

Female Entrepreneurship: An Analysis Of The Profile And Difficulties Faced By Women Confectioners In The Municipality Of Três Rios/Rj, Brazil

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Abstract: *The objective of this research was to identify the profile and difficulties faced by women entrepreneurs who work in the confectionery business in the municipality of Três Rios, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. To this end, an exploratory research with a qualitative approach was applied with a sample composed of 15 female entrepreneurs in the confectionery business in the city. Data collection involved in-depth interviews with the entrepreneurs, and the data were analyzed using the discourse analysis technique. As a result, it was possible to verify that the women are between 23 and 43 years old, and are mostly single with completed high school. A relevant aspect was the finding that most of the entrepreneurs are also mothers, highlighting the challenge of reconciling motherhood and entrepreneurship in the confectionery area. In this case, the main difficulties faced by the interviewees were linked to the double working day, lack of family support, difficulties in publicizing the products and devaluation of the work. Thus, the double working day, with the conciliation of professional and domestic responsibilities, represents a significant obstacle for entrepreneurs, requiring time management skills and resilience.*

Key Word: *Female entrepreneurship; work; confectionery.*

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I. Introduction

Social gender relations in the labor market are being increasingly debated in society. This is because labor relations have been marked throughout human history by deep-rooted inequalities, perpetuating stereotypes, discrimination and limiting women's access to career and leadership opportunities. Traditionally, many sectors and positions have been dominated by men, while women have faced obstacles in their quest for recognition and equality in the labor market (SALGADO, 2019).

In recent decades, however, the feminist movement, civil rights achievements and awareness of the importance of diversity and inclusion have driven efforts to combat gender disparities in the labor market. As a consequence, important achievements have been made, with women occupying prominent positions in various sectors and demonstrating their entrepreneurial skills and capabilities (GUIRALDELLI, 2016; GONÇALVES; PINTO, 2011).

In this context, female entrepreneurship has emerged as a growing phenomenon in recent decades, driving economic and social progress in various parts of the world, especially in Brazil. According to data from the Micro and Small Business Support Service (2023), Brazil stands out internationally as the 7th country with the highest number of female entrepreneurs. Of the 52 million entrepreneurs in the country, 32 million are women, demonstrating that the female figure has gained an increasingly expressive space in the business world.

Among the various segments of entrepreneurship, the confectionery industry is one of the sectors in which female entrepreneurship has gained prominence. Confectionery, also known as the art of making sweets and cakes, has been an area where many women have found opportunities to develop their culinary talents and turn them into profitable businesses (RODRIGUES, 2022).

Thus, the presence of women in the business world has been increasingly remarkable, breaking barriers, challenging gender stereotypes and redefining the global entrepreneurial landscape. In this era of social changes

and transformations, female protagonism in entrepreneurship demonstrates a unique relevance and a significant contribution to gender equity (KALIL; AGUIAR, 2016).

However, despite the undeniable advance of the female contingent in the labor market, women still face several inequalities in the organizational context. Currently, gender inequality at work is accentuated by factors associated with sexual and/or moral harassment, discrimination, wage discrepancy, precarious working conditions, lower hierarchical positions, among other problems. This consequently leads to a gender hierarchy capable of disqualifying women's work and accentuating precariousness in the productive world of women (CISNE; FERREIRA, 2021).

According to data from the Continuous National Household Sample Survey - PNAD (2022), women represent 44% of the labor force in Brazil, and in relation to unemployment rates, they constitute the majority of the unemployed, whose rates are 55.5%. In addition, compared to men, women receive lower wages and are more likely to occupy jobs in precarious sectors.

In view of this problem, the present research aimed to identify the profile and the main difficulties faced by women entrepreneurs who work in the confectionery segment in the municipality of Três Rios, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It is expected that the results of this research can contribute to the empowerment of women entrepreneurs in the region, offering them relevant information for more assertive decision-making in their business. In addition, it is hoped that the data and analysis obtained can guide the formulation of public policies and programs to encourage female entrepreneurship, promoting sustainable economic growth and social inclusion.

II. Material And Methods

The present research was characterized as exploratory with a qualitative approach, since the purpose of this study was to deepen the understanding of the profile and difficulties faced by women entrepreneurs who work in the confectionery business in the municipality of Três Rios, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The qualitative approach was chosen to understand the participants' experience in a deeper way, in order to allow an analysis of the phenomena in an integrated perspective. As Godoy (1995) points out, the qualitative approach seeks to capture social phenomena in more detail, exploring the perspectives and experiences of individuals. In this type of research, the focus is on the quality of the information collected, and not on statistical generalizations for a larger population.

For this study, a sample of 15 women entrepreneurs who work in the confectionery industry in the municipality of Três Rios/RJ was constituted. The selection of participants was made through a non-probabilistic convenience sampling, taking into account criteria such as: ease of access, convenience or availability. Non-probability sampling for convenience was adopted due to its practicality and ease of selection of participants for this study.

