TITLE: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE USE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITY WITHIN CONTEXTS OF POVERTY

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Gender differences in the use of social capital for entrepreneurial activity within contexts of poverty

Abstract: Previous research has pointed to differences in the use of social capital between male and female entrepreneurs that may explain, in part, the different outcomes they obtain. Adopting a gender perspective, this study analyses whether these differences depend on the contextual configurations in which their businesses operate, specifically the degree of hostility of the context and their household structure. Thirty male and female entrepreneurs who set up their businesses in poor neighbourhoods in and around the city of Guayaquil (Ecuador) were interviewed. Data was analysed using content analysis and comparative qualitative fuzzy set analysis. The results show that women rely on bridging and bonding social capital for favourable entrepreneurial outcomes, while men rely mainly on bonding social capital, with the structure of the household being one of the influences that condition whether or not they go outside their immediate environment to mobilise resources. This work contributes to a better understanding of how the relational behaviour of male and female entrepreneurs is conditioned by gender and context. These results differ from those obtained in previous research focusing more on developed countries and suggest that gender differences in social capital are at least partly explained by the contextual configurations in which entrepreneurs find themselves, and especially by the needs and agency space available to them, rather than by the faithful reproduction of gender roles and the behavioural patterns derived from them.

Keywords: FsQCA, Female entrepreneurship, Social capital, Developing countries, Poverty, Household structure.

1 Introduction

In the poor neighbourhoods of mega-cities in Latin America, Asia and Africa, millions of individuals start businesses in order to support their families (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2023; Banerjee and Duflo 2008). In these contexts, characterised by limited material resources and alternatives, the social capital developed by entrepreneurs is particularly important for business survival and development (George et al. 2016).

Several studies have indicated the need to deepen our understanding of the particularities of social capital dynamics in such contexts, particularly from a gender perspective. Research in various developing countries found that different architectures of institutional, cultural and social norms shape the role of gender and social capital in business

development in ways that differ from those reported in studies in developed countries (Ngoasong and Kimbu 2019; Solano and Rooks 2018; Lindvert, Patel, and Wincent 2017; Rooks, Klyver, and Sserwanga 2016).

Due to weak institutions and exclusion from many formal markets, poor entrepreneurs in developing countries are more likely to use informal exchanges with close ties such as family and friends (i.e., bonding social capital), as the main support structure for running their businesses (Solano and Rooks 2018; Portes and Landolt 2000). Both men and women entrepreneurs thus limit their access to ties outside their close circles (i.e., bridging capital), which, in turn, can hamper the development of their businesses (Granovetter 1973). From a gender perspective, this situation can reduce the differences in the relational behaviour of men and women entrepreneurs observed in developed economies, where men tend to build more bridging ties to contacts outside their close network of family and friends (Brush, De Bruin, and Welter 2009; Díaz-García and Carter 2009).

Social capital also plays out differently in collectivist and individualist societies and appears to provide more benefits in terms of resource exchange to the latter (Rooks, Klyver, and Sserwanga 2016). The results of studies from a gender perspective in collectivist societies in developing countries indicate differences in the relational behaviour of men and women entrepreneurs, but in a different direction than that observed in developed and more individualist economies. Social capital is found to have negative effects on business development for women entrepreneurs (Lindvert, Patel, and Wincent 2017; Ngoasong and Kimbu 2019), while men do not benefit from the social capital embedded in their networks because they ask less for resources in their close network (Solano and Rooks 2018).

Lastly, the social stratum to which entrepreneurs belong entails different gender roles and expectations. In impoverished communities prevailing necessities are different and, as previous research indicates, these may introduce different expectations regarding gender roles which in turn might significantly impact the dynamics of social capital formation (Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl 2013).

Based on these previous insights, this paper examines (1) how the different types of social capital that entrepreneurs who start their businesses in poverty contexts in a developing country are related to business performance and (2) how the context in which these entrepreneurs operate condition the development of different forms of social capital. The empirical research is based on interviews with 30 entrepreneurs (17 women and 13 men), all of whom, from a situation of poverty, had started a business in or near Guayaquil (Ecuador). First, content analysis was used to categorise the interview data and, based on the dialogue with previous literature on entrepreneurship in poverty contexts and gender and on the insights emerging from our qualitative analysis, to identify the factors that might explain differences in the use of social capital between men and women for business performance. We focus on two dimensions of the context: the degree of hostility of the context and entrepreneurs' household structure (Brush, De Bruin and Welter 2009; George

et al. 2016; Lindvert, Patel, and Wincent 2017). The degree of contextual hostility refers to the lack of availability of different types of resources (financial, material, emotional, infrastructure) for starting the business and vulnerability to violence and crime. The household structure captures whether the household is two-parent or single-parent and the number of children.

With the data thus categorised, a fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) was performed to examine the impact of context and the types of social capital developed on the business performance of men and women entrepreneurs. The results suggest that the relational behaviour of male and female entrepreneurs in contexts of poverty is conditioned mainly by the structure of the household, a factor that has rarely been considered previously in entrepreneurship research (Carter et al. 2017). The relational behaviour patterns identified reflect sharp differences with those reported in previous studies, whether conducted in developed or developing countries, when the household structure was not considered (Lindvert, Patel, and Wincent 2017; Solano and Rooks 2018).

