

Losses In Professional Women: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Today's professional women seek to reconcile the different environments and spaces in their lives and to achieve this, they need to set priorities, which implies choosing and giving up certain things according to their primary reason of existence. The purpose of this study is to identify the losses that professional women have had throughout their lives and the way they cope with them. The study was developed through an interpretative paradigm with a qualitative approach; the method used was the phenomenological narrative. Eleven women were interviewed in depth, where the main findings were the difference between losses and renunciations, among them: separations, self-forgetfulness, work, and deaths. The ways of coping with that are: spirituality, pain management, emotional intelligence. The meaning of life, resilience and support networks stand out in the women's discourse.

Keywords: renunciation, sense of life, resilience, reconciliation, support networks

1. Introduction

From the last decades of the 20th century to the present time, women have wanted to be everything at once: mothers, wives, professionals, citizens, daughters, friends,

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sisters, and there is no turning back in this process. Today's women have the possibility of choosing among a wide array of options for their personal and professional achievements, they have the possibility of being professionally trained and, at the same time, they can combine this role with another one that means a primary reason of their existence. Although this possibility poses a dilemma for all roles to be fully developed, today it is possible. Young women defend their right to combine their professional work with the harmonization of their personal lives; they do not want to give up having children, but neither do they want the life that their mothers have led, and at the same time they do not want to copy male attitudes or ways of behaving or thinking, but to be themselves: they aim to a project of their own that manages to balance all aspects of their lives: personal, family, social, and work (Chinchilla y León 2004). As a result, the context in which women develop has changed and is different from what they experienced in the last century.

In the current context, there is a presence and strengthening of educational and labor insertion processes for women, which in previous years would have been impossible to think of (Bernal 2017; Castañeda 2015; Dorantes 2015). Women's entry into the labor market has been one of the most relevant phenomena in recent years, which has caused a key change in social transformation. And even though this entry has shown significant progress and accelerated growth, women's incorporation in some areas such as top management has shown to be slower, unequal structures and anachronistic ethos that segregate jobs based on sex-gender still persist (Bolla 2022).

The fact that women work not only represents an important economic support today, which gives them economic freedom, but also allows them to fulfill themselves professionally in accordance with their dignity and is also a means of social interaction and help to society, which contributes to making a more humane world, thus transcending in their work (Musarell et al., 2020). This requires them to balance their private and public lives as a challenge.

Several research (Gelambi 2019; Martín Lladó 2022; Musarella 2020; Orejuela 2019; Sánchez 2012) show that the key issue is related to reconciliation and that there is a flaw in this regard: the attempt to balance private life and work life creates tensions and conflicts that are difficult to manage.

This is the double female presence, which makes the

dualisms of "presence/non-presence, public/private, work/non-work, productive/reproductive" complicated for a woman's life.

Faced with this struggle to meet all the demands made on her and the obstacles she must face, which is not only the glass ceiling, but also the cement ceiling and the sticky floor (Ramírez y Briano 2022; Debeljuh et al. 2015; Chinchilla 2012), the professional woman has to be honest with herself and reflect on what she wants and what her priorities are; that is, align both her personal and professional goals and make profound decisions (Barsh et al.2008). Whichever option is chosen, it is important to emphasize that this decision must result from a deep personal reflection and a clear delimitation of one's own life project, which will always have losses, and doubts and renunciations to make and face will always appear. This is a personal choice for each woman.

Given the relevance of this topic, this study focuses on identifying the losses faced by Mexican professional women today and the ways of dealing with them in order to achieve their life projects to the extent possible.

In the reference framework, a proposal was drawn up regarding a division of losses based on Pangrazzi 2011, Rivas Lacayo 2011, and Viorst 1996 that human beings face throughout their lives. Some of them match this classification and others do not, so the theory is enriched from these results. It is linked to Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development that establishes generativity as the mission of the adult stage, which is related to Frankl's meaning of life; both approaches provide a reference framework for this work.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Throughout their life, every human being experiences on multiple occasions and to a greater or lesser degree losses that cause pain, anguish, and suffering. A person's life is dotted with positive and negative events, joys and sorrows, fulfilled hopes and frustrated expectations. Thus, no life is spared from facing losses and renunciations because they are part of life. When one thinks of losses, the concept is usually related to death; however, losses are a much broader phenomenon: one loses not only through death, but also by abandoning or being abandoned, changing, letting go and moving on, choosing, renouncing, privileging certain things (Viorst 1996).

Loss in this work is understood as the absence or lack of something that someone had and which causes pain and

suffering in the person, it can be changes that the person faces from what was a normal behavioral pattern. It occurs in life, being an event that is involuntary to the person; that is, loss is not chosen, it occurs throughout life's different stages.