Once the sample was defined, fieldwork was carried out with the application of in-depth interviews with the entrepreneurs. The in-depth interviews allowed a detailed and in-depth investigation of the experiences, perceptions, motivations, beliefs and challenges faced by the participants. In the in-depth interviews, open conversations took place with each respondent. The approach was more flexible and directed by a script of questions, allowing entrepreneurs to express their opinions and reports more freely and completely, corroborating what Batista, Matos and Nascimento (2017) recommend.

The script of questions was based on a semi-structured questionnaire. As Boni and Quaresma (2005) point out, the semi-structured questionnaire is characterized by being a research instrument that combines pre-defined questions and open questions that are clarified during the investigation. Thus, for the realization of the in-depth interviews, a list of main questions and topics to be addressed were elaborated, but always allowing flexibility so that the interviewees could give free and in-depth answers on the theme. The semi-structured questionnaire offered the opportunity to ask open-ended questions to allow participants to express their opinions and experiences more freely.

Before starting each interview, the entrepreneurs were duly informed about the purpose of the research, their role in the investigation and the nature of the recording of their responses. All of them received detailed information on how the data would be treated, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of the identity of those involved. With the awareness and agreement of the interviewees, the recording of interactions during the in-depth interviews was carried out in an ethical and responsible manner, ensuring the integrity of the data and respecting the autonomy of the entrepreneurs involved in the study.

After data collection, the data were analyzed using the discourse analysis technique, which is a qualitative method of investigating and interpreting oral and written texts (SILVA; ARAUJO, 2017). Discourse analysis aims to understand how the languages used by participants reflect and constitute their social representations, ideologies and worldviews. In the context of the present research on the difficulties faced by women entrepreneurs in the confectionery business in Três Rios, Rio de Janeiro, discourse analysis allowed an in-depth and contextualized approach to the participants' experiences.

The discourse analysis technique used in this study involved transcribing and organizing the in-depth interviews, followed by a thorough reading to identify recurring themes, patterns and discourses. The data were then transcribed and analyzed for shared and divergent meanings about the difficulties faced in confectionery entrepreneurship.

III. Result

Profile of confectionery entrepreneurs in the municipality of Três Rios/RJ

Through the research carried out, it was possible to identify, initially, the profile of the entrepreneurs who work in the confectionery business in the municipality of Três Rios/RJ. The results of the research indicated that the profile of entrepreneurs in the confectionery business in the municipality of Três Rios/RJ is characterized by encompassing young and adult women, with ages ranging from 23 to 43 years. In this case, the average age, which was calculated from these data, is 35 years. Thus, most of the entrepreneurs in the sector are in the age group where many people are at the peak of their professional career and creativity, which can be a positive factor for the development of new ideas and businesses in the confectionery industry.

Regarding education, it was found that 8 interviewees have completed high school (53.33%), 3 have completed higher education (20%), 3 have incomplete elementary school (20%) and 1 has completed elementary school (6.67%). The general analysis of the information on the education of the interviewees reveals a diverse and multifaceted scenario among women entrepreneurs in the confectionery business. It is observed that the majority has completed high school, representing just over half of the total, indicating that this educational level is the most common level among the entrepreneurs participating in the research. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that a significant portion of the interviewees have completed higher education, representing one fifth of the group. This trend reflects the investment of these women in more advanced education, which may have contributed to the development of stronger managerial and entrepreneurial skills, reflecting positively on their trajectories in the confectionery business.

Another relevant fact is that three interviewees have incomplete primary education, which corresponds to 20% of the total. This indicates that some entrepreneurs faced educational challenges, but managed to overcome them and find success in their ventures. This result demonstrates that determination and the capacity for continuous learning can be essential factors for success in the entrepreneurial world. In addition, one of the interviewees has only completed elementary school, representing 6.67% of the group. This data highlights that even with a more basic educational level, some women manage to excel in entrepreneurship, emphasizing that formal education is not the only determining factor for success in this area.

Overall, the diversity of educational levels among women entrepreneurs in confectionery suggests that access to entrepreneurial opportunities is not strictly linked to the degree of formal education. Instead, skills, determination, experience and adaptability also play key roles in the success of these women entrepreneurs. The data analysis underscores the importance of recognizing and valuing the multiple trajectories and pathways that lead women into entrepreneurship, as well as the need to provide support and inclusive policies that help women entrepreneurs at all educational levels reach their potential in the confectionery and other sectors.

