



Women empowering rural Spain: A study of entrepreneurial career satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

Women entrepreneurs in rural Spain play a vital role in combating depopulation, yet they often encounter challenges impacting their professional satisfaction. This study investigates factors influencing satisfaction among female entrepreneurs associated with the Confederation of Rural Women (CERES). We utilized the Motivation and Conditionings of the Entrepreneurial Career Questionnaire (MCCE) with a sample of 379 cases, analyzing data using a logit model. Results reveal intrinsic motivation and Career counselling as key determinants of satisfaction. Furthermore, findings suggest that work-life balance factors may also influence satisfaction. Despite facing adversity, these women remain crucial in rural Spain's depopulation struggle.

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship and career satisfaction among women in rural areas are increasingly important topics being addressed from a career guidance standpoint (Suárez-Ortega et al., 2020). Indeed, the fundamental objective of entrepreneurship is to empower individuals, as evidenced by their level of satisfaction in their professional careers. This is where career guidance has a critical role, assisting individuals in identifying and cultivating their skills, interests, goals, and making well-informed professional decisions (Feria et al., 2020).

Women play a pivotal role in addressing the ongoing depopulation in rural Spain, acting as a barrier against it. However, they encounter specific challenges, including limited access to education and employment opportunities. The scarcity of resources and educational support for employment, coupled with a lack of diverse job prospects, diminishes their expectations (García et al., 2021). This context underscores the significance of career guidance for rural women. It equips women with strategies and resources to overcome societal barriers, prioritizing their personal and professional self-realization. Simultaneously, it fosters the rekindling of the entrepreneurial spirit which is crucial in the context of

rural depopulation as it contributes not only to economic revitalization but also to social cohesion, territorial sustainability of depopulated areas and to addressing climate change through entrepreneurial resilience strategies and climate action (Trápaga et al., 2019; Tulla-Pujol et al., 2018; Memon et al., 2025).

1.1. Determinants of career satisfaction

There is a large body of research on the determinants of career satisfaction in different settings and contexts (Sánchez-torné et al., 2021; Chang et al., 2020; Foster and Hill, 2019; Lu et al., 2020; Onyishi et al., 2019; Martínez-García et al., 2019), and on the career development of entrepreneurial women, conceptualized as a multifactorial process that requires a holistic and integrative approach to strengthen entrepreneurial competencies, leadership capabilities and sustainable business growth (Marshall and Gigliotti, 2018; Agarwal, 2020; Naguib y Barbar, 2025).

However, there is little research that has delved into the elements that favour this satisfaction among entrepreneurial rural women. The professional and/or business trajectory has multiple aspects and can be

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analyzed from the contextual, professional aspects and personal dimensions (Suárez-Ortega et al., 2020; Naguib y Barbar, 2025). This argument is supported by the theory of career construction, which argues that career adaptability is a vital element for providing an appropriate response to the different itineraries, opportunities and personal/professional crises of the individual (Savickas, 2013). From this point of view, entrepreneurship is seen as an adaptive career response (Rudolph et al., 2017).

Research indicates that rural women's career satisfaction can be influenced by various factors, ranging from personal and intimate settings to opportunities stemming from external support networks (Chatterjee et al., 2020; Okello, 2020). De Clercq and Brieger (2021) emphasize in their study that autonomy and decision-making control are critical factors for job satisfaction. Petridou and Glaveli (2008) concur that opportunities for development and growth are indispensable for career satisfaction among entrepreneurial rural women. They suggest that training programs and continuing education workshops are potent avenues for acquiring intra- and inter-professional skills. However, the potential of these factors diminishes without recognition from the society. In the entrepreneurial context, personal appreciation serves as a motivating element for job satisfaction (Ghouse et al., 2021).

In this regard, advocating for the recognition and visibility of the professional careers of rural women becomes yet another compelling rationale to champion women's rights and freedoms. Additionally, it underscores the significant role of women in addressing the contemporary issue of rural depopulation within the Spanish context and contribution to the sustainable development of rural areas in Spain through women's different entrepreneurial initiatives (Tulla-Pujol et al., 2018). Tickamyer and Henderson (2003) assert that many rural women derive satisfaction from their careers when they perceive that their work positively impacts their community or society at large. The importance of rural women in processes of societal transformation is thus evident, particularly in a context where sustainability is an overarching societal goal and where the threat of climate change positions women as key actors in resilience building (Memon et al., 2025).