This paper contributes to achieving a better understanding of how entrepreneurs' relational behaviour is gendered, i.e. to identify the factors that generate significant differences in this respect between male and female entrepreneurs. The results obtained show that these differences depend on contextual configurations resulting from the intersection between the structure of the household and the degree of contextual hostility experienced. These configurations delineate the space and incentives for individual agency and help account for the gender differences observed in this and previous research. In summary, the present study enhances the understanding of how the way in which contexts are gendered varies with different geographies, cultures and social classes (Welter, Brush, and Bruin 2014; Welter and Baker 2021), thus creating differences in the relational behaviour of male and female entrepreneurs.

In the next sections, we present the state of the art on gender differences in the use of social capital and make a case for the importance of considering the role of context when analysing these issues. Finally, we review current literature on gender differences in the use of social capital in developing countries.

2 Literature review

2.1 Gender differences in the social capital of entrepreneurs

Social capital provides value to individual entrepreneurs by enabling them to access important resources for business development. This type of capital is as important as economic capital, or even more so, in explaining social action and its outcomes (Biggart 2008). Studies in this field differentiate two forms of social capital that are relevant to entrepreneurial development: bonding and bridging (Burt 1992; Granovetter 1973). Bonding social capital is

characterised by networks that are dense, homogeneous and based on strong relationships among individuals that are family or friends. It provides access to hard-to-find resources for establishing the firm, but it is costly and becomes redundant in time (Granovetter 1973). Bridging social capital, on the other hand, consists of contact networks of diverse characteristics, which allow individuals to access new resources and information and to reduce their dependence on immediate friends and family, playing a key role in business development (Adler and Kwon 2002).

Previous research into entrepreneurship and gender has identified differences in how female and male entrepreneurs bring their social contacts into play (Greve and Salaff 2003; Jennings and Brush 2013; Runyan, Huddleston, and Swinney 2006), regarding aspects such as the diversity of contacts used (Díaz-García and Carter 2009), the size of the social network and the types of relationships created to obtain support for business development (Sequeira, Gibbs, and Juma 2016). In general, female entrepreneurs have fewer contacts and less diversity of contacts than male entrepreneurs. They rely more on strong relationships in their close circle, such as family and friends to start and develop their businesses (Greve and Salaff 2003; Renzulli, Aldrich, and Moody 2000). By this means, they build stronger and more lasting social ties, based on trust and with a higher level of personal interaction (Díaz García and Carter 2009). Female entrepreneurs, therefore, tend to have less diverse networks (Aldrich 1989; Renzulli, Aldrich, and Moody 2000) and experience greater difficulty in accessing them.

In contrast, men tend to have more extensive professional experience before starting a business, which leads them to have larger and more diverse support networks (Brush, De Bruin, and Welter 2009; Díaz-García and Carter 2009). In addition to forging strong relationships, they also create weaker, shorter-lived ties, outside their close circle (Díaz García and Carter 2009; Jennings and Brush 2013; Manolova et al. 2007). In summary, women seem to generate less bridging and more bonding social capital than men (Górska et al. 2022; Wang, Deng, and Alon 2021). These differences in relational behaviour are invoked to explain partially differences in the performance of women and men entrepreneurs.

2.2 Context and gender differences in the use of social capital

The entrepreneur's embeddedness in a specific context confers a series of structural advantages and disadvantages that impact on the business created and, on its performance, both immediate and subsequent (Kwon and Ruef 2017; Henry et al. 2022). In the following, this research examines how various aspects of the entrepreneurial context – institutional, social and household – generate different conditions and expectations towards the entrepreneurial behaviour of men and women.

The gender gap in entrepreneurship is tangible in developing countries, where idiosyncratic factors, in addition to the traditional barriers reported elsewhere, make business startup, survival and development more difficult for women (Welter, Brush, and Bruin 2014; Conley and Bilimoria 2022). As well as the scant support received for entrepreneurship from formal institutions and the difficulties in obtaining credit, women are subject to informal regulatory institutions, reflected in patriarchal societies, under which women are pressured to become homemakers at a very early age and are relegated to a subordinate role within the family (Meliou 2020; De Clerq, Kaciak, and Thongpapanl 2022; Ngoasong and Kimbu 2019; Xheneti, Karki, and Madden 2019).

With respect to the relational behaviour of women and men entrepreneurs in developing countries, previous research indicates that women's agency in seeking contacts and developing relationships beyond the close circles of family and friends is usually more restricted than that of men (Ngoasong and Kimbu 2019; Solano and Rooks 2018; Surangi 2018), due to gender roles and expectations that relegate a large part of women's activity to family care, resulting in their having less work experience, and generating relationships of dependency within the family. Thus, in societies with highly differentiated gender roles, the entrepreneurial support relationships that women develop are mainly restricted to the family, which provides selective access to resources, but at the same time demands a distribution of business profits and restricts access to off-grid contacts (Mustafa and Treanor 2022; Ngoasong and Kimbu 2019; Solano and Rooks 2018; Surangi 2018). This type of environment confronts women with scenarios unlike those encountered in more individualistic contexts or where these norms of solidarity with the extended family do not apply. Moreover, some studies even find that in contexts with strong norms of solidarity and reciprocity, social capital can have negative effects on business development for women entrepreneurs (Lindvert, Patel, and Wincent 2017; Ngoasong and Kimbu 2019).

