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## Enemy at the (house) gates: permanence of gender discrimination in public relations career promotion in Latin America

### Abstract

This study develops models capable of finding empirical relations between social factors in practitioners' private lives, that is to say, extra-organizational or external factors to the work environment that affect the career promotion of female professionals in public relations. The aim is to analyse some gender issues at a global level by exploring the Latin American subcontinent, where there is an accepted lack of knowledge. With that purpose, the focus is on the public relations practitioners' care responsibilities (such as living with children or dependents) and if these responsibilities influence their opportunities for career development in Latin American countries. Quantitative data from 803 Latin American practitioners representing 18 countries were analysed through predictive multivariable analysis with data mining techniques, using hierarchical decision trees. The applied statistical method is valid to explain some of the extra-organizational factors that affect female career promotion in public relations and can be used for other studies. Results empirically found that family dependency and caring responsibilities affect the career opportunities of women, and that family responsibilities do not affect men's chances to career promotion. Therefore, the predictive analysis statistically proves that gender can be a determinant factor for career promotion in these circumstances.

### Keywords

**Public relations, communication practitioners, gender discrimination, female career promotion, family dependency, Latin America, data mining.**

## 1. Introduction

In the most industrialized Western countries, there exists a normative view of gender in the workplace which includes assumptions of gender diversity and respect for the equality of individuals' rights within organizations. For instance, in 2014 the Swedish government declared itself a 'feminist government' and runs specific programs; in 2009 Austria introduced a budgetary principle of promoting gender equality in its Constitution that allows monitoring indicators and gaps to be budgeted; in 2019 Spain incorporated an Equality Gender Plan recommended for companies with more than 50 workers according to a recent law (Decree-Law 6/2019). And, not in vain, one of the United Nations Sustainable Development

Goals is gender equality (Goal 5), and, as Miotto, Polo López and Rom Rodríguez (2019) state, these goals are being highly influential in gender equality practices.

More frequently these values should be included in the organization's description of its identity values, governance principles and its CSR mission (see Velasco *et al.*, 2015), participated by communication functions. Moreover, gender diversity, within the diversity principle (Grunig, 2001), and the participative culture (Lindeborg, 1994), has been understood as a factor contributing to excellence in public relations, and as a reflection of social responsibility (Hon & Brunner, 2000).

However, within the areas of communication management and public relations, gender gaps are still identified, as they persist both at the professional field level and as an academic and educative field (e. g. Tench, Moreno & Topić, 2017; Creedon, 2004; Place, 2011). Even though female practitioners outnumber males (Andsager & Hurst, 2005; Grunig *et al.*, 2000), "their distribution in the field is uneven and clearly defined by gender" (Andsager & Hurst, 2005, p. 86). In fact, there is a series of enduring gender discrepancies in the field.

Generally, studies about gender in public relations are focused on structural aspects, such as the feminization of the profession, the salary gap, and the glass ceiling or on the descriptive and prescriptive prejudices, such as specific characteristics of the female professionals or their preferences (Tench, Moreno & Topić, 2017; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Andsager & Hurst, 2005; Hirsh, 2009). These prejudices have been argued as evidence to explain the structural gaps in the professional field. Feminist studies usually mark socialization as the origin for gender differences and preferences (Tench, Moreno & Topić, 2017). Yet, in the field of public relations many scholars' arguments have belonged to the structuralist perspective (O'Neil, 2003, p. 151), which states that the different ways of behaviour in men and women are due to organizational conditions and "power differences created by the organizational structure, not socialization" (p. 155).

The third wave of feminism (from the mid 1990s) makes claims for a post-structural interpretation of identities, gender, and sexuality. In particular, feminist literature argues that women are in less favourable positions than men as a consequence of the existing patriarchy and points out "gendered social, political, and economic inequities in organizations" (Pompper, 2007, p. 292). In this vein, Fitch, James and Motion (2016) suggest that practices and assumptions in public relations should be understood as highly gendered social constructions.

Scholars suggest that women's lack of power in public relations is "due to gender-based discrimination and expectations" (Place, 2011, p. 1). Briefly, for female practitioners, gender discrimination results in negative consequences, namely, the glass ceiling, low job satisfaction and unrealistic work expectations (Place, 2011, p. 2), and also the salary gap, limited promotion, difficult access to top positions, the work-versus-family conflict, and constraints due to their care responsibilities and family-related obligations. Thus, this paper aims to develop models capable of finding empirical relations between social factors in practitioners' private lives, that is to say, extra-organizational or external factors to the work environment that affect the career promotion of female professionals in public relations.

