. 'Personal fulfillment' indicates the desire for well-being, job satisfaction, and the ability to exercise all professional potential. 'Dissatisfaction

with the previous job,' whether due to low pay or lack of personal fulfillment, generally stimulates the search for self-employment as an occupation. 'Opportunity identified' and 'financial necessity' lead women to choose entrepreneurship as a way to put an innovative idea into practice or live a better life, respectively. 'Schedule flexibility' is pointed out in the literature as one of the main motivations of female entrepreneurship. The mitigation strategies, on the other hand, includes actions to 'exclude,' 'reduce,' and 'share roles,' pointed out in Shelton's model (2006). 'Business complications' appear as a unit of coding in the mitigation strategies, as mentioned in the literature (Fabricio & Machado, 2013). This last unit was included after analyzing the data due to the relevance, frequency, and connection between the numerous barriers mentioned and the mitigation strategies developed to overcome them.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This section presents the main findings of this study, which are synthesized using the Network View tool, from the ATLAS.ti 7 software as networks of the relations among codes. The analytical category and its respective unit of coding are connected using arrows. Each code is indicated with an ordered pair of two numbers, such as unit of coding {x, y}, in which the "x" represents the frequency the unit of coding was used, i.e., the number of citations to which the code was related; and "y" represents the code's density or the number of other codes to which it is linked.

Table 2

Personal and family data of the interviewees

	Age	Number of Children	Personal income	Family income	Marital Status	Education	Housekeeper
I1	34	3	R\$ 12,000.00	R\$ 12,000.00	Divorced	Complete high school	Full time
I2	31	2	No information	R\$ 15,000.00	Married	Incomplete higher education	Full time
I3	33	2	R\$ 4,500.00	R\$ 26,000.00	Married	Post graduate	Full time
I4	41	2	R\$ 10,000.00	R\$ 20,000.00	Civil union	Post graduate	Full time
I5	33	1	R\$ 10,000.00	R\$ 20,000.00	Married	Complete higher education	Full time
I6	32	0	No information	R\$ 10,000.00	Married	Post graduate	2x per week
I7	26	1	R\$ 10,000.00	R\$ 20,000.00	Married	Post graduate	Full time
I8	49	2	R\$ 20,000.00	R\$ 40,000.00	Married	Complete higher education	2x per week
I9	56	2	R\$ 15,000.00	R\$ 25,000.00	Married	Complete high school	Full time

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Table 3 shows the participants' businesses. They have been in the market for 2 to 27 years and have 2 to 150 employees. Family members join the company as partners or staff. The businesses operate in the field of women's clothing (6), lingerie (2) and fitness (1), are predominantly retailers or wholesalers. The businesses have an annual turnover of between 960,000 and 9 million.

With regard to the company's age, the businesses are relatively new. Six of them are less than seven years old,

4.1 Interviewee profile

This subsection presents the interviewees' personal, family, and business' data, defining the participants' profile, and providing subsidies to discuss the findings. The details on the interviewees' profile allow establishing the necessary connections with the items of the semi-structured interviews. The participants are identified from I1 to I9, and people and company names are suppressed or replaced.

Table 2 shows the profile of the interviewees: age between 26 and 56 years, with a predominance in the range of 30 to 40 years. They have small families, usually with one or two children. Seven of them are married and responsible for at least 50% of the family income. Six out of the nine interviewees hold a college degree or a postgraduate degree, and all of them have full-time or part-time housekeepers. With regard to personal income, five participants have equal or greater compensation in comparison with their partner, which indicates the importance of their income to support the family.

In general, the participants' profile is similar to the group of female entrepreneurs studied in the research by Gouvêa, Machado, and Silveira (2013), particularly regarding marital status, the presence of children, and importance in the household income. The high level of education was a characteristic also observed in the studies by Machado, Barros, and Palhano (2003), Teixeira and Bomfim (2016), and Vale and Serafim (2010).

which probably justifies the low number of stores. The research by Gouvêa, Machado, and Silveira (2013) found similar, in which almost half of the female entrepreneurs interviewed had only one store. Based on their relative low age, these businesses may be considered as part of a wave of female entrepreneurship pointed out by SEBRAE (2018) in the recent years in Brazil.