However, in these contexts, both men and women entrepreneurs are more likely to use informal exchanges with close ties such as family and friends (i.e., bonding social capital), as the main support structure for running their businesses (Portes and Landolt 2000). Both would have thus limited access to ties outside their close circles (i.e., bridging capital), which, in turn, can hamper the development of their businesses (Granovetter 1973). From a gender perspective, this situation can reduce the differences in the relational behaviour of men and women entrepreneurs observed in developed economies, where men tend to build more bridging ties to contacts outside their close network of family and friends (Brush, De Bruin, and Welter 2009; Díaz-García and Carter 2009). Moreover, some studies find that men do not benefit from the social capital embedded in their networks because they ask less for resources than women in their close network due to cultural norms that create the expectation that they should be more self-sufficient than women (Solano and Rooks 2008). These results indicate that different cultural and social norms shape the role of gender and social capital in business development in ways that are different from those reported in studies in developed countries.

Furthermore, within a given country, entrepreneurship can present different gender dynamics according to the social stratum in question. In the context of developed countries, women with medium-high incomes experience greater social pressures for a more intense maternity, in terms of childcare, than those with lower incomes (Williams, Blair-Loy, and Berdahl 2013). In the former case, this can exacerbate conflicts between entrepreneurial and maternal identities, because once the basic needs of the home are met, the dominant cultural patterns among more prosperous classes prioritise involvement with the child's welfare and upbringing. By contrast, for women living in poorer households, scarcity creates greater pressure to contribute resources to the family unit, which can lead to the emphasis on women's role in intensive parenting being relegated to a secondary consideration. In such cases, both parents may participate (albeit inequitably) in procuring the subsistence of the family and in caring for children and the elderly. In many cases, too, there may be other female members of the family (older daughters or sisters) to help with childcare while the mother is working (Hennessy 2015). Therefore, when women engage in entrepreneurial activities to help meet the basic needs of their family, there is less of the conflict between the facets of entrepreneur and mother that has been observed in previous research on female entrepreneurship.

In addition to these environmental factors impacting on entrepreneurial behaviour, there are those of the home. For a better understanding of female entrepreneurship, several authors have examined the complexities of household dynamics and relationships, viewing these as a fundamental influence on entrepreneurial behaviour (Brush, De Bruin, and Welter 2009; Carter et al. 2017; Díaz-García and Carter 2009; Gras and Nason 2015; Ghatak and Bhowmick 2022). In many countries, a woman must obtain the explicit consent of her husband to start a business, and there is a clear expectation of female subordination, according to the male view that entrepreneurship cannot be a mechanism that will provide a woman with the resources needed to make decisions independently of her husband's will (Meliou 2020; Wolf and Frese 2018; Xheneti, Karki, and Madden 2019). Furthermore, the family structure within the home and specifically the presence of a male partner is in itself a fundamental resource in the development of the business. Therefore, the presence or absence of such a partner, as well as the conventional status of women in the family, determines power relations in the home and creates more or less space for women's agency in terms of business startup and mobilising relationships to this effect (De Clerq, Kaciak, and Thongpapanl 2022; Liu, Schøtt, and Zhang 2019).

Overall, the above aspects generate a wide variety of circumstances, which accounts for the need to conduct a detailed exploration of how the different dimensions of the context and the way in which they are gendered can shape entrepreneurs' relational behaviour and impact on business performance.

3 Method

3.1 Study context

To determine whether there are differences in how entrepreneurs in a developing country use their social capital to develop their businesses, and how these differences playout in a context of poverty, this research conducted an exploratory study of men and women who had started businesses in such context, in or near the city of Guayaquil. Much of the research into social capital and female entrepreneurship in developing countries has been carried out in African and Asian countries. However, less is known about the relational behaviour of female entrepreneurs and the impact of their social capital on business performance in the context of Latin American countries such as Ecuador. Although the family plays a vital role in Ecuadorian society, and the concept of family is relatively broad, encompassing second and third-degree ties, relationships of trust are usually restricted to the nuclear family (parents and their children). Within Ecuador, the region of Guayaquil is unlike other areas of the country that are characterised by stronger community ties. Guayaquil is an outlier in the national context, with values closer to coastal individualism than to the mountain collectivism commonly found elsewhere (Silva 2005).

Guayaquil is the second most populous city in Ecuador, with a population of 2.7 million inhabitants. It is the county's economic centre and its main port (INEC 2022). In December 2021, the rate of adequate employment in Guayaquil was 42.2%, while that of employment in the informal sector was 44.6% (INEC 2021) and 20.1% of the population lived below the poverty line (INEC 2021). Although no statistics are available from the city on persons' reasons for starting a business, in the country as a whole 82.71% of individuals consider that the main reason for starting a business is the difficulty of finding paid employment (Lasio et al. 2020). In terms of gender, national figures show that 62% of owners of established businesses are men, versus 38% women; among new businesses, 53.5% are men and 46.5% are women (Lasio et al. 2020). In fact, Ecuador has one of the highest rates of female entrepreneurship in the Latin America / Caribbean region.

Ecuador's legal system does not formally discriminate by sex. Moreover, since 2009, various new laws have been passed and commissions established to favour gender equality. In some cases, however, historically rooted cultural models persist under which women have been discriminated against through the generations. These spaces perpetuate the segregation of roles, relegating women to the home space and preventing them from entering the productive sector, where they could generate more family income.