Losses, therefore, constitute events that cannot be avoided; Santos (2014) states that all people face two to three traumatic losses in their lives related to death, illness, loss of job, among others, from which no one can escape "... we are all going to have to face two or three traumatic events throughout our lives that will put us to the test" (Santos 2014: 22).

Therefore, the elaboration of losses is a main topic of human existence (Cabodevilla 2007). They range from strong, traumatic, harsh events, to ordinary, day-to-day losses, such as growth, changes, issues that are constant, universal and inevitable, constitute necessary losses, which imply abandoning, letting go and sometimes giving up.

Renunciation -as opposed to loss- is a phenomenon that occurs in the exercise of the will, it is chosen, it is voluntary, it is decided for some reason and at the same time it means a type of loss. Throughout life, the path shows that every person must choose certain things and that these choices are plagued with renunciations, for instance, dreams that one had and that for some reason of choice will never be fulfilled, expectations of oneself, unfeasible hopes, ending relationships with significant people, changes of home, job, residence. All these are renunciations that entail a personal decision and that allow reaching other points and other perspectives that make the person who he or she is and allow resignifying the sense and direction of life at the same time, that is to say, where it is directed to. When we decide, we always choose; choice implies renunciation, tending to go towards a greater good and leaving something behind (Llano 1999).

There are many types of losses. However, there is no systematized division of them. Few authors deal with the concept of loss -as described above- as Viorst 1996; Pangrazzi 2011; Rivas Lacayo 2011; and they make divisions regarding the types of losses, coinciding in some and differing in others. The following table exemplifies some of the losses according to this division and there could be renunciations of the same kind in each type of loss:

Table 1. Types of loss

Separations	Expectations	Imperfect relations	Losses of self	Death
Significant persons	Objectives	Love-related	Control	Loved ones
Love-related	Ideals	Emotional	Self-esteem	Significant persons
Development-related losses	Illusions	Significant persons	Health	
External objects	Life plans		Disease	
Changes of residence, job, home			Self-forgetfulness	
Economic situation				
Renunciations				

¹Source: Own elaboration based on Pangrazzi (2011), Rivas Lacayo (2011), and Viorst (1996).

This research is linked to the theories proposed by Frankl and Erikson:

Frankl's theory focuses his thinking on building a life full of meaning, a meaningful life to the fullest extent possible, in which the reasons for a person's existence are discovered. If the meaning of life is clear, the losses or renunciations a person faces will be linked to this meaning and will be much easier to understand and tackle, and how a person faces losses and renunciations will be key in the way he or she builds their life. A woman's sense of life can thus be associated with full and total surrender to the project that she discovers and decides, which is the essential characteristic of the adult woman (Frankl 1994).

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development analyzes the stages of development and indicates that there is a crisis in each stage and that the personality's development depends directly on the resolution made in response to such crisis. These crises -present in all stages of human existence- can be connected to the losses and renunciations that occur in each stage of development. At the same time, Erikson's study identifies the adult stage as a period of generativity, which assumes having reached a state of maturity, of fullness, where work, free time and family play an important role, which is linked, in turn, with full and total surrender, as an essential characteristic of women. Likewise, this stage has the main task to achieve an appropriate balance between generativity versus stagnation; so that both poles represent the greatest crisis of the evolutionary stage of adulthood. If this balance is not achieved, crises and conflicts arise in the same stage, and within them it is possible to identify what losses or renunciations may occur (Erikson 1981).

3. METHOD

This research was developed through an interpretative paradigm with a qualitative approach. Its purpose was to study the social phenomenon of loss in order to understand

it, interpret it and search for its meaning. A qualitative design was chosen because it studies the way in which women have experienced this phenomenon throughout their lives, delving into their points of view and interpreting their meanings (Taylor y Bogdan 1994).

The method used was a phenomenological narrative, since participants recounted their lives, the experiences expressed by them and the meaning they gave to them were analyzed. This type of method allowed access to the narrative, to the life experience, to the life history of a person (Ñaupas Paitan 2014). Phenomenology was also used, the common meaning of different women was discovered in the experience they lived regarding the phenomenon of losses (Creswell 2007).

3.1 Participating Population

Eleven Mexican women between 40 and 60 years of age participated in this study. The sample of women was selected based on two criteria:

Women with a minimum of a Master's degree

Women professionals who hold or have held managerial positions for at least three years

The following table shows a breakdown of the general data related to these women:

Table 2. Participating Population.