Regarding marital status, nine women reported that they are single (60%), five emphasized that they are married (33.33%) and one reported that she is a widow (6.67%). It is observed that the majority of women entrepreneurs in the confectionery business are single, representing 60% of the total. This data is relevant, as it suggests that independence and dedication to an entrepreneurial career are priorities for this group of women. By being single, they may have more freedom to focus on their business and pursue their professional ambitions without the additional responsibilities and demands associated with marriage. This predominance of single women in entrepreneurship may also reflect a shift in social expectations and the role of women in society. Increasingly, women are seeking financial autonomy and independence, which may be driving this high number of single women entrepreneurs in confectionery.

Finally, the last question regarding the profile sought to identify whether women have children. As a result, eleven women reported that they have children (73.33%), while four said no (26.67%). The analysis of the results on the presence of children among women entrepreneurs in the confectionery business brings up a fundamental issue that permeates the reality of these women: the reconciliation between the identity of being a woman, mother and entrepreneur.

The significant presence of women entrepreneurs with children (73.33%) shows that many of them are facing the challenge of reconciling motherhood with entrepreneurial life. This reality highlights the importance of considering the specific demands faced by entrepreneurial mothers, such as time management, flexibility to deal with family emergencies and support to take care of children while dedicating themselves to their business. Being a mother and an entrepreneur simultaneously can involve a daily juggling of tasks and responsibilities, requiring organizational skills, resilience and adaptability.

Subsequently, the interviewees were asked how long they have been working as entrepreneurs. The results showed that the time varies from 4 months to 5 years, and most started to undertake after the advent of the

Covid-19 pandemic. Most of the interviewees started to undertake from the year 2020, that is, from the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this scenario, the pandemic scenario contributed to the increase in unemployment in the region, which pushed many women to seek new forms of income, including entrepreneurship in the confectionery area. Flexibility and the possibility of working from home were also cited as reasons for starting a business in the field.

Reasons that led the confectioners to undertake entrepreneurship

Regarding the questions related to female entrepreneurship, the first question was about the reasons that led the confectioners to undertake. In response, it was observed that the main reasons for undertaking were linked to the search for a supplementary income (46.66%), the lack of opportunities in the labor market (33.34%) and the passion for confectionery (20%), as can be seen in the subsequent statements below.

What made me go into business was my desire to have my own money. As I have children and I am a housewife, I had to find some way to supplement the household income. Unfortunately, my husband's money alone was not enough to pay the bills (E8).

Confectionery came along to change my life. I was already unemployed, so I had to find some way to earn an income for my household. It was by undertaking that I achieved this. Today I sell brigadeiros, pies and cakes. Thanks to entrepreneurship, today I am an independent woman (E2).

Confectionery has always been present in my life. Since I was a child, I always liked to make sweets. So I tried to start entrepreneurship as what I liked to do most. I started selling sweets to neighbors, then I went out on the streets and today I sell via delivery on the internet (E9).

In view of the interviewees' statements, it was possible to verify that the search for a supplementary income emerged as a significant impetus for entrepreneurs to enter confectionery. The often challenging economic reality led women to explore their culinary skills and turn them into profitable business opportunities. By realizing the potential of their skills in making sweets and cakes, the women entrepreneurs found entrepreneurship a viable alternative to reinforce family income and consequently to achieve a desired financial independence.

In this sense, the passion for confectionery has emerged as a powerful driving force for entrepreneurial confectioners. For many of them, the act of creating delicious delicacies is a true vocation, a form of art and personal expression. The possibility of turning this passion into a business was therefore a unique opportunity to combine pleasure with work, as well as to reap the rewards of an activity that provides personal and professional satisfaction.

Allied to these factors, there is the lack of opportunities in the labor market, which was a determining factor for women to enter entrepreneurship. The interviewees reported that they were unemployed and, because of this, entrepreneurship emerged as an alternative to overcome these adversities and seek financial independence. Thus, entrepreneurship in the confectionery sector represented a way to overcome these limitations and create a space of their own, where women were able to earn an income without the constraints imposed by the traditional labor market.

Main difficulties when undertaking

Subsequently, the respondents were asked about the main difficulties they face when undertaking. As a result, it was observed that the main difficulty in undertaking is associated with the double workday, given that six entrepreneurs (40%) cited aspects around the difficulty of balancing professional responsibilities with domestic tasks and family care, as evidenced by the speeches transcribed below.

The main difficulty is undoubtedly the double working day. In addition to undertaking, I have to take care of the house and my son, as I am a single mother and have no help from anyone. It is difficult, but we have to make ends meet (E4).

I believe that the difficulty lies in associating household chores and work (E7).

In this sense, it appears that the double workday is the main difficulty faced by women entrepreneurs in the confectionery industry in the municipality of Três Rios/RJ. These results reflect a common reality faced by many women who seek to undertake and advance in their careers, while still having to deal with traditional gender roles in their personal lives. The fact that six female entrepreneurs (40%) emphasized the difficulty of the double journey reveals the relevance of this issue and how it can significantly impact the development and growth of businesses in the confectionery sector. Entrepreneurship, in itself, is already a challenge that requires dedication, time and effort. However, when combined with the accumulation of household chores and family responsibilities, women entrepreneurs face an additional burden that can lead to increased stress and exhaustion.