The present study is the first work focused on gender issues in public relations in Latin America. It is based on prominent literature on the topic, and analyses the actual situation of PR female practitioners in this region with a quantitative new methodological approach. Empirical evidence about the actual situation of practitioners can encourage the gender discussion at the organizational and professional associations level, and also enhance the need of providing solutions for gender discriminations experienced in the field.

Therefore, the main objectives of this paper are to explore these gender issues at a global level in the Latin American region, to find empirical relations between factors that are external to the workplace and affect female professionals' careers, and finally to find methodological models and conclusions to generalize.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. From intra-organizational to extra-organizational factors of gender discrimination in public relations

The second wave of feminism (1960s-1990s) contributed to the entry of women into the labour force (Fitch & Third, 2010). Since women have entered the profession at enormous rates over the last decades and scholars subsequently talk about a feminization of the field (Fitch & Third, 2010) and a predominantly female industry (Moreno, Fuentes & Khalil, 2018; Zerfass, Verhoeven, Moreno, Tench, & Verčič, 2020; Zerfass, Verčič, Verhoeven, Moreno & Tench, 2019; Moreno, Molleda, Álvarez Nobell, Herrera, Athaydes & Suárez, 2019; Tench, Moreno & Topić, 2017; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Wyatt, 2013). This feminization has been expected to bring about a greater professionalization and a step forward to symmetric communication (Grunig *et al.*, 2000). The public relations industry is predominantly female (Tench, Moreno & Topić, 2017, Topić *et al.*, 2019; GWRP, 2019; Fitch & Third, 2010; Wyatt, 2013), but public relations and communication management are considered a gendered field, given that gender discrepancies persist (Aldoory & Toth, 2002, p. 103). Gender differences, expectations, and socialisation generate power dynamics both in society and in the public relations workplace (Place, 2011, p. 3).

Despite women's majority in public relations employment, female employees do not dominate the senior or leadership positions. Third-wave feminism (or post-structural feminism) tackles this issue, since women still achieve lower positions in industries even where female employees outnumber male employees (Zerfass *et al.*, 2020; Moreno, Fuentes & Khalil, 2018; Tench, Moreno & Topić, 2017; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Merchant, 2012).

The existence of a glass ceiling is confirmed with several reports and studies. According to the World Economic Forum, most companies are aware of the existence of a gender gap and women being underrepresented in their boardrooms, "and the public relations industry is no exception" (McCorkindale, 2020, p. 14). But there is still some confusion about what the causes are. Regarding the intra-organizational mechanisms that build the glass ceiling, most studies focus on internal promotion biases, but external recruitment and hiring processes can be crucial too (Fernández & Campero, 2017). But other extra-organizational factors such as gender role socialization or historical precedence were also identified in the field of public relations (Wrigley, 2002).

The term intraorganizational has been used as a concept in management to describe dynamics of relations and networks within the organization (see Pedersen, Soda & Stea, 2019; Brennecke, 2020) and has been applied to the inherent gender implications in these relationships (Rua Gomez, 2020). Accordingly, the term extraorganizational is used in managerial studies in relation to factors in society that are related to gender bias (Stuart & Galperin, 2019; Dreher, Ramaswami & Dougherty, 2020).

Despite female professionals being in the majority in the public relations field this does not prevent women from earning less than men (Tench, Moreno & Topić, 2017; Aldoory & Toth, 2002; Choi & Hon, 2002; Wrigley, 2002). Therefore, together with the employment position gap, we also find a salary gap.

Gender has proven to be relevant to explain the salary gap, even when years of experience, job interruptions, age, and education level are taken into account (Aldoory & Toth, 2002). Current longitudinal studies, like the European Communication Monitor (Zerfass *et al.*, 2018; 2019; 2020), confirm that there is a permanent significant salary gap in this field even in the most industrialized countries in Europe. These salary differences persist in every role, from managerial positions to unit members. Few women reach managerial positions, but even when they can overcome the glass ceiling, their salaries are still substantially lower than men's.