Woman	Age	Profession	Master's Degree Area	Marital Status	Number of children	Professional position
1	40	Engineer	Humanities	Married	1	Management
2	42	Administrative Sciences	Administrative Management	Divorced	1	Entrepreneur / Senior Management
3	43	Administrative Sciences	Administration/Single Management		0	Board of Directors
4	44	Medicine	Science	Married	3	Senior Management
5	53	Administration	Administration/Married Management		1	Senior Management Entrepreneur Businesswoman
6	45	Humanities	Administration/Married Management		2	Senior Management
7	48	Administration	Humanities	Married	0	Consultant
8	58	Humanities	Humanities	Married	3	Consultant
9	43	Science	Humanities	Married	2	Address
10	54	Administration	Humanities	Single	0	Senior Management
11	60	Humanities	Administration	Married	7	Businesswoman Entrepreneur

²Own elaboration

3.2 Data Collection Instruments and Techniques

As recommended by Creswell (2009), the in-depth interview

was used for the phenomenological narrative, and, parallelly, passive observation at the time of the interviews, which allowed a better understanding of the language of the interviewees. A script was designed as an instrument to guide the development of the in-depth interview, which had a series of open questions to create greater freedom and spontaneity in the interviewed participants. According to Hammer y Wildavsky (1990), the guide was prepared with key topics to be addressed so as not to leave out any important ones. The interviews were flexible and dynamic, which allowed each participant to broaden and elaborate on the topic as they wished.

3.2.1 Procedure

The first phase of the procedure was data collection and storage. According to Taylor y Bogdan (1987), three stages were identified within this phase: the establishment of rapport, field strategies and tactics to conduct the interview in person, and finally the recording of data in the form of written field notes, a field diary was kept, the interview was recorded with a mobile device and later transcribed.

The second phase was data analysis, which was carried out as follows: a) Data reduction: from the beginning of the interviews, the information was reviewed in order to arrange it in a systematic order, and a permanent, constant and recurrent review of the information obtained through the transcribed interviews and passive observation notes was carried out (Saldaña 2016; Merriam 2016). b) The information was coded from the data obtained through transcriptions, that is, the information segment that could be useful to the research was marked. At this stage, we were open to everything that could be found. The heterogeneous information in terms of size and topics was separated into homogeneous material of thematic units of the same topic that were repeated in the interviews (Creswell 2007). The information was recoded and reviewed again since qualitative research demands meticulous attention to language and depth of reflections in order to obtain more refined categories. c) Information was identified and classified into analysis units, that is, meaningful parts of the data that contribute to answering the question. All this implied coding the information to conceptually classify the units under the same criterion. d) Construction of categories: the material was grouped into a pattern theme that answered a question. Subsequently, the data were identified and separated into conceptual elements that encompassed

the main events and life experiences of the persons investigated. The basis of this categorization was comparison, aggregation, contrasting and ordering of information, to establish links between them. e) Data arrangement and transformation: A causal diagram was designed to relate categories to each other and establish the relationship between them and the theory. f) Content analysis: Information was broken down to discover the meanings of the document, which in this case were the transcribed interviews. The presence and value of the topics appearing, the novelty, and the relevance of meanings for the text itself were sought.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to discover the common losses faced by adult professional women throughout their lives and what they have meant to them. As a result, the following types of loss emerged: separations, work, death, expectations, self-forgetfulness, and renunciations. The following forms of coping were identified: spirituality, pain management, emotional intelligence, training received from parents, and acceptance.

However, research produced more results; there were interesting findings in the women investigated. The types of losses discovered went beyond those related to work-life balance. One hundred percent of them expressed having a conscious and clear sense of life, which gives them direction and guidance in their lives. They were characterized for being resilient women, permanently struggling to move forward and face adversities, with a preponderance of the education and training they received from their families. These are women formed in character, with the virtue of strength to move forward. A support network was also discovered which helps them, both in difficult moments and in their daily struggle, to cope with all their roles. Specifically, this support network is formed by the family of origin, partner, and work team.

The first finding is that all women have losses and renunciations as part of life, and, sooner or later, every human being will face them. From the beginning to the end, people face a continuous flow between losses and gains, the slightest ones train and prepare them to face the most painful ones (Pangrazzi 2011; Viorst 1996). It should be noted that losses and renunciations were differentiated; losses are those events that come to life, which do not depend on oneself, while renunciations are phenomena

that occur due to decisions made in the scope of will.