The family is a central element in the social structure of Ecuador. In the poorer neighbourhoods of Guayaquil, it was expected to find that the extended family and community would play a key role in economic life and that entrepreneurs would be active, seeking the survival and growth of their businesses, thus compensating for the scarcity of resources

available to individuals in this context. However, the initial interviews revealed that in most cases small businesses were family owned and restricted to the home and the nuclear family (parents and children).

3.2 Sample and data collection

This research took the form of a case study of 30 male and female entrepreneurs. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with open questions. The participants were selected by convenience sampling, by which the first author visited populated sectors over a period of three months and interviewed respondents in their own commercial establishments or markets. In some cases, the place of work coincided with the home address. Only the owner was interviewed, since in Ecuadorian microenterprises it is the owner who provides leadership and is able to supply the type of information required.

The saturation criterion was applied to determine the sample size of 30 entrepreneurs. Initially there were 34 (19 women and 15 men), but four respondents provided insufficient information and were excluded from the subsequent analysis. Therefore, this paper reports on the experiences of 30 business owners (17 women and 13 men). All started their businesses from a situation of poverty, some in more hostile sectors than others, a difference that was considered in the fsQCA coding. Although some started their businesses in central areas of the city, for example, in street markets, their economic situation was poor in every case. The cases studied are detailed in Table 1, below.

Insert Table 1 about here.

The interviews were conducted in person, which was considered the most appropriate approach in this case as the information to be collected required a certain degree of trust between the interviewer and the participant. A semi-structured interview script was prepared and five pilot interviews were conducted to help develop the questions and add others that might arise. The average duration of the interviews was 45 minutes and all were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews covered the beginnings of the company, the entrepreneurs' relationship with their family, the social capital available and the strategies employed to obtain resources for the business.

3.3 Data analysis

Data analysis was carried out in two phases. In the first, a content analysis was made, using Nvivo software, of the qualitative data collected in the interviews. Each case was analysed independently, as follows: in a content analysis, the

interview responses were coded by paragraphs and sentences, following the method proposed by Corbin and Strauss (1990).

To validate the content analysis and to corroborate the reliability of the interpretations made of its results, the two coders performed first-order coding of two separate interviews and discussed any discrepancies. This enabled them to produce a codebook to guide the rest of the coding process, which was used for the remaining interviews, with the addition of some commonly agreed codes as they emerged.

Through a constant dialogue between the data and previous literature on gender, social capital and entrepreneurship in situations of poverty, these codes were grouped into more abstract categories and themes. Individual case descriptions were created, which included information on the origins of the business and the entrepreneur, the household situation, and the support relationships used in the development of the business. Based on these descriptions, a more holistic understanding of each case emerged. Subsequent cross-case comparison allowed us to identify common themes and variations among cases and potential patterns of relationships between themes. The data structure resulting from the analysis is shown in Table 2 and the exploratory model emerging from our data is shown in Figure 1.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

The model identifies the factors that could explain differences in the use of social capital between men and women for business performance: household structure (belonging or not to a two-parent family and number of children), hostility of the initial context (family support, initial capital and business location), and human capital of the entrepreneur.

3.4 Fuzzy Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis

The second phase of data analysis consisted of a qualitative comparative analysis of the cases, aimed at identifying the types of social capital used by entrepreneurs to develop their business, according to the conditions faced, such as the degree of hostility encountered towards starting up the business, and the structure of the entrepreneur's household. This fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) has been defined as "an exploratory/interpretive technique, based on set theory" (Ragin 2008, p. 190), which follows inductive reasoning when the sample includes only a small number of cases (Greckhamer et al. 2018; Ragin 2008, 2017). This systematic, rigorous method uses the rules of Boolean algebra and formal logic to explore complex causal relationships and combines the best features of quantitative (variable-oriented) and qualitative (case-oriented) methods (Ragin 2008).

Under fsQCA, several causal conditions may lead to the same result. Each case is viewed as a complex configuration of causal conditions producing a result. The relationships between the causal conditions (or combination) and the result (the solution) may be one of necessity or of sufficiency. This approach, therefore, is appropriate for understanding the causal complexity of social and business phenomena.

In this study, quantitative values were assigned to the concepts that emerged from the qualitative analysis, as described below.

3.5 Study conditions: measurement

Table 3 sets out the explanatory conditions obtained by the content analysis.

Insert Table 3 about here.

In determining the outcome of the model, it was no easy matter to obtain financial information on the respondents' business activities, for several reasons: some did not properly control their accounts, others were reluctant to detail their economic benefits, or only responded in vague terms. Business performance was thus measured according to the number of jobs generated. This information was coded from the responses made during the interviews.

The value of human capital was determined by scoring formal education before business startup, on a scale ranging from 0 to 5 (0-No formal education; 1-Primary school; 2-Primary education and occupational training; 3-Secondary school; 4-Secondary education and occupational training; 5-University degree). In addition, one point was awarded if the entrepreneur had experience in the family business or in previous employment and another point for prior skill or vocation in the area of business.

Bonding social capital is obtained from sources close to the entrepreneur, such as family and friends and, in general, trusted persons within the nearby community. In each case, this research evaluated the extent to which the entrepreneur relied on these relationships to develop the business. The use of bonding social capital was quantified by assigning a score of 1 for each type of close relationship (nuclear family, non-nuclear family, friends and neighbours) relied upon by the entrepreneur to support the development of the business.