Table 3

Entrepreneurs data

	Company age	Number of stores	Number of employees	Number of family members employed	Sector	Annual sales
I1	3	1	23	3	Clothing	R\$ 1,000,000.00
I2	2	2	40	2	Clothing	R\$ 2,500,000.00
I3	6	2	12	1	Lingerie	R\$ 1,800,000.00
I4	20	1	5	1	Lingerie	R\$ 960,000.00
I5	5	1	22	0	Clothing	R\$ 4,080,000.00
I6	2	1	2	0	Clothing	No information
I7	7	1	11	4	Clothing	R\$ 1,600,000.00
I8	13	5	70	3	Fitness	R\$ 3,500,000.00
I9	27	11	150	2	Clothing	R\$ 9,000,000.00

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

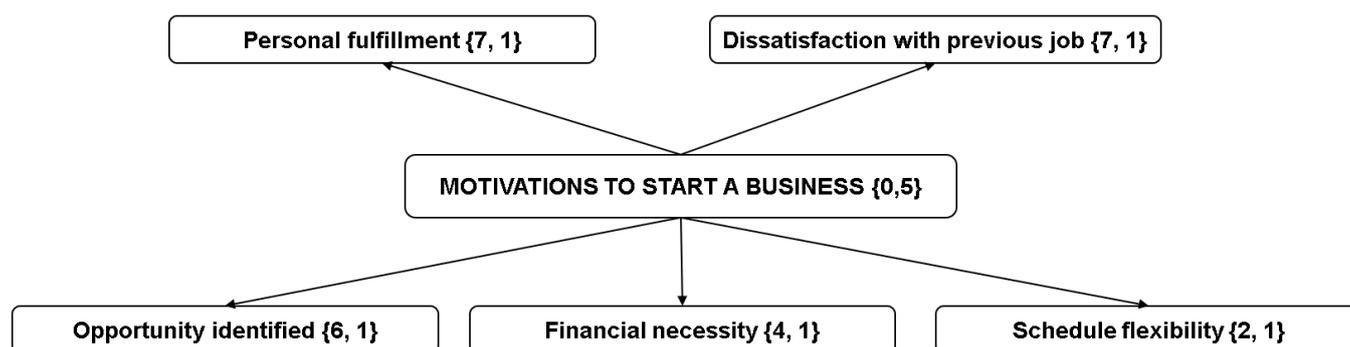
As mentioned in the methodology, the study focused on female entrepreneurs running small businesses – annual sales of up to R\$ 4.8 million and up to 100 employees (Sebrae, 2018). As observed in Table 3, I9's business does not comply with the criteria, since it is a medium-sized enterprise. However, we decided to include it in the analysis because the number of employees exceeds the limit to be considered small company in only 50 people. In addition, the company grew recently, and is still managed as an SME.

4.2 Motivation to start a business

This subsection discusses the main motivations for female entrepreneurship, which is important in the study on work-family conflicts. The literature suggests connections between family and professional paths when demonstrating that Brazilian female entrepreneurs choose self-employment, believing that schedule flexibility reduces work-family conflicts (DeMartino, Barbato, & Jacques, 2006).

Figure 1 shows that the analytical category 'motivation to start a business' consolidates 5 units of coding, presented in descending order: personal fulfillment (7), dissatisfaction with the previous job (7), opportunity identified (4), financial necessity (3), and schedule flexibility (2).

The motivations immediately verified in the interviews were: opportunity identified (4), financial necessity (3), and schedule flexibility (2). However, during the analysis, other motivations stood out – often as important as the ones verified at first sight – such as personal fulfillment (mentioned by all interviewees). Dissatisfaction with the previous job was also catalyst in this decision-making process, reported by five of the nine interviewees. In this sense, in the ATLAS.TI software, the same quote can be related to several units of coding, since more than one motivation is taken into account when deciding to start a business.

**Figure 1.** Motivations to start a business.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Whether by identifying opportunities or financial needs, 4 women started businesses in a precarious context: I1, I2, I4, and I9 started their businesses at home, with few resources, with the structural help of some family members, selling as 'sacoleira' (bulk buying and re-selling) until they had minimal resources to start a small business. Over years of dedication and hard work, the businesses thrived and were formalized

For example, I9 worked, in her words, "doing a little of everything" in a bakery. After being made redundant, she bought an old second-hand sewing machine, learned to sew by herself and cut fabrics on the kitchen table. She relied exclusively on the help of her husband (a bus driver), and, daily, worked door to door selling her merchandise. I1 worked as a housekeeper from the age of 12 and, at 15, in a shoe store as a salesperson. She then left the countryside

and went to the state capital, Fortaleza, where she worked as a *'sacoleira'* until she managed to set up her own store. Their narratives indicate that these women are very proud of themselves. They overcame adversities and achieved success through their work. They emotionally report their difficult journey, how they started, and where they are now, as indicated below.

"I feel very, very respected. When I look back and see that I started on that bike of mine as a *sacoleira* and today we already have a name, people, I praise God a lot [...] [the company] is already a reference in lingerie, and I think this is awesome [laughs] not for vanity, but for happiness. [...] In the first years, I spent a year without buying clothes for myself. I had lunch at my mother's house because I had to save money from my sales to be able to buy merchandise for the store, do you know what that's like? [...] At the time I even thought about selling my house so I could put more in my business" (I4)

In contrast, interviewees I3, I5, I6, I7, and I8 started their businesses in a more favorable context: they received financial and structural assistance from at least one of their family members and opened a store straight away, at the beginning of the enterprise. In line with the above, I3 and I6 highlight a crucial external incentive in the option for entrepreneurship: the financial support received from their spouses at the beginning of the business. The partners were responsible for 'making ends meet' so that the entrepreneurs could start the business.