The first type of loss identified was that of separations, which refers to a disengagement or estrangement from a significant individual or individuals with whom one had or has an affective bond. The main findings were that three of the women were separated from their parents and siblings at an early age, others from their partner, friends and extended family. It was shown that they do not necessarily have to be negative relationships for a separation to happen, but rather that sometimes, due to their own circumstances, families have to separate because of a choice or life option, and this creates distress and pain. "The price of separation is often very high" (Viorst 1996: 29). A person cannot detach so easily from their first family, as we are inwardly bound to it. (Rivas Lacayo 2011), states that our resilience requires that we learn to relinquish our attachment to things and our eagerness to turn people into our possession.

This is a type of loss that is always present throughout life. (Pangrazzi 2011) states that relationship and separation do not exclude each other but rather complement each other. He who is able to find will also know how to separate, just like separation is the prerequisite of encounter. "Every separation becomes a deprivation of goods, an inner laceration, but also a lesson of life, a reminder of the vulnerability and provisional character of every good" (Pangrazzi 2011: 9).

The second type of loss was that related to work. Two aspects were identified: renouncing to job opportunities that were given up because of priorities. In this regard, participant 4 said she had had many job offers that she did not find interesting because they were totally incompatible with the objectives she had set for herself. There is also another aspect that addresses the loss of jobs for reasons beyond their control. In this regard, participant 7 assures having felt some kind of "small death" when she was told that her services would no longer be required. Interviewee 10 had the same experience when she pondered that it was not up to her to leave the position, but that she was required to do so for reasons beyond her control and that she had put a lot of effort into it.

The first is a renunciation, since they chose not to opt for a greater position -which implied responsibilities at an international level, positions with greater power, traveling- that, although attractive for professional development and growth, they had to pass up because they were not

compatible with their life objectives. This represented a crossroads for them, because on the one hand it is an attractive job offer, representing an ambition and not only a professional but also personal satisfaction for the woman, since few women have the opportunity to reach it, but on the other hand it does not match with what they have as a priority, as a sense of life. This causes tension and conflict in women; it's not easy. However, it's a matter of making decisions according to personal priorities and anticipating conflict situations (Chinchilla & Moragas 2009).

On the other aspect, job loss refers to the fact that they had to leave a job that meant a lot to them, which they had done with responsibility, dedication and affection, and that, for some reason unrelated to their performance, they were dismissed, which becomes a loss. This was an important finding, since they describe it as something similar to losing a child, because such loss was not up to them, that is, there are situations beyond one's control.

The importance of work, and therefore the meaning of its loss, can be highlighted, since it is a source of personal fulfillment, a human activity that requires effort through which women master what they do, discover and transform their resources not only for survival and that of their families, but also for the maximum development of their potential, integration with the family and the community, and it entails providing a better service to society. Work is so important in life that it also contributes to the individual's happiness and to building a successful life (Llano 2002).

The next type of loss identified was death losses, with infant pregnancy loss and parental death being the most relevant.

The loss of a baby through pregnancy entails not only the loss of the baby, but also the expectations it brought: the illusion and dreams of becoming a mother, the desire to form a family or to complete it. In this regard, participant 1 states that she became pregnant, but when it did not go full term, recovering was the hardest part. Participant 2 had the same experience: "I had the misfortune of losing a baby between my two children, and that's when you really realize what it's like to have your soul broken".

One of the most difficult griefs to cope with is that of perinatal loss, which can occur at any time during pregnancy up to the first month of the newborn. The authors Fernández Alcántara (2012) and García de Madinabetta (2011) agree that it is one of the most

complicated losses.

Some women coincide with having faced their parents' death. Although this death occurs in a chronologically logical way, if it was a significant relationship, facing it represents a significant loss. Participant 2 expresses:

"This is my second great mourning, the first one was the baby I lost, and now my father's, and I don't know which one is more difficult, they are both very complicated." In this regard, participant 3 refers that the real, major loss had been, first, to have given up her parents. But then she didn't know that in addition to giving them up, they were going to die.

Of the four factors that affect death, one of them is the relationship one had with the person who died. From this we can infer that the parents' death causes a very strong pain, since the individual had a significant relationship with them.

Death is one of the losses that escapes directly from freedom and responsibility in the human being (Frankl 1994). In view of this, it must be given a meaning so that pain and suffering find meaning and transcend itself. Death is not opposed to life, death is included in life, thus while we live, we are raising death at the same time.

Expectations was another type of loss identified, referring to the fact that there are desires and wishes in life that are not fulfilled. Many things are expected from life that are never received (Santos, 2014). Unfulfilled expectations in women were different according to their personal life history: not being a biological mother, marriage, not practicing their clinical profession and economic expectations within marriage, are some examples. Given this type of loss, a feeling of despair may arise in adulthood when the expectations set are not being achieved: despair says that there is too little time left or that it is too late to choose other paths to wholeness (Erikson 1981).