These recent studies have not delved into the factors affecting the salary gap. But several intra- and extra-organizational factors have been highlighted in previous gender studies in public relations, namely: differential skills (women's lack of negotiation skills to request

higher salaries), socialization (women are taught not to be demanding or aggressive in salary negotiations), gender discrimination and sexism (men are offered more money for recruitment and retention purposes because of the gender imbalance), historical disparity, balancing work and family (it can limit women's salary as they have to work less hours or go part-time), among others (Aldoory & Toth, 2002, p. 117).

Closely related to the glass ceiling issue and the salary gap, some social science scholars point out the relationship between dependent care responsibilities and promotion (see Purcell & Baldwin, 2003). The OECD reports that "gender inequality in unpaid care work is the missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes, such as labour force participation, wages and job quality" and women are the ones who "typically spend disproportionately more time on unpaid care work than men" (Ferrant, Pesando & Nowacka, 2014, p. 1).

The gender differences regarding position and salary are partly linked to women's responsibilities in child-rearing and household chores: as women are more likely "to interrupt their careers for family considerations, firms will avoid hiring and promoting women to leadership positions that require long hours and continuous commitment" (Iversen & McCall-Rosenbluth, 2011).

According to the Copenhagen Center Report survey, more women than men state to be unwilling to work more hours as it would affect their work-life balance, which contributes to their professional mobility and job satisfaction (van Slyke Turk, 2016). Female employees feel pressured to balance work and personal life, and they must make critical choices to face that balance (Place, 2011, p. 8). This affects their promotion opportunities, and women perceive the public relations profession as more difficult for them when it comes to achieving promotions and juggling work and family responsibilities (Sha & Toth, 2005). Besides, women are socialized and expected to balance work and family (Grunig, Toth & Hon, 2013), as family-work responsibilities are considered as women's issues and tend to frame discrimination of work-life balance challenges as personal problems, rather than industry problems (Place, 2011, p. 10). In this vein, Aldoory, Jiang, Toth and Sha's previous work (2008) showed that both men and women constructed the conflict as a woman's issue.

In the scholarly literature, there is a shortage of information about the different aspects that can influence the work-life conflict (Shen & Jian, 2013) and the work-versus-family constraints. The organizational support is key to better cope with work-life conflict (Jiang & Shen, 2014; Jin, Sha, Shen & Jiang, 2014), as negative organizational environments contribute to higher work-life conflict (Shen, Jiang, Jin & Sha, 2015). Jiang and Shen's study (2014) confirmed that women reported higher levels of strain-based work-life conflict than men. More variables, like age, family and dependent care responsibilities must be analysed to understand the conflict and choices (Shen & Jian, 2013).

Employees who are primary caregivers for their families will probably have to face this time-based conflict as it is more stressful (Shen & Jian, 2013; Pompper, 2007). In fact, dependent care is also considered to affect promotions as it generates stressful situations that can cause individuals to choose between focusing on their career or their families (Purcell & Baldwin, 2003, p. 221). Some studies show that male and female practitioners consider public relations as a field not favourable for work-life balance (Moreno, Fuentes & Khalil, 2018; Aldoory *et al.*, 2008; Sha & Toth, 2005). And this affects women initially. Dependent care, namely, the care of children and elderly adults, constrains women's careers since women are expected to devote more time than men to their families and household chores. Society reinforces traditional male and female roles, associating women with home duties and men with being the family's main monetary source, so that promotion into positions that require overtime, travel, and relocation can be off-limits for women or must be refused (Purcell & Baldwin, 2003).

Public relations scores as one of the most stressful jobs (CareerCast.com, 2020). Not in vain, work-life balance is a significant issue for the field, as it directly affects most employees and it has also become a concern for employers' organizations (Aldoory *et al.*, 2008, p. 1). Two

decades ago, Aldoory *et al.* (2008, p. 13) already recognized the necessity (still applicable) in the research field for using quantitative data to attempt generalizations for greater populations of public relations professionals regarding work-life balance in the field.

## 2.2. The context of gender discrimination in the public relations industry in Latin America

Scholars have traditionally focused on the environmental approach when defining the main contextual variables that affect the professional development of the public relations profession and practitioners (Yang & Taylor, 2014; Yang & Taylor, 2013; Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009; Taylor, 2001). Sriramesh and Verčič (2003) collapsed their range of five contextual variables into three factors: country infrastructure, societal culture, and media environment. A recent study in 20 countries in Latin America provides evidence on how the professionalism of public relations is affected by economic development, level of democracy and the media system (Molleda, Moreno & Navarro, 2017). Gender inequalities are constructed within the societal culture, and contribute to the construction of the societal culture; nevertheless, there are not special research studies on this contextual factor in the public relations profession in Latin America.