"I will be very honest, I could make this choice only because my husband has a salary that supports the family [...] Not that my salary is superfluous, in any way. Every month, my money pays the bills. But if I was in need, I would never be able to leave [the company she worked for], even if it was to fulfill a dream [...] I know many women, mothers of [her daughter's] classmates. Their salary is the most important income for the family and that it is a struggle, the children have to stay in full-time daycare, and they cry [...], but they have no alternative" (I3)

In these cases, as presented by Strobino and Teixeira (2014) and Madalozzo and Blofield (2017), the woman's opportunity to work depends on a complex combination of personal and family conditions, such as marital structure and the presence of children. In addition, the research by Keith and Schafer (1980) indicated that women put financial problems as the most important factor in the emergence of work-family conflicts. In this case, it is positive that their spouses are able to pay the household bills temporarily, so they can dedicate to build their business.

Regardless of the initial motivation and the context, there is a high level of planning and market study among all entrepreneurs to expand their businesses. The high education of the interviews - 67% have completed higher education or postgraduate studies - may reflect the option for entrepreneurship in a more informed way, which may have contributed to the success of the businesses. Thus, this research corroborates the information in the GEM report (2018), which states that the rate of 'opportunity entrepreneurs' in Brazil increased from 42.4% in 2002 to

61.8% in 2018, considering that four of the nine interviewees decided to start their businesses after identifying a gap in the market.

Elements found in the speech of seven interviewees corroborate the importance of flexibility pointed out by Biachim (2019) and Fiksenbaum (2014), who found that schedule flexibility was the factor of work most mentioned as beneficial to the family. However, the interviewees recognized that schedule flexibility, even though reducing work-family conflicts and being one of the main advantages of self-employment, is considered a consequence of entrepreneurial activity more than a motivation for choosing to start a business. Only two interviewees mentioned schedule flexibility as a predominant motivating factor to start a business since it favors the work-family balance, as indicated by Lindo et al. (2007) and Quental and Wetzel (2002).

This research also corroborates the findings of Adkins, Samaras, Gilfillan, and Mcwee (2013), Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio (2004), Gouvêa, Machado, and Silveira (2013), and Machado (2002) who report that there is an interrelation between the reproductive cycle, the entrepreneurial project, and the patterns observed in female entrepreneurs. For example, I2 had a sterilization process at age 31 because she was aware that her bold and ambitious profile would no longer be suitable for having more children. I3 resigned from her formal job at one of the largest companies in Ceará and decided to open her own business after the birth of her second child, thus envisioning the schedule flexibility necessary to perform multiple roles. As "there is no way to handle everything," this entrepreneur realizes that she does not explore the clothing market as she should, forcing herself to maintain a conservative profile in relation to the expansion of the business due to prioritizing her children:

"I loved what I did! [shaky voice]. Even today, I miss it a lot [...] My salary was very good and then I left to earn nothing [laughs] [...] But zero regrets. There, [old job] schedule flexibility did not exist [...] My daughter was going to be two years old and then I really had to choose: one or the other [...] If I could spend more hours inside the company, I have no doubt that we would be bigger and better. For example, there is a business consultant who always reminds us: '- you work in wholesale, you have to travel, you have to know the stores that sell lingerie in Brazil, you have to have a showroom,' but when I think about it, and about my two young children, the little one starting school now, then he gets sick, it is a mess. I really do not have the courage, I can't handle everything, it's really impossible" (I3)

As indicated by Bandeira et al. (2017), Jonathan (2011), Jonathan and Silva (2007), Lindo et al. (2007), Moletta (2020), Quental and Wetzel (2002), Silva (2006), and Strobino and Teixeira (2014), despite all the possible reasons to start a business, women unanimously reported that they did it, and work as businesswomen, because they like it, love it, feel challenged, have passion and pleasure. They see the venture as 'a leisure activity,' 'a second home,' and 'a child.' It is evident, therefore, that they

experience a good quality of life and establish an effective and psychological bond with their businesses. They believe that they are able to 'infect' their employees and family members with this feeling of love, which is considered a prerequisite for a successful business. These entrepreneurs feel extremely happy and fulfilled.