Expectations and dreams follow the same path to happiness. Although dreams and expectations are sometimes fulfilled and sometimes not, happiness depends to a certain extent on the illusion of achieving them. Ideally, the distance between what is being achieved and what is desired should be shortened day by day.

Self-forgetfulness was another type of loss where women showed that, at a certain stage of their adult life,

they abandoned themselves in order to put other priorities before themselves and fulfill their roles at work, home, family and other aspects that involved them. In this regard, some women agreed that they neglected their physical appearance, to such an extent that they gained considerable weight. Participant 5 mentioned:

My sacrifices were on my person: I was never able to lose the weight I gained during pregnancy, because on top of everything else *[you have to]* go on a diet, eat healthy, take all those workout classes; I can't juggle it all."

In the same sense, participant 8 states:

"And it was a mistake, but that sacrifice has been, that I forgot about myself. When you are working, the last thing in your list is yourself, first comes your family, first comes your work, first comes the house."

These women agreed that they put themselves last by responding to certain aspects they had as priorities, which implied that they neglected themselves, and without realizing, they also neglected their health, their physical appearance, among others.

This translates into the stress and tension levels that these women experience in meeting all the demands of their primary roles. Crisis moments can lead the person to neglect herself, and to find a series of excuses not to get involved in self-care because of the number of things she has to deal with and the overwhelming number of answers they have to give, a reflection of Erikson's (1981) crisis of generativity vs. stagnation.

Resignations represented another item that women have had to deal with throughout their everyday lives. Renunciations, unlike losses, occur because they are chosen, and choice always entails a choice, but at the same time means a type of loss because one lets go of something that was on the radar for at least some time. Women who participated in the study perceived that renunciation and sacrifice are a two-sided coin. On one side, she gives up whatever does not add value or is not good for a woman's life, and this, far from being a loss, is a good thing. In this regard, participant 5 mentions:

"Every human being should practice it constantly, that is, to sacrifice and renounce to what is not good in your life;

this is a “must do” for me.

Conflict occurs when, in order to achieve certain objectives or to reach certain goals, certain things that are good for life have to be sacrificed or given up. Participant 9 comments this:

"There is a priority conflict, it's another type of renunciation and sacrifice and it hurts, so you have to set very clear differences because in a successful woman's life there are both and you have to know how to tell them apart."

Some renunciations mean different types of changes that have to be made in life for the greater good and refer to those mentioned above as decisions that seek an important purpose in one's life. In this regard, participant 4 comments:

"I gave up my country, my culture, at that time, at 22 years old I was very young, very idealistic, with many aspirations, but I did have the project of doing something big with my life." Regarding work, participant 7 reflects: "When I was offered a management position throughout Latin America, I knew that it would require a lot of my personal and family time, and I had to make a choice."

Participant 6 refers to what it meant to her, having renounced her religious life: "Losing my religious family, my religious reference, and also the investiture that gave many privileges."

It can be acknowledged that renunciation entails sacrifice. However, as time goes by, this renunciation gains sense and an explanation as to why it was made, and in the end, processing it in this way should be satisfactory because a greater good was sought. Some of the interviewees agree that choosing is giving up and that everything has an opportunity cost, but in the end the balance must be satisfactory. Participant 9 says this:

"Choosing A over B, well, you have to leave A to take B, but not literally deciding to leave something. Or you leave something because you choose something else, and you know that in such choice there will be an opportunity cost,

thinking “did I make the right choice?”, because that will be seen over time.”

This coincides with participant 4 refers:

"To choose is to renounce. And I think this is something that sometimes we don't teach our children well, but when you have to live it, and we all have to in many moments of our lives, we become aware of it, and I think that the most important thing is to be happy with that choice".

The renunciations that the women participating had to make were: changes in the order, style and routine of their lives, changes of residence, leaving their family of origin, giving up certain privileges they had, among others. All of them were aware that these renunciations were made for a greater good, which was in line with their life project. They were aware that to choose is to renounce and it has an opportunity cost. They decided in a thoughtful, reasoned and reflected way, to prioritize to what they wanted, assuming the consequences they would have, owning their actions and being responsible for their decisions.

This means that they acted with responsible freedom; freedom is the most characteristic dimension of the person and a capacity for self-determination that allows choice. To choose is to renounce and the individual has the freedom of choice. Altarejos (1986), who agrees with Frankl (1995), states that the choice of some concrete actions versus others requires the choice that leads to the ultimate purpose of the person; therefore, choices must lead into such purpose's direction.