Gender differences in the time devoted to domestic and care responsibilities can be found over the world. There is limited evidence about the gender division of housework and market work in Latin America, where women are usually in charge of the elderly, the infirm, and children (Campaña, Giménez-Nadal & Molina, 2015). With the arrival of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Latin American societies have been marked with deep social, economic and demographic changes that increased women's participation in society through higher schooling rates; the important issue of entry into the workforce (still mainly male), together with a decreasing fertility rate and a greater life expectancy for women (Veleda da Silva & Lan, 2004). However, as some sociological studies in the region show, women's participation in income generating activities is increasing, but household chores and dependent care remains a female responsibility (Campaña *et al.*, 2015; Pedrero Nieto, 2013).

Gender inequalities are a direct consequence of a traditional perspective about the place and role women must have in society, based on prejudices and discriminations, that do not consider the improvements experienced in the region and their effects in societies (CEPAL, 2013). One way to overcome the problems that women face is to achieve economic autonomy with the help of decent work for women, along with social protection and care systems. Female employment is a key issue to move forward if there is going to be equitable and sustainable development in Latin America (CEPAL, 2013).

Surveys on non-remunerated jobs and the use of time (see for instance INDEC, 2014) show that women devote more hours to non-remunerated jobs than men, even if women also work outside of their home. This is particularly found in the time devoted to giving care. This pattern can be found in Argentina as well as other Latin American countries and triggers the need to develop specific care policies to reconcile work and family commitments (Calero, Dellavalle & Zanino, 2015).

Little is known about gender discrepancies in the public relations and communication management industry in Latin America. No specific studies have been developed about the gender discriminations in the profession. At the same time, there is a lack of empirical data and literature to theoretically support the observed reality.

The majority of women in the profession has been reported in surveys from diverse countries (e.g., Moreno *et al.*, 2019; Moreno, Molleda, Athaydes, Suárez, Herrera & Álvarez, 2017; Molleda & Ferguson, 2004; ProRP, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010). Molleda and Ferguson (2004) conducted a research study to identify the main factors that contribute to the performance of the specific Latin American social role of public relations. Results focused on one Latin American country, Brazil. The findings reported that the gender of public relations practitioners reinforce the feminist view that women are generally discriminated against in

society. Male professionals were more likely to represent the organization outside its boundaries. Nevertheless, when female respondents of the survey did occupy the highest positions, they also performed similar activities to men, including advising top management on corporate social responsibility and ethics (Molleda & Ferguson, 2004).

Recently, some of the few extensive studies about the field of public relations and communication in the region (Molleda, Moreno, Athaydes & Suárez, 2010; Moreno, Molleda, Athaydes & Suárez, 2015) show aspects to consider:

- a) Traditionally, public relations has been a women's profession.
- b) However, women do experience difficulties to access higher positions and salaries.
- c) Different gender issues in the field are not acknowledged by most of the professionals; male practitioners are not as aware of the barriers female professionals must face as women and this is more striking in countries where greater social gender inequality, in general, is found; so that we could face the gender fallacy.
- d) The only gender discrimination aspect accepted by professionals (to a greater extent by women than men) is that female professionals need more time because of family care responsibilities.

### 2.3. Objectives and hypothesis

We have distinguished four main gender issues based on the public relations literature in Western countries (see Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018; Topić *et al.*, 2020; Topić *et al.*, 2019; Moreno, Fuentes & Khalil, 2018) and the very few studies around Latin America (Moreno *et al.*, 2017; Moreno *et al.*, 2019; Molleda & Moreno, 2008; Molleda, Moreno, Athaydes, & Suárez, 2010; Molleda & Ferguson, 2004), but with valid data on gender issues. These issues are: feminization, glass ceiling, salary gap and female promotion regarding their social context (especially care responsibilities in their private lives).

After reviewing the literature on gender issues in public relations we detected three main lacunas: a) the necessity of testing theories developed in the Western Northern countries in other regions of the world; b) the necessity of empirically related extra-organizational social factors in the private lives of practitioners which cause female career promotion discrimination; and c) the necessity of attempting generalizations for greater populations of public relations professionals regarding the issue of work-life balance (Aldoory *et al.*, 2008).