"One thing I think is very important is that my company has always been my second home. So, doing everything with pleasure, with desire is undoubtedly the flagship for me. Without a doubt, if you say 'close your eyes and tell me which place brings you to happiness,' I would say my job, it always has been, it always has been! And I think I passed all this love on to my husband and my two children, because [name of her daughter] left her profession, and came to work with me and felt right at home [...]" (18)

As for financial necessity, this was not an initial motivation to start the business for the interviewees. Their hard work and dedication, however, is paying off, compensating them significantly. The interviewees feel motivated to expand the business and even invest in other segments. The high financial contribution of the business to the family budget led the husbands to leave their jobs and start working in the enterprises (situation observed in three of the nine cases). This finding confirms the information in the GEM report (2018) that informs that the percentage of women who are dependent (when the main family income comes from the husband) fell from 49% to 41% between 2015 and 2018, indicating that the entrepreneurial activity started to give women a leading role in terms of household income. This is also corroborated by Tanure (2014), who shows that despite the work overload, the entrepreneurs seek the growth of the business. At the same time, it contradicts the research by Lindo et al. (2007), in which women tend to keep their businesses small, thus privileging the family relationship.

Earnings from the businesses were responsible for social mobility in four cases. After years of hard work, these female entrepreneurs left the low-income strata of the population, entering the middle-class. The other five participants who were already middle-class when they started the businesses, either maintained or improved their life conditions because of their businesses. Therefore, the financial results of the endeavors reinforce the individuals' social and psychological well-being. All interviewees recognize themselves, today, as successful entrepreneurs. This is an outcome that partially confirms the research by Machado (2002) and Machado, Silveira, Hoeltgebaum, and Gouveia (2008), who identified that the notion of success was more strongly connected with social well-being than with financial results and business growth. In addition, this finding confirms the study by Moletta (2020) correlating increasing profit and a better quality of life.

Ahl (2006), analyzing publications from 1982 to 2000 on female entrepreneurship, identified a tendency for studies to reproduce the idea that female entrepreneurs would be inferior to their male counterparts. The author observed the tendency of considering women-led

companies as less important or, at best, side-businesses. Khan and Rowlands (2018) report that female entrepreneurs still have to deal with the lack of credibility and the stigma that their businesses are hobbies. In addition, Cornwall (2018) discusses the issue of 'entrepreneurship' as a form of 'female empowerment,' arguing that this connection reinforces gender roles and prevents women from achieving a liberating social change.

The findings of this research go in the opposite direction. They reinforce the perspective of female entrepreneurship as a form of empowerment, social ascension, and financial emancipation, corroborating Jonathan (2011), who concluded that female entrepreneurs empower women through emotional support and social and professional inclusion. Also, Golin (2018) highlights that women feel empowered through freedom of work, schedule flexibility, extra income, and self-esteem. Dandolini (2018) reiterates that entrepreneurial activity is used as a tool of liberation, making women consider themselves insubordinate, free, and confident. Soares (2019) confirms that feminist self-management practices are instruments of social emancipation and help to reduce inequality.

4.3 Mitigation strategies

This subsection presents the main strategies to reduce the work-family conflict (WFC) of women entrepreneurs. The results are exposed according to the logical chain of existing ideas, namely: business complications generate conflicts and leading entrepreneurs to seek mitigation strategies (exclude, reduce, or share roles). Figure 2 shows that the analytical category, mitigation strategies for WFC, comprises four units of coding: business complications (20), exclude roles (0), reduce roles (8), and share roles (64).

Corroborating the study by Dandolini (2018) and Fabrício and Machado (2013), female prejudice was not mentioned as a difficulty in this research. This result may be explained by the fact that the clothing sector is predominantly female, which does not undermine women's skills in relation to employees, suppliers, competitors. As in the research by Dandolini (2018), female entrepreneurs are respected by their male employees and form female alliances that are configured in the sorority and mutual help.

Businesswise, the interviewees reported the following barriers, presented in decreasing order: a shortage of qualified labor; difficulty in forming a work team; high tax burden, lack of government incentive and economic crisis; delay in financial return; lack of resources to reinvest. Therefore, as in the study by Fabrício and Machado (2013), the most frequently cited difficulty for business development was to find qualified employees.

The mitigation strategies to face these challenges did not include measures related to the unit of coding 'exclude roles' (0), i.e., none of the interviewees chose not to have a family or children as a strategy to overcome the mentioned difficulties. Shelton's (2006) model contemplates these

strategies as options, even though pointing out that excluding roles – such as the role of being a mother – is not the most adopted measure to mitigate conflicts, which was corroborated in this study. It is noteworthy that this outcome

was expected since one of the criteria for selecting the participants was to 'have formed a family.'