Bridging social capital was quantified by reference to the following sources: attending training activities; affinity with famous or influential people; membership of a business association; contacts made at trade fairs or links with universities; relations with public authorities; prestige within society; and resources provided by NGOs. The final score was obtained by awarding one point for each of the bridging capital sources described. These forms of social capital

were coded according to their use during the development of the business, not at startup, since the interest of this study lay in determining its relationship with current business performance.

Regarding the hostility of the context, in this study it was defined as the lack of availability of various types of resources (financial, material, emotional, and infrastructure) for starting a business, as well as vulnerability to violence and crime. Based on our qualitative analysis and previous literature on entrepreneurial resource mobilisation, we identified three dimensions of contextual hostility:

Location Hostility: This dimension pertains to the degree of marginality of the area where the business was initially located. The areas are classified as very marginal, marginal, and downtown. Very marginal areas are impoverished neighbourhoods within the city with high crime rates and significant public safety issues. Marginal areas are situated in the mountains surrounding the city, characterised by difficult vehicular access and susceptibility to violence and crime. Additionally, communities close to the city, though safer, may have restricted access to basic services. The downtown area, being the least marginal, sees entrepreneurs placing their informal businesses on street sidewalks under unhealthy conditions, making them vulnerable to criminal attacks. This dimension encompasses both access to basic services and infrastructure for establishing the business, as well as vulnerability to violence and crime.

Access to Seed Capital: The second dimension of hostility considers the entrepreneurs' ability to access external funding required to initiate the business. While most entrepreneurs begin with their own financial resources, this funding is often insufficient to cover all business needs (Gartner et al. 2012). Consequently, the absence of external funding accessibility to fulfil business requirements represents a more hostile situation for an entrepreneur compared to scenarios where such funding is available and can be attracted. Additionally, entrepreneurs with lower wealth are less likely to secure external financing (Frid et al. 2016). Considering these factors and existing evidence, and acknowledging entrepreneurs' hesitance to divulge their financial status, we regard access to external funding as a proxy for gauging the difficulty in obtaining financial resources during the business setup phase. Therefore, it serves as a dimension of contextual hostility.

Emotional Support: Lastly, among the resources crucial for assisting entrepreneurs in establishing their businesses, emotional support from nuclear and extended family members, as well as friends, holds paramount importance. This is especially true for women, who often face more role conflicts (Welsch et al. 2021). We contend that entrepreneurs who benefit from such support create their businesses within a less hostile context compared to those who lack such support.

To operationalise hostility, 2 points were assigned if the seed capital was obtained from the entrepreneur’s own resources (a context considered very hostile), and 1 point if it was obtained from third parties (less hostile). Another point was added if there was family opposition to the venture, and 0 otherwise. Lastly, the hostility of the business location at the

outset was scored as 1 point for a central location (least hostile), 2 for a marginal one, and 3 for a very marginal area (most hostile).

We operationalize the household structure using two conditions that we incorporate into the fsQCA analysis: whether the household consists of two parents or is single-parent, and the number of children. The presence of a romantic partner in the home can serve as an asset for business development (Wolf and Frese 2018). However, given the subordinate relationships many women experience in our study context, the presence or absence of such a partner also impacts the level of independence they can exercise in decision-making. While all men in the sample receive support from their partners, the situations of women vary significantly. Some have been abandoned by their husbands, are widowed with dependent children to support, or have experienced other challenging family situations. Among the 17 women in the sample, seven are heads of single-parent households. Regarding the number of children, family obligations can significantly influence business performance, as larger families necessitate more resources compared to smaller ones. Moreover, the number of children also affects the burden of caregiving responsibilities, typically shouldered by women, which in turn limits their availability for business-related activities.

After establishing the components of each condition and quantifying them according to the information given in the interviews, these raw data were transformed into fuzzy values by applying the fsQCA calibration method. As explained in the next section, this is done by defining membership, crossover and absence criteria based on the theoretical and contextual knowledge of each of the conditions.

3.6 Calibration of the conditions

Fuzzy sets are characterised by the presence of observations that have some degree of membership of the set, albeit partial (Ragin 2008). To perform fsQCA analysis, conventional variables, which represent the (necessary and sufficient) conditions for an outcome to occur, must first be transformed into fuzzy set variables to facilitate Boolean analysis. This process is called calibration and is carried out using fsQCA software.

In this calibration, the researcher must specify the values of an interval scale variable that correspond to the three qualitative breakpoints that structure a fuzzy set: the full membership threshold, the full non-membership threshold, and the crossover or maximum ambiguity point. To determine this threshold, the researcher must apply appropriate theoretical and contextual knowledge (Greckhamer et al. 2018; Ragin 2008, 2017). Conditions that present only two categories are not calibrated.

Table 4 presents the minimum, maximum and crossover points for the study conditions.

Insert Table 4 about here.

The following paragraphs describe how crossover points were established for each of the conditions included in the model.

Number of employees: The crossover point is determined by reference to contextual knowledge. In Ecuador, businesses that employ up to nine workers are termed microenterprises while those with 10-49 are considered small companies (Reglamento a la Estructura de Desarrollo Productivo de Inversión 2017). The level of ten employees was taken as the crossover point.