Attending to these lacunas, the first aim of this paper is to shed some light on the gender issues at a global level. Gender discriminations in the field are explored for the Latin American subcontinent, where there is a lack of knowledge. The second aim of this paper is to find empirical relations between factors in practitioners' private lives which are external to the work environment and that affect the career promotion of female professionals. And the third aim of this paper is to analyse a wide set of cases in order to find generalizations and methodological models.

This paper explores if the care responsibilities of public relations practitioners influence their opportunities for career development in Latin America. This research question has been operationalized in the following hypothesis:

- H1. Living with children or dependents affects differently the promotion opportunities of male and female practitioners.

### 3. Method

This paper takes up the recommendation by Aldoory *et al.* (2008, p. 13) for using quantitative data to attempt generalizations for greater populations of public relations professionals regarding the work-life balance in the field.

In order to test the hypothesis, public relations and communication management professionals in Latin America were surveyed in 2016-2017 through the Latin American Communication Monitor, based on a questionnaire of 10 sections and 33 questions. Nine

questions regarding gender issues were analysed. More than 20,000 strategic communication and public relations professionals for companies, governmental organizations, and NGOs in Latin America were invited to participate in the online survey through datasets of national and regional professional associations. In total 1,774 professionals started the survey. The data analysis and results exclude those participants who could not clearly be identified as part of the study population. This left 803 respondents from 18 countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Dominican Republic, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

As two of the objectives of this research study were to analyse a wide set of cases to find generalizations and methodological models, it was important to utilise the complete dataset for the region at this stage rather than break down by country or using other variables. In this way the research tested the analytical methods of data mining and searched for profiles and trends for the whole region of Latin America.

A predicted analysis is presented for testing the hypothesis (see Batthyány & Cabrera, 2011). A multivariate analysis with data mining technique through hierarchic decision trees (see Berlanga, Rubio & Vilà, 2013) was carried out. Chi-square automatic interaction detector (CHAID) is the statistics used in the decision trees.

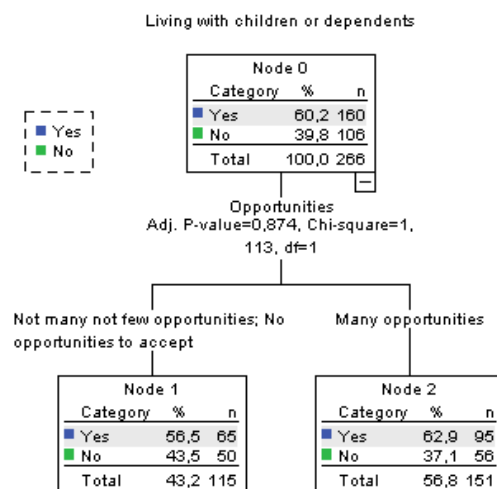
For this analysis, the first group studied was male practitioners in Latin America and then female practitioners with the variable “My personal situation allows me to accept job opportunities...” (‘career promotion’ from now on). Once the relation with this variable was rejected for men, a set of new variables were introduced for the female group. The independent variable or criterion used in the model is the cohabitation with children or other dependents. It is an ordinal variable with dichotomous values (yes or no). The dependent or predictor variables introduced in the model were: gender, position or responsibility level within the organization, salary, career progress, years of experience, type of organization, work location, and country.

Once all the variables are introduced in the segmentation tree model, the CHAID method finds signification in the dependent and predictor variables: living with children and dependents, years of experience in the profession, position in the organization and type of organization. No correlation was found with the variables for salary, location, and country.

#### 4. Findings

Male professionals who live with children or dependents can accept the same promotion opportunities in their professional careers than other male practitioners without these familiar care conditions.

**Figure 1:** Decision tree for male professionals.



Source: Own elaboration.