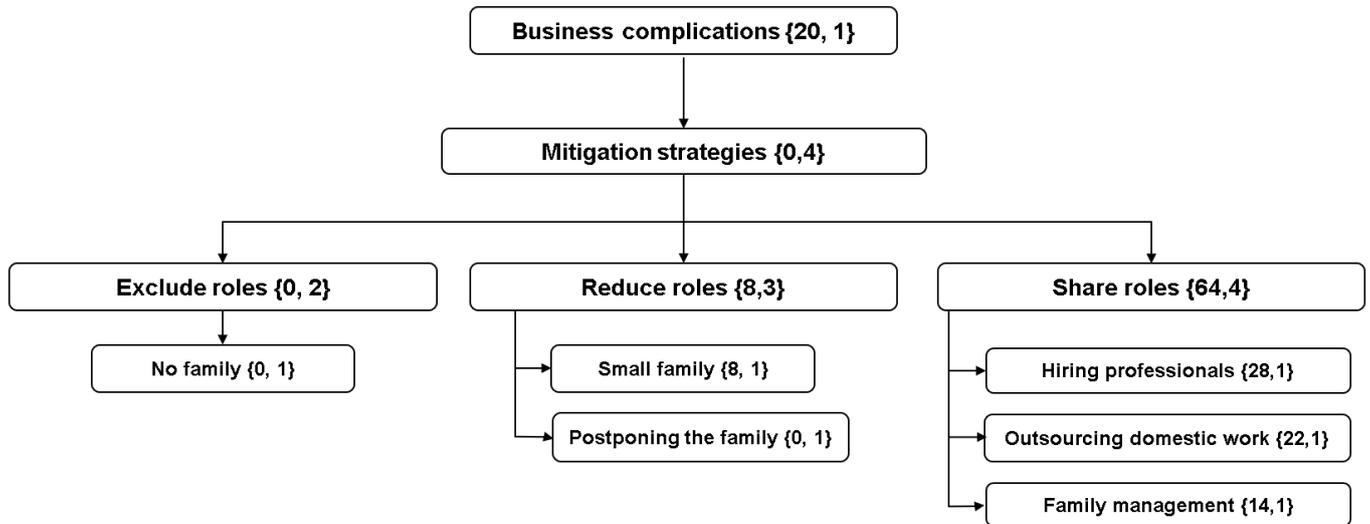


Figure 2. Strategies to mitigate work-family conflicts.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The strategy of reducing roles (8) groups two subunits of coding: small family (8) and postponing family (0). Although the intention to form small families was not explicitly mentioned, all respondents have few children, usually one or two. In addition, it was possible to notice in the reports the high level of planning in relation to motherhood due to the involvement with the business and the work overload. These findings reiterate the study by Woolnough and Redshaw (2016), who shows that large families require more time and produce more work-family conflicts.

The mitigation strategy of sharing roles (64) groups 3 subunits of coding, presented in the following decreasing order: hiring professionals to help in the business (professional management) (28), outsourcing domestic work (22), and family management (14). Through professional management (28), predominant in this study, the interviewees were able to delegate activities to trustworthy specialists. This finding is in line with research by Gouvêa, Machado, and Silveira (2013), Hornsby and Kuratko (2003), Shelton (2006), Strobino and Teixeira (2014), and Wu, Chang and Zhuang (2010), in which participatory management with professionals is crucial for entrepreneurs committed both to their family role and the company's growth.

However, as already found in the research by Lindo et al. (2007), the interviewees report difficulty in delegating, especially at the beginning of the business. In this first phase, they declared to feel personally responsible for the enterprises' success or failure. With time and experience, among other factors, the businesswomen feel more comfortable delegating some activities, as expressed in the statement below:

"My husband complained that I didn't have time for him, you know? But now it's changing, after I took a coaching workshop, after talking to a consultant, after I was able to delegate things, I see that the company works very well without me having to be here all the time [...] I thought it was the end of the world for me to have to delegate or hire someone to solve something for me! Nowadays, I delegate almost everything!" (15)

The interviewees' narratives show that motherhood is a determining condition for overcoming the greatest managerial and business barriers, respectively, difficulty in delegating and qualified labor. As the businesswomen would be temporarily away, they needed to start delegating: "I had to learn to pass the responsibilities to my team" (17) and "my husband was putting too much pressure, '- I want a child, I want a child,' and that's when I got a production manager, right, so I started to pass things on to her" (15). According to the interviewees, professionals hired to run parts of the businesses in this process of increasing delegation were able to create high performing work teams. Therefore, an important finding of this research is the opportunity of professionalizing the company's management when the businesswomen decided to have children.

Given this context, three of the four businesswomen with young children mentioned that motherhood required a reduction in workload to establish a more balanced routine, with better distribution of hours between work and family. As they are no longer able to dedicate as much time to work, women encouraged the professionalization of management by hiring specialists (coaching, consultant, stylist, manager, etc.), which significantly contributed to leverage the business, since these professionals had know-how in areas of the company that the entrepreneur did not master with the same competence. The reports indicate that the company's

“boom” occurred precisely after the arrival of this professionals to the businesses.