Human capital: In Ecuador, the net rate of secondary education attendance has been reported as 75.49% (INEC-ENEMDU 2020). With this in mind, the crossover point selected for the human capital condition was 2, which corresponds to primary education plus occupational training, approximately equivalent to secondary school education in other contexts.

Bonding social capital: A maximum of 3 points was awarded for this condition. Entrepreneurs who obtained 2 or 3 points (63% of the cases) were considered to make intensive use of bonding social capital, while a score of 1 point reflected limited bonding capital. Accordingly, the crossover point was set at 1.5.

Bridging social capital: The businesses considered to make good use of this type of capital were taken as those awarded 3 or more of the maximum 7 points (13% of cases). For this reason, the crossover point was set at 2.5 and complete absence at 0.

Hostility of the initial context: The maximum score obtained for this condition was 6 points, equivalent to full membership and the minimum was 2 points, classed as full non-membership. The crossover point assigned was 4 points. Most cases (77%) scored below this value.

Number of children: In Ecuador in 2020, the average number of births per woman was 2.4 children (The World Bank 2020). For the purposes of this study, the crossover point was set at 2. The highest number recorded was 8 children, and the lowest, 0.

Dichotomous conditions were not calibrated. To validate the model presented, several crossover points were established for each of the causal conditions. With each of these different calibrations, the configuration patterns remained unchanged.

3.7 Analysis of necessity and sufficiency

The analysis was performed using fs/QCA 2.5 software. First, a necessity analysis was conducted to identify the individual conditions required for the result to occur. A necessary condition is one that must be present for the result to occur, but its presence does not guarantee this occurrence (Ragin 2009). A condition, or a combination of conditions, is considered necessary if the consistency score exceeds the threshold of 0.9 (Schneider 2018; Schneider and Wagemann 2012).

The necessity analysis was followed by a sufficiency analysis, to generate the truth table reflecting which configurations are sufficient for the result in question. A sufficient condition is one that leads to the result, even though it may not be necessary. A sufficiency relationship is normally considered consistent when the threshold of 0.75 in the consistency indicator is exceeded (Ragin 2017).

4 Results

4.1 Necessary conditions

The results of the necessity analysis are shown in Table 5 and indicate that human capital is a necessary condition to form a configuration that achieves high performance (the result for this condition exceeds the threshold of 0.9).

Insert Table 5 about here.

4.2 Sufficient conditions

The sufficiency analysis revealed the existence of two combinations of conditions that represent sufficient solutions for the result to occur. Table 6 illustrates the intermediate solution, as recommended by Ragin (2008) for clarity of interpretation. Each column in the table, representing the causal conditions, describes a sufficient combination of conditions that lead to the result. When the model was run, the human capital condition was omitted since, as noted previously, this is a necessary condition in all cases for good performance.

Insert Table 6 about here.

The results obtained show that the two solutions consist of combinations of conditions, any one of which produces high performance. To assess the empirical importance of the solution, Ragin (2008) suggests determining the coverage (the part of the result which is explained by the solution as a whole). The results show that an adequate coverage of the solution was obtained, with a value of 0.665.

The consistency indicator measures the degree to which the terms of the solution and the solution as a whole are subsets of the result; this parameter could be seen as representing the importance of combinations of results. Consistency provides information about the validity of the model. The total consistency of the solutions obtained was 0.775, which is higher than the acceptable minimum of 0.75, as advised by Ragin (2008).

The study results show that the configurations of conditions associated with high performance differ between men and women, although the two configurations also have elements in common: starting the business in a non-hostile context, having human capital and bonding social capital. There were differences between men and women regarding the use of bridging social capital. Surprisingly, the combination that explains the high performance of men's businesses is found in the absence of bridging capital (Solution 2), while for the women this condition is present (Solution 1).

Solution 1 shows that women's use of bridging social capital is accompanied by the absence of a partner and by their having few children. Not having a partner (or not having their support) seems to prompt women to move outside their close circles and to seek resources through contacts with government entities, associations, communities and personalities in order to promote their business.

For men, however, the absence of bridging social capital is associated with the presence of a partner (in fact, all the men in this study had a partner, unlike the women, whose situations were more diverse) and high number of children. The men had a traditional home style, with a wife and children, indicative of greater domestic stability during business startup. Furthermore, in some cases their wives, as well as taking care of the household chores, helped with the administration of the business. Thus, the men received support from their family, which reduced the need to seek resources elsewhere, from external networks, to develop the business.

> Yes, my wife is free to make decisions, she knows the business. There is good communication between us; if I'm away, she knows what to do, and vice versa, we communicate well (Man, case number 3).

Regarding children, the results show that the business success solution for men incorporated the presence of children, while that for women depended on their absence. For women with no partner, having a low childcaring burden is a condition to achieving high business performance. Men, however, could have a larger number of children and still be able to achieve business success, thanks to the differentiated family structure in this Ecuadorian society, where men enjoy greater freedom of manoeuvre in the home than women.

These accounts suggest that the structure of the home can influence the relational behaviour of men and women, in the latter case allowing them a greater margin to establish and develop external ties to their community to support the performance of their business. This view is corroborated below.

> I feel good, I feel useful, I feel capable, I'm independent. I've got that, I really like the feeling that I'm independent, that I have... let's say, freedom, in that sense (Woman, case number 17).