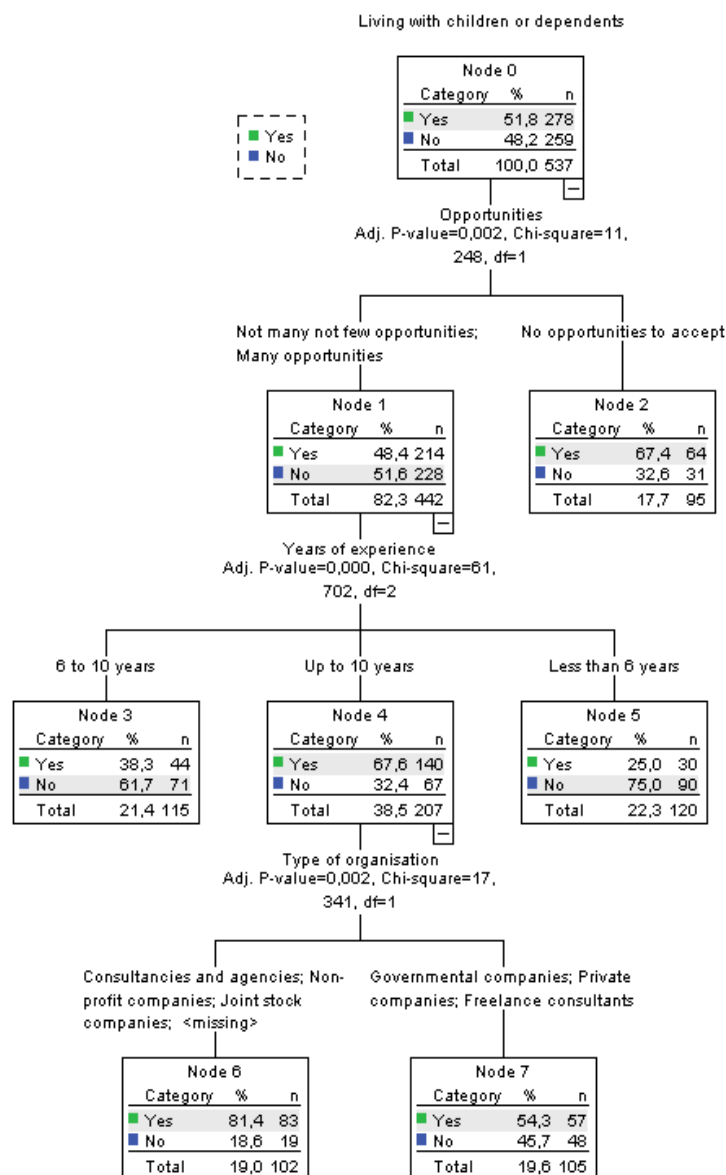
Six out of ten men (60.2%), report that they live with people in their charge. Despite this, in the context of work opportunities and promotion, men consider that their personal situation would allow them to accept new positions (see Figure 1).

Indeed, those who believe they can take new job opportunities are mostly the core of men with more family responsibilities (62.9%). Therefore, family responsibilities do not affect men's opportunity to accept career promotion.

It is not confirmed that male professionals who live with children or dependents can accept fewer promotion opportunities in their professional careers.

The second step of the analysis tested if female professionals who live with children or dependents can accept fewer promotion opportunities in their professional careers.

**Figure 2:** Decision tree for female professionals.



Source: Own elaboration.

Female communication professionals mostly live with children and other people who they consider as their responsibility (51.8%), although less than men. Regarding women and opportunities for career promotion (see Figure 2), those who state having limited chances accept this situation because of their personal context and these are the women with family responsibilities (67.4%). The statistical model does not need more segments, namely, variables, to explain this profile. Therefore, women with family responsibilities would reject a work opportunity due to their personal context.

On the contrary, women whose personal situation allows them to have possibilities –“not many and not few possibilities” and “enough or many possibilities”– to accept work opportunities are those who mostly do not live with children or dependents (51.6%). However, a minority of women with more than 10 years of experience who report that their personal situation would allow them to accept a work opportunity promotion are mostly (81.4%) working in agencies, consultancies, NGOs and joint stock companies. The best salary levels for female practitioners in Latin America are found in these types of organizations.

Therefore, only the minority segment of women who have more than 10 years of experience and work in agencies, NGOs or joint stock companies, would accept career promotion opportunities, despite their family situation.

The segmentation tree confirms our hypothesis: living with children or dependents affects differently the promotion opportunities of male and female practitioners. Only women with children or other people in their charge cannot accept job opportunities to promote their careers. The same personal situation does not affect male practitioners. The predictive analysis statistically proves that gender is a determinant factor for career promotion in these circumstances.

## **5. Conclusions and discussion**

Studies about gender in public relations have focused on structural aspects, such as the feminization of the profession, the salary gap, and the glass ceiling, or on prejudices, such as specific characteristics and preferences of the female professionals. These prejudices have provided an explanation for the structural gaps, and feminist studies usually identify socialization as the origin for gender differences and preferences.

Our aim was to bring back the structure to the super-structure, understanding socialization as a transversal issue in intra-organizational and extra-organizational factors, and both in and beyond the workplace.