“I had a hard time getting seamstresses and I needed them to grow the business [...] That’s when I called the production supervisor and she knew several and she was able to do this job because before I couldn’t do it [...] It has been a year and a half since it [the company] grew, and then we hired people. [...] We hired a manager for the store, a professional who knew customers, sales representatives, that was it! We had a quality product, a nice, desired product. I just needed people to expand; alone we can’t do anything” (15)

In line with the research by Buddhapriya (2009), Chang, Chin, and Ye (2014) and Yuile, Chang, Gudmundsson, and Sawang (2012), the results indicate that the mitigation strategy ‘share roles’ was the most frequent among the businesswomen working on expanding their enterprises without giving up their personal projects. It has also been demonstrated that management practices contribute so that work is not an obstacle for motherhood, favoring work-family balance.

In addition, two female entrepreneurs report that, after becoming mothers, conflicts with their husbands decreased and their partners did not complain as much about the excessive time women dedicated to work: “we [she and her husband] have disagreements because of work, and before [her daughter’s name], it was even worse because I really lived for work. Nowadays, I have learned that I can be happy also when I am not working” (17).

In summary, despite the fact that motherhood brings new demands, it is observed that it stimulated fundamental changes in the management style, resulting in greater emotional stability and less burden. The analysis shows that, of the eight women with children participating in this research, six reported that motherhood had little effect on their professional performance. Given the above, there is evidence that having children worked more as a mitigating than an aggravating factor in work-family conflicts.

“I think what he did was improve [my performance after motherhood]. I’m lighter, understand? I’m more relaxed [...] I think there was a series of factors that improved,... Hiring new people, we’ve got a consultant now, we’re making things more official. I’m starting to delegate because before I couldn’t delegate anything to anyone, I wanted to do everything, so I was highly stressed, I even sought help with coaching, which helped me. Now I’m managing to delegate things, there is more time.” (15)

These findings contradict the research by Cabrera (2009), Brown (2010), Williams (2004), and Woolnough and Redshaw (2016), in which motherhood proved to be an obstacle to professional advancement or as a reason to slow down women’s careers. An explanation may be the focus of this research on female entrepreneurs, who have greater flexibility, minimal resources for outsourcing domestic work and find personal fulfillment both as mothers and businesswomen. These characteristics suggest an alignment of our findings with research that shows the positive effects of motherhood on the field of management. Breen and Leung (2020), Leung (2011) and Nel, Maritz and

Thongprovati (2010) criticize the perspective of motherhood solely as a restriction on the female entrepreneurial career. The authors point out the opportunities arising from gender roles, such as the identification of business opportunities, the best balance between work and family, professional and personal fulfillment and the definition of organizational structure and practices that accommodate the needs of a mother, which results in a competitive advantage for the businesses managed by ‘mompreneurs.’

This research also corroborates the findings of Aguiar and Bastos (2017) and Bianchim (2019), in which the benefits resulting from multiple roles were clearly perceived, with family predominantly seen to positively impact work. In Bianchim’s (2019) research, the feeling of happiness for participating in family life and the values learned in this environment were the variables that stood out the most and, consequently, favored work performance. The authors also concluded that, although workers with children are more likely to experience work-family conflicts, they are also more inclined to develop a more positive perception of the relationship between these two spheres. This may be linked to the greater possibility of applying conducts and values developed at work in the family context and vice versa.

Within the strategy of ‘share roles,’ the second most used measure was ‘outsourcing domestic work’ (22), delegating these activities to i) housekeepers; ii) family members; and iii) education professionals. In alignment with Strobino and Teixeira’s (2014) research, our findings demonstrated that the delegation to housekeepers and other professionals is the most common measure, and it was used by all interviewees. Entrepreneur I1 greatly praises the work of her housekeeper, even comparing her with a mother: “she does everything, she takes care of them, she makes food, she cleans the house, she is everything, she is like the boys’ mother!” In addition, women highlight how essential outsourcing domestic work is for their better work performance: “Thank God a wonderful nanny appeared, then my work routine started to improve” (17).

Although less frequent, the practice of outsourcing domestic work to family members was observed – mainly to grandmothers –, which perpetuates the culture that care economics belongs to women. Finally, domestic outsourcing to education professionals was identified, usually private teachers. The practice was observed in the case of the two interviewees with teenage children. They report a concern for keeping their children busy, as a form of making up for their absence and ensure the children are doing something productive: “Everything is based on the ‘I pay’ so I don’t have to be absent from the company” (11). This scenario confirms the research by Baluta and Moreira (2019) and Vanalli and Barham (2012), in which the women’s professional achievements did not inhibit their obligation for family activities, whether they are carrying them out or supervising other women who perform such tasks. Thus, conceptions of task division associated with gender remain. The idea that ‘women increasingly inserted in the market, would mean

that men are increasingly inserted in the domestic space' is not yet a reality.