All losses trigger grief, which must be faced to overcome it. Grief is the price paid for love: that is, for the love of what was lost, and it is present in all areas of life, in all types of losses...from the simplest to the most complicated things. “The process of healing wounds requires different times and strategies depending on the actors involved” (Pangrazzi 2011: 21).

Although there are many studies on the stages of grief (Kübler Ross 2000; Pangrazzi 2011) and the process through each stage, this research had findings about how the women interviewed coped with it. The courage with which they face losses is highlighted here, which matches with the concept of attitudinal value established by Frankl (1990); what are the values expressed to give meaning to life, through the suffering caused by loss and this is a determining factor to move forward. This attitudinal value

is present in all forms of coping.

The first finding in this category was Spirituality. Indeed, the eleven women participating agreed that Spirituality is a fundamental anchor in human being's life, not only when going through a difficult and painful situation. "My spiritual life has allowed me to center myself, to keep focused", shares participant 5. She agrees with what participant 10 says: "I can't talk about anything else but God, I have to admit it". And participant 11 adds: "Spirituality because, in the darkest moments, you have nothing else but faith. It is like my axis".

This denotes that the human being's nature is to be a spiritual being (Frankl, 2005). Believing in someone stronger than oneself, demonstrating their faith, having a life centered on God in this case, believing and having confidence in Him, is what has helped them move forward. However, spiritual life is not only present in the hard and difficult moments, but also in their daily life, in which they put God at the center. In short, it is their spiritual life that sets the course for them, thus being their life's spur, from which they draw part of their strength to go on. Therefore, spirituality refers to the human aspiration for a deep and meaningful existence (Frankl 1989).

Grief management was another finding. Women agreed that grief has to be worked through in order to overcome it, and this involves time and a long process to learn how to overcome pain and manage the loss. "Suffering that is not overcome can turn a person sour, bitter, resentful, hurt, spoiled. The same suffering that sinks and submerges some people in hatred, purifies others and makes them more human, more capable to love" (Rojas 2009:256). The problem is to know how to turn the argument around and learn from those negative experiences to overcome them and look forward, and not fall into bitterness or succumb. Participant 9 states: "Healing the pain and my grief which has been a long process, dedicating time and effort, acknowledging my vulnerability, learning to let go of what no longer is or can no longer be."

In this regard, participant 6 states that she has worked on some key issues: "It was also very important for me to work on my anger. Working on my frustration, naming and naming."

These women demonstrated their awareness that pain is an inevitable fact of life and that love and pain will always go hand in hand. They stated that pain is often the cause of losses due to decisions made, which are hard to overcome;

nevertheless, one has to be responsible for the decision made and abide by the consequences.

Emotional intelligence was also a finding with which the women interviewed cope with losses. In this regard, they stated to be constantly and continuously thinking and reflecting, questioning themselves what they are doing, finding as many alternatives as possible to choose the right thing to do in the given situation. "To know the purpose of our actions, thinking is necessary, and thinking is something different from acting, although sometimes it is nourished by it" (Altarejos 1986:15). In this sense, participant 2 states: "I find an alternative to each problem, it does not necessarily have to be a solution, but it does have to be an alternative; thinking and thinking". Participant 5 adds:

"Be the very owner of that decision, of that sacrifice, of that painful renunciation; but that it has a valid reason for being, a reasonable reason... and then own that decision, not to carry it with aggravation or guilt because you only exude bitterness to those around you, then it backfires."

These women showed that they were able to cope with losses intelligently, involving reason and not only the affective aspect. Coping is the cognitive and behavioral effort that is developed to manage specific dimensions that are valued as situations that exceed a person's resources; knowledge and affection go together (Sueiro y López Moratalla 2011). The cognitive aspect implies emotion, and the affective aspect requires cognition.

Training received from parents was another finding that emerged from the forms of coping. Women interviewed expressed here that their parents trained them to always move ahead, to be their best version, being confident and taking responsibility for their choices. They trained them to learn from mistakes, to constantly work and better themselves. They learned from them magnanimity and service to others. Participant 11 shares: "I come from a wine-tasting family, especially from extraordinary parents who taught us the value of work but being magnanimous."

These women were educated for responsibility, which coincides with Frankl (1994); who states that one must be taught to make decisions, to discern, to recognize what is essential, what makes sense, and then be responsible for it.

"Education must be concerned with refining the conscience so that the individual is able to listen to the demand that every situation contains. Education is

education for responsibility” Frankl, (1994:31).

It can be then inferred that the formation received in the family of origin is key to being able to face life with its joyous and happy moments, and also in the hard, difficult moments of adversity that bring pain and suffering.