> Right... I've even been outside the province. If they call me to say 'Come to Manabí to give a workshop', I'll go. If they ask me to go up into the mountains, I'll go there, too (Woman, case number 19).

The female respondents highlighted the sensation of freedom that entrepreneurship gave them, fostering travel and contacts with a wide range of people, enabling them to acquire knowledge, funds and, in general, opportunities for their businesses and their immediate community. Such was the case of the woman whose testimony is presented as case number 19, who heads an association of women artisans and whose trips outside the province and the country have served to generate employment for female heads of family in her impoverished community and to export their products to North America.

According to the above observations, to achieve good business performance, a high level of human capital is a necessary condition, both for men and for women. In addition, the existence of adequate bonding social capital is a sufficient condition for both sexes. The main difference between male and female entrepreneurs in this study lay in the significance of bridging social capital; for women, this resource was widely used in the development of their business activities, when they were the head of the household and had few children; the men, on the other hand, did not make use of this form of social capital. The explanatory model emerging from our results is represented in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here.

The resulting model shows that, in a non-hostile context, women with high human capital who are heads of households and have few children use both bonding and bridging social capital to generate high performance. In the same context, men with high human capital who have a two-parent family with many children use bonding social capital to generate high performance.

A sufficiency analysis was carried out to identify the combinations of conditions that explain not high business performance (see Table 7). In this case, four solutions were obtained, all applicable to the women in this sample. The necessity analysis for the model representing not high performance indicates that no condition is necessary for this outcome to occur.

Insert Table 7 about here.

The first solution corresponds to women living in two-parent households with many children, who begin their business activity in a context that is initially less hostile, but do not develop bonding or bridging social capital. In solutions 2 and 3, women have few children, operate in less hostile environments and lack bridging social capital. In these cases, despite starting the business under more favourable conditions (reduced initial hostility and few children), the absence of bridging capital seems to be the common denominator that explains not high performance, regardless of the presence of bonding capital or of a partner. In solution 4, female heads of household develop both bridging and bonding social capital. Their not high business performance in this case is explained by their low level of human capital, the large number of children in the household and the existence of more hostile conditions in the business context. In fact, it is these latter three conditions that differentiate these cases from those presenting high business performance.

5 Discussion

This study reveals several interesting findings. First, in the context analysed (poor entrepreneurs in a developing country), both men and women use bonding social capital to improve business performance. This result is in line with previous research, which has highlighted the fundamental role played by family support and by close ties in the survival and performance of businesses in hostile contexts (Boso, Story and Cadogan 2013; George et al. 2016). Second, also in line with previous research, we find that human capital is a necessary condition for these entrepreneurs to achieve high business performance (Crook et al. 2011). However, it is not a sufficient condition, and its presence or absence is irrelevant in most configurations that explain not achieving high business performance.

Third, the family structure of the household is associated with the use of different forms of social capital in the case of men and women entrepreneurs. Both men and women who achieve high performance share that they have high human capital and started their business in not hostile situations. However, a woman who achieves high performance is the head of a single-parent household, has few children and develops both bridging and bonding social capital. Conversely, a man who achieves high performance is head of a two-parent household, has many children and supports the business performance only with bonding social capital. Previous results obtained in samples of entrepreneurs from developed countries indicated that women are more likely than men to use the networks formed from their immediate circle, particularly the family, rather than more diverse and external networks (Carter, Anderson, and Shaw 2001; Díaz-García and Carter 2009; Jennings and Brush 2013; Manolova et al. 2007). Our findings show that the structure of the household is a condition that together with the development of bridging capital is associated with high business performance. Therefore, we can say that the structure of the household conditions the type of social capital women and men

entrepreneurs use to support the high performance of their business in this context. The position of head of the household places these women in a situation where support is needed, since this support is not provided within the home, but it also provides them with more freedom and empowerment (Conley and Bilimoria 2022). Thus, driven both by necessity and by opportunity, women transgress traditional gender roles that otherwise restrict their activity to the family environment, and look to external networks for the resources they need to develop their businesses.

Unlike women, men in our sample mainly resort to their bonding social capital to support the high performance of their businesses. Previous reports on entrepreneurship in the context of developed countries indicate that high business performance is associated with the use of both bonding and bridging social capital in the case of men entrepreneurs (Díaz García and Carter 2009; Jennings and Brush 2013; Manolova et al. 2007). A potential explanation in our case lies in the resources provided by family and close ties with friends, which seem to meet men's business needs. All men in our sample count on the support of a sentimental partner who is fully involved and contributes to running the business.

These findings are also different from those obtained in other developing economies, where studies suggest that the presence of strong bonding capital restricts the development of bridging social capital, since women's relational behaviour is more exposed to the influence of the family, which inhibits them from developing more extensive networks (Lindvert, Patel, and Wincent 2017; Ngoasong and Kimbu 2019). In the cases described in this study, the presence of bonding social capital does not limit the development of bridging capital for women. This can be explained, at least in part, by the more individualist culture of the region of Guayaquil, where the extended family does not intervene directly in the affairs of the nuclear family. Women can exert their agency and challenge dominant gender norms in their proximal context, building new ties that can help them mobilise the resources needed to grow their businesses. Therefore, in order to explain the relational behaviour of female entrepreneurs, research should consider the particular context in which women operate, their position of power and the extent to which this position allows them to challenge the dominant gender norms.