Therefore, the study highlights the importance of housekeepers and professionals sharing domestic tasks for the growth of female entrepreneurship. In Brazil, unlike developed countries, housekeepers are still paid a low amount, which facilitates entrepreneurs to reduce the hours spent on domestic chores and increase dedication to the business, as indicated by Tanure (2014). In this sense, it appears that the strong culture of outsourcing domestic work (which is related to the country's past marked by slavery) may be strengthening the professional growth of a specific group of women. This finding corroborates Hirata and Kergoat (2007), who point out that the greater insertion of women in the labor market does not necessarily mean a greater division of domestic tasks between spouses, but rather the delegation of these activities to other women, usually poor black women. For these less affluent women, there is little choice but the subservience to 'successful women.' They do not have financial resources to outsource or share family demands, so the combination of a promising career with the management of domestic activities is not a possibility they envision (Madalozzo & Blofield, 2017).

In the case of small companies, sharing roles can also take place through family management (14), in which administrative functions are distributed to family members: children, siblings, or partners. It is noteworthy that six interviewees reported that these family members brought

the necessary balance for the smooth running of the business: "my heart is soft, but thank God that my sister exists [...] And she is the one that says 'NO' [laughs]" (I4).

In summary, 'share roles' is the most used strategy to mitigate work-family conflicts in this study, significantly impacting the businesswomen's performance in their companies. These findings corroborate the studies by Shelton (2006), Strobino and Teixeira (2014), and Tanure (2014), who also stress the importance of sharing roles as a strategy to mitigate work-family conflicts. Therefore, although female entrepreneurs are constantly concerned and stressed about their endeavors, the feeling of personal fulfillment and the support of this shared management collaborate to mitigate conflicts, as indicated by Lindo et al. (2007).

Finally, Gouvêa, Machado, and Silveira (2013) and Machado, St-Cyr, Mione, and Alves (2003), when comparing managerial methods of a businesswoman with how she manages her own home, show the most used were cooperation, sharing, and a 'go with the flow' attitude. In addition, Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio (2004) highlighted that female transformational leadership, developed over time after performing many support and care functions, represents a competitive differential.

4.4 Summary of results

Table 4 shows a summary of the main findings.

Table 4

Summary of the main research results

Categories of analysis	Units of Coding	Main results
Motivation to start a business	Personal fulfillment (7)	Entrepreneurship was a source of pleasure, happiness, satisfaction, challenge, and personal fulfillment.
	Dissatisfaction with the previous job (7)	It was catalyst in the decision to start a business and to be better paid in the long run.
	Opportunity identified (6)	Seeing a gap in the market or having difficulties to grow due to dependence on others, women decided to work on their own.
	Financial necessity (4)	Realizing their entrepreneurial potential, women invested in their careers as a way to overcome financial problems and earn more money.
Mitigation strategies	Schedule flexibility (2)	Although not the main motivation, schedule flexibility is recognized as the main advantage of entrepreneurship, helping to balance work and family demands.
	Business complications (20)	Shortage of qualified labor, difficulty in forming a work team, high tax burden, lack of government incentive, and economic crisis.
	Exclude roles (0)	Not mentioned.
	Reduce roles (8)	Have small families, with a high level of planning in relation to maternity due to involvement in the business.
	Share roles (64)	Professional management with trusted people and specialists, whose work contributed so that motherhood was not an obstacle to career or business growth. Outsourcing to housekeepers, family members, and education professionals, which results in greater dedication to the business and better performance. Sharing family management with children, siblings, and, partner, who have opposite managerial profiles to the women.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Table 4 lists the categories of analysis, the corresponding units of coding, and the main results found in each one. In addition, the number of citations is presented in brackets, demonstrating the themes the interviewees mentioned more frequently.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This qualitative and descriptive study based on interviews with nine businesswomen in the clothing sector in the state of Ceará analyzed female entrepreneurs' strategies to mitigate work-family conflicts, contributing to subsidize an incipient discussion about the positive effects of motherhood on work. The results corroborated the literature, pointing out that 'sharing roles' is the main strategy adopted to tackle work-family conflicts.

The research sought, initially, to identify changes in women's professional paths as a form of adaptation and strategy to mitigate work-family conflicts, observing the female entrepreneurs' motivations to start a business. The motivations observed were personal fulfillment (7), dissatisfaction with a previous job (7), opportunity identified (6), financial necessity (4) and schedule flexibility (2). Schedule flexibility is more a consequence of entrepreneurial activity than a determinant factor to start a business. Personal fulfillment and opportunity identified were the main motivations observed in this research, which are elements that may be related to the interviewees' education. The findings regarding motivation include: the interrelationship between the reproductive cycle, entrepreneurial project, and patterns of female entrepreneurs; love for the business as a prerequisite for its implementation and success; and the financial return as motivation to continue the enterprise, attracting other family members.