Thus, the difficulties faced by women entrepreneurs in the confectionery business reveal a challenging scenario, where the double working day stands out as the most significant obstacle. The double working day is a common phenomenon among many women entrepreneurs, especially those who are mothers. This is reinforced by the interviewees' statements, who describe the difficulties of reconciling the responsibilities of entrepreneurship with caring for the home and children. The pressure of having to run a business and at the same time perform

household chores, without the help of partners or family members, can be extremely challenging and stressful. This is especially relevant for women entrepreneurs who are mothers, as they need to reconcile their professional responsibilities with childcare and household chores.

In addition to the double working day, three other entrepreneurs (20%) pointed to the lack of support from family members as a significant difficulty when undertaking.

Having the lack of support from family members at this time of undertaking makes it very difficult. They think that selling candy is not work (E12).

I started alone and with nothing by selling my sweets. At this moment, what makes it difficult is the support of the family, because I am alone looking for my source of livelihood (E5).

Without a doubt, the main difficulty is the lack of support from my parents and boyfriend. In addition to not contributing and helping, they keep putting obstacles, saying that I should have a job with a formal contract. In a way, I agree, but entrepreneurship is the only option at the moment, so they should support, not discourage (E9).

The results reflect the importance of family support for the success of female entrepreneurs, since encouragement and emotional support from loved ones can be fundamental to overcome the challenges faced on the path of entrepreneurship. The lack of support from family members is also a relevant issue mentioned by three of the interviewees. The absence of support from partners, family or friends can make it even more difficult to manage multiple responsibilities. Thus, having a solid support network can be fundamental for women entrepreneurs to find a balance between the demands of personal and professional life. Otherwise, the lack of such support can negatively impact the motivation and confidence of women entrepreneurs, making it essential to seek ways to address this difficulty and find ways to create a supportive and encouraging environment for business development.

It is also worth mentioning that two entrepreneurs highlighted the existence of difficulties in publicizing their sweets (13.33%) and one cited the devaluation that exists around female entrepreneurship in confectionery (6.67%). The fact that two female entrepreneurs (13.33%) highlighted the existence of difficulties in publicizing their sweets suggests that the promotion and marketing of their products are significant challenges. Promotion is key to attracting customers and expanding the reach of the business. This may reflect the need to invest in effective marketing strategies and take advantage of social media and other online platforms to increase product visibility.

Confectionery is a competitive market, with numerous options available to consumers. Therefore, standing out in this sector requires effective and creative marketing strategies. The need to invest in promotion is understandable, since even if the products are of high quality, if people do not know they exist, they will hardly be sold.

The entrepreneur who mentioned the devaluation of female entrepreneurship (6.67%) points to the persistence of gender stereotypes and prejudices in the confectionery sector. This perception can affect the self-esteem and confidence of female entrepreneurs, hindering their progress in business. It is essential to combat this devaluation by promoting equal opportunities and recognizing the talents and efforts of women entrepreneurs in the confectionery industry.

The data show that the female entrepreneurship landscape in confectionery faces multiple challenges, from practical issues such as product promotion to more complex issues related to gender equality and social perception. Overcoming these difficulties requires collective efforts, including family support, inclusive policies and actions to combat stereotypes.

IV. Conclusion

Based on this exploratory research with a qualitative approach, it was possible to identify the profile and the main difficulties faced by women entrepreneurs in the confectionery business in the municipality of Três Rios/RJ, Brazil. It was found that women are between 23 and 43 years old, and are mostly single with completed high school. As for motherhood, the significant presence of women entrepreneurs with children highlights the challenge of reconciling motherhood and entrepreneurship.

In this sense, the main difficulties faced by female entrepreneurs are linked to the double workday, lack of family support, difficulties in publicizing products and the devaluation of female entrepreneurship in the confectionery industry. The double working day, with the conciliation of professional and domestic responsibilities, represents a significant obstacle, requiring time management skills and resilience.

The expressive presence of entrepreneurial mothers, facing the challenge of reconciling motherhood with entrepreneurial life, highlights the importance of inclusive policies that help entrepreneurs at different educational levels to reach their potential in the confectionery business and other sectors. Entrepreneurship represents an opportunity for many mothers seeking flexibility and financial independence, but it also requires organizational skills, resilience and adaptability.

Based on these results, it is essential that public policies and institutions support the growth of female entrepreneurship in the confectionery business by providing access to resources, training and networking. Valuing

female entrepreneurship will not only enrich the local economic landscape, but also contribute to strengthening gender equality and empowering women in society as a whole.

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