Specific organizational policies that take into account not only intraorganizational relations but extraorganizational bias need to be included in the organizational agenda to advance on gender equality. A gender diversity organizational environment can improve the performance of communication functions, especially promoting female leadership. In fact, some recent studies show that women may be more adaptable and effective at pursuing company sustainability than men (Alonso-Almeida, Perramon & Bagur-Femenias, 2017) and findings reveal that gender diversity is positively associated with corporate innovation (Attah-Boakye, Adams, Kimani & Ullah, 2020; Hughes, Paxton & Krook, 2017), along with the key role of gender diversity in the growth of the CSR approach and companies' reputation (Vacca, Iazzi, Vrontis & Fait, 2020).

Moreover, several studies highlight the outstanding results of companies with higher gender diversity within their executive teams, although companies seem to be reluctant and the current rate of change is extremely slow (GWPR, 2019, p. 4).

We have empirically found that family responsibilities do not affect men's possibilities to accept career promotion, but they do affect women with caring responsibilities in the Latin American public relations industry (or industries).

This research study allowed us to analyse a wide set of cases with a data mining technique through hierarchic decision trees. This technique enables us to find generalizations for greater populations of public relations professionals as promoted by Aldoory *et al.* (2008).

Finally, this is the first study focused on gender issues in public relations in Latin America, and it corroborates results provided by previous diverse gender studies about the profession in Western Northern countries for an underrepresented region in public relations and communication management research like Latin America.

Authors expect to contribute to the global literature on gender in public relations and communication management, providing evidence for a geographic region misrepresented in the research in the field. Empirical evidence about the actual situation of practitioners can encourage the gender discussion at the organizational and professional associations level and enhance the need of providing solutions for gender discriminations in the field.

## 6. Limitations and future research directions

During the progress of this study, some limitations and a path for future research as a mid-term project were revealed. First, the universe of public relations practitioners in Latin America remains unknown. As reported in other parts of the world, there are not censuses or research studies to establish precise estimations about the total number of active professionals. An important effort in the survey distribution was made in order to achieve a large number of professionals through datasets of 23 associations and the research team's own datasets. Likewise, highest diversity was pursued including practitioners with different levels of responsibility, salary, experience, and educational background from different geographic environments, and types of organization. However, since participation in the survey is voluntary, it is not a statistically representative sample.

Second, 803 cases of public relations active professionals in 18 Latin American countries were included. A geographical bias could be perfectly possible since very different results can be found in the most industrialized European countries, the United States or Asia. However, extensive quantitative studies in developed regions such as Western Europe (Zerfass, Verhoeven, Moreno, Tench & Verčič, 2016) confirm that gender issues still remain. Therefore, more exploration is needed to uncover the existence or absence of the extra-organizational factor of care responsibilities affecting the career development in other regions such as in Latin America.

Third, it is also necessary to acknowledge the differences among Latin America, since development differs from one country to another in economic, political, social and cultural aspects. In order to analyse a wide set of cases to find generalizations and methodological models, dataset was grouped to apply statistical analysis of data mining. The country as a variable was introduced in the segmentation tree model, but the CHAID method did not find significance in the dependent and predictor variable.

Fourth, during the analysis process, other aspects that shed light on the factors that determine the career development of female professionals were found. The dependent care variable was operationalized as "living with children or other dependents," but it can be operationalized in wider ways allowing the inclusion of care responsibilities beyond the cohabitation with dependents. The fact that only women have difficulties to accept career options, in relation to family responsibilities, needs further research within other variables such as time distribution in and outside the workplace. To what extent does the time devoted to home chores and family influence professional career opportunities? And even more, how can the lack of time for leisure influence career development?

Finally, this type of quantitative analysis presents some limitations. Statistical relations with a sufficient number of subjects were made, but it was not possible to delve into the life stories and the way in which these relations are produced. For this reason, we believe that this type of study and its quantitative methodological tools should not flood the gender studies

field, rather a balance of works using multiple methodologies is encouraged. The main contribution of this type of quantitative study is in testing hypotheses, searching generalizations, differentiating universal from contextual practices and validating knowledge previously shown through qualitative studies.

This research study has empirically tested a valid statistical method to explain some of the extra-organizational factors that affect female career promotion in public relations. Replication studies from new planned surveys and the introduction of new variables into the tree model might allow us to revalidate, complete and consolidate empirically-based knowledge about gender inequality in public relations.

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