From this, data analysis revealed the meaning of life as the central category, since it could be identified in the eleven women interviewed. It was a preponderant finding because the eleven women interviewed were clear and expressed their meaning of life in a conscious and defined way. Frankl (1990), Santos (2014), and Rojas Estapé (2019) state that most people do not know the reason for their existence, they do not know why they get up every morning, they have the feeling that their lives totally and definitely lack meaning. These women show clarity in this regard, and participant 10 states:

“The meaning of my life is to serve, it seems to me that it is a conviction of what a woman can give, it has been easy for me professionally, that is, the very profession has led me to be able to give it, and the satisfaction, which is everything, when you realize what you can change in a place as a woman...”

Women who participated in this study brought out important resources that define them as persons: clarity, security, forcefulness, and congruence regarding these questions, in terms of their meaning of life; this is a significant finding, since according to the authors cited, very few people have this clarity. These women prove so in their mission. In this regard, participant 6 states:

“In the midst of a very strong crisis, I had to ask myself what I needed from my environment to be able to get my life back on track and I had the opportunity to start a family, and now my family is the meaning of my life.”

This finding also coincides with Erikson (1981), who affirms that it is in the adult stage when the individual understands that the mission has to aim at giving oneself to others, so that happiness will come as a consequence.

Thus, what matters is not the general meaning of life, but the concrete meaning of each individual’s life at a given moment. Each person has a mission to fulfill with a specific task (Frankl 1989). Women participating show that they

have clear priorities, and this allows them to make appropriate and adjusted decisions according to what they want to achieve in life. As participant 7 refers:

“I did not take silly positions. Nor did I take useless ones. Because I was careful that the positions I took were not to the total detriment of my professional career. So, while it is true, my daughter, and my marriage too, of course, therefore my family, were my absolute priority.”

Some agree that their family is their top priority and, based on this, they make other decisions that are not detrimental to their top priority, but at the same time enrich other areas of their lives, such as their professional and work environment.

The meaning of life also presents some objectives to be fulfilled throughout life and the balance and equilibrium that this represents. Participant 4 states:

“I try to have balance between professional and personal life... so I try to achieve things in all these dimensions, right? In other words, not only to achieve things in the personal-professional area, but also in the personal-academic and personal-personal ones.”

The sense of life is another of the most representative findings: women demonstrate and assume their decisions with inner freedom, that is, showing that they themselves are the owners of their choices. “...if the most important decision of my life is not in my hands, I do not want to stay here” and “I decided to leave”, mentioned participant 6. They demonstrated that they did not victimize themselves, as stated by participant 5: “I have to be fair with my decision making, with my assertiveness, with my love for my family, with my well-established hierarchy of values.”

These women’s decisions are made based on an inner freedom, that is, they decided by themselves about core aspects of their lives that are related to their sense of life, their priorities, objectives. This allows them to responsibly assume the commitment that this decision implies, which is one of the most important findings of this work.

It shows that women are highly committed to their family, to their work and to the growth of the people around them; this implies tolerance and concern for the problems happening around them. It also represents the fundamental task of resolving the right balance and equilibrium between

productivity and stagnation (Erikson y Erikson 1981).

It also represents the tension, conflict and internal struggle with which a person lives and which is necessary to fulfill the meaning that transcends the individual and is worth living (Frankl, 1994). This meaning in women's lives is directed towards self-transcendence and transcendence, since it is oriented towards someone other than themselves. The realization of meaning is their intentionality of life. And the will to meaning directs decisions towards meaning, and they differentiate what is meaningful and what is not.

Another significant finding was that the women participating proved to be resilient, since they display a permanent struggle to move forward in the face of adversity; in addition, they show perseverance, they do not stop fighting, no matter how many times they fail or things do not go as planned, they are persistent, they do not give up and demonstrate a capacity for determination. They strive for what they want to achieve, so they assume a relentless struggle in their lives. In this regard, participant 2 says:

"In my office, I have a picture with many colorful bicycles, do you know why? Because I am convinced that the only recipe to move ahead in life is that you can't stop pedaling. The day you stop pedaling, what do you think happens? You fall. And so... that's my philosophy of life".

Participant 6 adds:

"Not giving up when there were obstacles, impediments, or paradigms that would have defined beforehand that someone like me would not have had the prescribed definition to get there, and yet I was able to do it with tenacity, with determination; and it's kind of a combination of that in business life."

They also mentioned that they saw all this in their parents: the strength to move forward, the nature of serving others, and the daily struggle they lived. They were the ones who formed them in character, living values and virtues, which determine their resilience capacity. Participant 9 states: "He is my greatest example to follow, he was a great leader, he was a great businessman, he was a great dad, how do I honor him? By giving the best of myself, which is what he taught me."