Our findings further indicate that not high business performance is associated with a low level of education, little work experience (especially in the case of women from very marginal sectors), hostile conditions for business start-up and the added burden of child raising. In the absence of bridging social capital that would allow female entrepreneurs to connect with persons and institutions beyond their close circle, for example to access bank credit, businesses stay small, even if there are strong family ties supporting the business and the context is not especially hostile, as these circumstances are not sufficient for business growth. For example, in two of such cases, the woman had a partner, but his support for the business was not always sustained; the man was only a source of initial capital, contributed with occasional extra income from salaried work or provided a temporary labour resource. In neither case was the man fully involved in the woman's business venture. This is a sharp difference with the cases of businesses led by men, where the

partner is always fully involved. The joint impact of these factors was that the business remained small scale and had poor growth prospects.

6 Conclusion and implications for policy and practice

This study contributes to the understanding of a question that is rarely addressed in studies of female entrepreneurship: the differences in the business behaviour of men and women, living in a context of poverty, in terms of their social ties. While previous studies have focused on explaining how entrepreneurship can represent a means for individuals and particularly women to escape from poverty (Aparicio et al. 2022; Bruton, Ketchen, and Ireland 2013; Sutter, Bruton, and Chen 2019), this research contributes to the understanding of how women and men in such contexts interrelate with their surroundings to achieve business success.

The identification in this research of differing patterns of relational behaviour between male and female entrepreneurs enhances the understanding of the role played by the contextual configurations in which entrepreneurs operate and helps explain the differences detected in this respect. These results complement previous work on social capital and entrepreneurship (Afandi, Kermani, and Mammadov 2017; Stam, Arzlanian, and Elfring 2014) and the role of social capital in the context of poverty (George et al. 2016) by shedding new light on the complex configurations of contextual conditions which explain the the use of certain forms of social capital and not others for supporting business performance.

The gender differences in entrepreneurs' use of social capital can be explained by the structure of the household potentially by two reasons. First, the structure of the household determines the extent to which, either traditional gender roles are reinforced, and female entrepreneurial activity is relegated to the domestic environment, or, on the contrary, a space for agency is created. Second, the structure of the household also has implications for the resources that the entrepreneurs can access and therefore determines whether they must go beyond the immediate environment to mobilise the necessary resources. In line with this view, Poggesi, Mari, and Vita (2016) pointed out that when family ties are weaker, women develop more non-family relationships. Therefore, gender differences in the social capital of entrepreneurs are explained, at least in part, by the existence or absence of space for agency and by the material needs that must be met by female entrepreneurs when building up their bridging social capital, rather than by absolute conformity with gender roles and the behaviour patterns derived from these roles.

The question of female entrepreneurship in Ecuador has been tackled previously by Chávez Rivera, Fuentes Fuentes, and Ruiz-Jiménez (2021), but their study did not address situations of poverty, instead presenting a generic analysis of the challenges faced by middle and upper-class female entrepreneurs. These authors reported that the entrepreneurs consulted presented dynamics similar to those found in developed countries in terms of entrepreneurial behaviour and

the role conflict between caregiving and entrepreneurship (Chávez Rivera, Fuentes Fuentes, and Ruiz-Jiménez 2021). However, this investigation suggests that the mechanisms through which gender differences operate may differ according to the social strata considered. In this sample, conflicts were sometimes apparent between the roles of maternity and entrepreneurship, but this question was not determinant; for example, household chores were usually shared by other family members, such as daughters, sisters and even husbands in some cases. Among the higher social strata, the direct subordination of women is not expected, but there are expectations regarding a more intensive level of maternity, while in the lower strata the opposite is true. In the first case, gender considerations impact on entrepreneurial behaviour, placing greater emphasis on childcare, while in the second there are more direct restrictions regarding the agency of women in business startup, particularly if they have a sentimental partner.

This study provides useful knowledge for institutions and organisations whose policies or actions are aimed at supporting entrepreneurs who live in markedly hostile contexts. Investment in developing human capital is a necessary condition for improving the performance of their businesses, however it is not sufficient. These organisations should focus specifically on facilitating the development of bridging capital, particularly among women whose social ties are usually more limited than those of men. This study also indicates that the way contexts are gendered varies between different social strata and support measures should adapt to the specific needs of entrepreneurs in each case.

7 Limitations and future research

As in any research, the present study is subject to certain limitations. The results must be interpreted with caution because the data on which they are based are restricted to a specific context, to a single informant and a single interview in each case. While the business leader consulted has an overall vision and is an appropriate informant for this type of study, comparison of the data provided with another source would increase the reliability of the results. However, this type of business, due to its largely informal nature, does not maintain data records and there are no sources of secondary information that could be used.

The low coverage of the solution for poor performance represents also a limitation of this study and indicates the need to include in further analyses additional conditions that might explain more representatively why these businesses struggle to create more job opportunities. This research highlights the need for further investigation into how the ways in which contexts are gendered vary between different geographies, cultures and social classes, and enhances the understanding of the differences in relational behaviour between female and male entrepreneurs (Welter and Baker 2021; Welter, Brush, and Bruin 2014; Henry et al. 2022).

Conflict of interest:

Authors state no conflict of interest.

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