The next step was to analyze the female entrepreneurs' strategies to mitigate work-family conflicts, namely: eliminate roles (0), reduce roles (8), and share roles (64). In line with previous studies, sharing roles was the strategy most used, and occurred through hiring specialists and implementing professional management (28), outsourcing domestic work (22), and adopting family management (14).

With regard to professional management, the study found that motherhood was determinant for the entrepreneurs' decision to hire specialists and delegate functions. This measure allowed companies to profit from the specialists' know-how and expand. In other words, motherhood was catalyst to improve the performance of the women-led companies participating in this research. As for outsourcing the domestic work, housekeepers were determinant to improve the businesswomen's performance and increase the time they dedicate to their company. This dynamic exposes the differences between middle-class female entrepreneurs and low-income female workers – who often fulfill the role of housekeepers and are not in the

position to choose another professional career. These women cannot outsource anything, which means that they are likely to spend their lives serving to other 'successful' women.

This study introduces the managerial implication of recognizing the management of work-family conflicts as an important element to the growth of entrepreneurial activity in Brazil. Shelton (2006) suggests that strategies to mitigate work-family conflicts should be part of the strategic planning of women-led companies. In this sense, raising and allocating funds to hiring professionals and forming teams should be a prerequisite to implementing such strategies. Thus, self-employment may be a viable alternative for women who seek work and family balance, especially those with young children.

The numerous complaints collected during the interviews mentioning the lack of government incentives suggest that public policies to encourage female entrepreneurship should be encouraged. When considering that women have significantly increased their participation in the market, public policies to support their initiatives should not be faced as part of the government's welfare. These policies must be considered an investment in the country's socioeconomic development. In addition, as women are more affected by work-family conflicts, there is a need for specialized assistance from agencies supporting micro and small businesses, helping in the management of these conflicts in the same way as they already do in more conventional areas such as financial literacy and raising capital (Shelton, 2006).

Bearing in mind that the work-family balance has ceased to be considered an aspect of private life to gain space in the formulation of national and international organizational policies and practices, public policies should consider the provision of adequate support infrastructure, including childcare and elderly care. Future studies could focus on the implementation of shared parental leave in Brazil, in order to promote an equal division in childcare and, in the medium term, to foster a cultural change in the current patriarchal society. These initiatives can help overcome one of the main barriers imposed on women – the balance between professional and family demands –, which may have an impact on the credibility and performance of women-led businesses.

The research presents two theoretical advances contributing to the literature. First, the findings suggest that managerial changes implemented in women-led businesses as a consequence of motherhood favors the reduction of work-family conflicts, leads to businesses' professionalization (by hiring specialists), and results in business growth. These outcomes, therefore, indicate positive impacts of motherhood in the field of management and contradict research that unilaterally addresses the negative effects of motherhood on careers. The second contribution is related to the significant financial return observed in the businesses analyzed, which goes against

assumptions about lower female entrepreneurial performance and ratifying studies that indicate female entrepreneurship as a form of empowerment and drive for social change.

The main limitations of this research was the focus on two of the largest and most developed cities in the state of Ceará, conducting interviews with businesswomen who are relatively successful. Despite not being used as a criterion for choosing research subjects, the fact that all interviewees run successful businesses suggest a bias toward a positive perception of entrepreneurship and its nuances, hiding difficulties faced by a large number of female entrepreneurs. Therefore, some of the results may be related to the interviewees' characteristics such as race and social class: they are white women, financially successful, and who currently belong to the middle-class – even though almost half of the interviewees were low-income women who improved their social condition after years of hard work and dedication. It is noteworthy that the interviewees' profile is different from that of most women in a country like Brazil, and the results obtained are limited to the range of the population that has similar characteristics. However, it is relevant to approach the multiplicity of roles performed by women with the profile selected in this research. The analysis of these businesswomen's performance in different scenarios offer insights that may not be apparent when the subjects' daily life is profoundly affected by poverty and the consequent lack of basic resources. Further studies must address other social-economic strata, expanding the study of work-family conflicts and female entrepreneurship in contexts of social and economic vulnerability, for example, which will also allow future comparative analysis.

Finally, further studies should include more participants and adopt a qualitative approach to examine, in-depth, topics that emerged from this research, such as the importance of small-businesses professionalization and the influence of motherhood on business growth. These efforts could offer new perspectives to the discussion on the work-family interfaces and conflicts and barriers to female entrepreneurship, highlighting opportunities for women who wish to embark on motherhood and a promising career, simultaneously.

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