Learning to live is a difficult subject and solid,

consistent, and well-founded role models are needed, who provide authentic reasons and point out a path worth living. This is how we have identity models that transmit to us the attractiveness of effort, when it comes to achieving goals (Santos 2014). Hence the importance of the example from parents who have tenaciously made themselves, who integrate decision and perseverance, and leave aside the easy path to be resilient women.

Therefore, we agree with Santos (2014) that these are women who have the characteristics of a resilient person: autonomy, adequate self-esteem, emotional balance, positive social orientation, confidence in their own resources, challenges in the face of a stimulating life, and a positive attitude towards them.

The last category is also a significant finding, as it shows that women cannot do it by themselves alone: they need a support network to be with them throughout their lives, in order to manage all the roles each one of them plays. Evidence showed that the support network is composed by the family of origin, the partner, if there is one, and the work teams. Regarding the family, participant 6 mentions: "That family that attracted me to what I am, was the family that attracted me to recovery".

Partner's and family's support was a fundamental finding in this research. They are the first allies in a woman's life, they are life partners, accomplices, they help to reflect and maintain direction in terms of her priorities. An example is the testimony of participant 5: "A woman who is professionally successful cannot be professionally successful without a husband who is her partner, her partner in life." Mutual support and respect between the couple also outstands. The family is the sphere that creates new human and social capital. It makes the person better and requires co-responsibility between men and women as builders of the home (Chinchilla & Jimenez 2013).

Work teams are also an essential support in the lives of women who participated in this study. Debeljuh et. al 2015 assert that a new change is nowadays being produced in organizations, favoring an effective harmonization of work and family life of their collaborators, which is consistent with the findings that highlight the support of the work team as a key factor contributing to the success of the professional woman.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the research questions, the conclusion is that

women who participated in this research faced losses, and among them the following stand out: separations, work, death, unfulfilled expectations, self-forgetfulness. All the women showed that they faced these losses as part of life. It should be noted that losses and renunciations were differentiated: losses are those events that happen in life and which are beyond our control, while renunciations are phenomena that occur due to decisions made in the field of will; that is, certain things are chosen and others are lost, in most cases for a greater good and since there is a clear sense of life, the awareness of renunciation gives satisfaction to that decision. They mentioned losses that go beyond reconciliation.

The coping strategies they used were the following: spirituality, pain management, emotional intelligence, and the training received from their parents.

Among the findings to be considered as a key point are: discovering and having a clear sense of life that implies mission, priorities and roles, and consequently acting according to values and principles. It should be emphasized that a woman's meaning in life is transcendent; that is, she goes out of herself to give herself to others, thus fulfilling the essence of her own nature and not frustrating her reason for being. This is the key principle in order to give meaning to losses and renunciations, in order to confront and overcome them. Both losses and renunciations become meaningful when they are linked to the key reasons for one's own existence. Women demonstrate their capacity to decide, the will to make sense that always implies making a decision that must be aligned with one's own life project.

Success is viewed as the sum of all life's aspects: personal, family, work, social, and spiritual; and not only referred to professional performance. This means a genuine female aspiration, the harmonious development as a whole that responds to all the aspects and roles that a professional woman plays. Undoubtedly, this is not easy and demands a daily struggle, it represents a necessary tension; one chooses, however, not to be a victim and to fully develop in an environment of inner freedom, being a leader in the face of adversity.

It is clear then that it's not only a question of achieving a work-family balance, but that professional women seek a balance in their entire life, and this encompasses all its dimensions, thus facing -in the face of their personal sense of life- losses and renunciations, which cause pain and suffering. They have been able to face it because they have

grown up in a favorable environment that has enabled them, has made them resilient and they have grown based on effort and work.

The professional woman is independent, she makes her decisions based on her freedom, she is the owner of her actions and is responsible for the consequences; however, despite being independent, she can't do it all by herself and needs a support network to achieve balance in all her life's areas. This network includes her family of origin, her partner, and her work teams.

Finally, this work assumes that life's fullness is found in the path of life, which is complex. At the same time, there will always be objectives to fulfill, projects to take care of, a broad awareness of what we are and what we want to be. Fulfillment is not an easy life, but a life of struggle and satisfaction, of forging an effort aimed at overcoming and giving meaning to losses and renunciations. Being a qualitative study

Today, more than ever, there is a need to present models of successful women who seek to balance all their dimensions in order to fight for their meaning in life, overcoming difficulties and moving forward, which in itself is a hopeful reference.

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