The following outlines the primary theoretical dimensions considered in this study, which, as per the research of Suárez-Ortega et al. (2020), are pertinent in determining satisfaction with professional careers of rural women entrepreneurs.

1.2. Articulation of personal and professional life

Social sustainability in entrepreneurship involves the integration of practices that allow entrepreneurs to effectively balance work demands with their personal responsibilities. This balance is essential to ensure psychological and physical well-being, reduce the risk of burnout and promote the permanence and long-term success of entrepreneurial initiatives. It also facilitates inclusion and equity, especially in contexts where women face particular challenges to work-life balance, such as in certain rural areas (De Vita et al., 2014; Baylina et al., 2017).

On one hand, it is imperative to address the work-life balance of this demographic (Bryant and Pini, 2011), as links have been established between satisfaction in self-employment and one's personal life (Loewe et al., 2015). Women often contend with societal expectations and entrenched gender roles that can further compound this issue (Bock, 2015). Scholars such as Baylina et al. (2017) explore how professional women who choose to reside in rural areas manage work-life balance in a changing environment. From a qualitative approach, the research reveals that, although these women actively contribute to rural revitalization, social norms related to family responsibilities evolve more slowly, affecting their well-being and social sustainability in these areas. In this regard, Rehman and Azam (2012) assert that social awareness of this situation and support networks is paramount for these women to garner encouragement and motivation from their immediate surroundings—namely, their families, friends, mentors, and local community leaders. The work-life balance for rural women presents particular

challenges due to the unique characteristics of rural areas and their additional responsibilities (Bayona and Gil-Alonso, 2013). Studies conducted both internationally (Buller, 2017) and nationally (Baylina and Berg, 2010; Camarero et al., 2009; Morén and Solana, 2006) have yielded a multitude of insights concerning work-life balance in this context.

1.3. Motivational factors of entrepreneurship

The life narratives of women trace a path of maturation and personal and professional development that inform their choices and actions (Suárez-Ortega et al., 2020). These narratives have the potential to create opportunities for empowerment (Castillo et al., 2020; Wright and Annes, 2016), with significant milestones like educational attainment, marriage (or life as a couple), and motherhood playing a pivotal role (Gálvez and Matus, 2010). Throughout this process, entrepreneurial intentions are primarily shaped and reinforced at the motivational level. Motivations play a crucial role not only in initiating entrepreneurship but also in achieving business success and company consolidation (Chua and Bedford, 2016). As per Chevalier et al. (2022), entrepreneurial motivations align with a multifaceted model influenced by the subjective balance of psychosocial factors that generate both positive and negative attitudes toward entrepreneurship.

Suárez-Ortega et al. (2020) categorize motivational factors towards entrepreneurship into three distinct groups: intrinsic, extrinsic, and tradition-vocation. Intrinsic motivations are tied to self-fulfillment, self-improvement, and personal and professional development. Extrinsic motivations are connected to financial gain, social status, and the necessity for employment. These are distinct constructs: intrinsic motivation arises from the inherent value an individual assigns to an activity, whereas extrinsic motivation involves engaging in an activity to attain an external reward. (Pintrich and Schunk, 2006). The third motivational category, known as tradition-vocation, encompasses influences from familial socialization processes related to entrepreneurship, as well as vocational motives.

Ozsungur's (2019) research, focusing on women entrepreneurs, categorizes motivational factors into four interconnected blocks: attraction, pressure, equilibrium, and emotional factors. Pull factors are positive and serve to encourage the entrepreneurial process (such as challenges, personal satisfaction, success, job flexibility, etc.), while push factors, conversely, are negative and manifest as situations that compel or necessitate entrepreneurship (including unemployment, inadequate income, dissatisfaction with current employment, etc.) (Ismail et al., 2012). Balancing factors aid in reconciling professional and personal life, and emotional factors are those influenced by emotions, such as commitment to work and family support (Braga et al., 2014).

Among the most common drivers that inspire women to venture into entrepreneurship, the work of Solesvik et al. (2019), highlights that women entrepreneurs are often motivated by a social dimension, seeking business opportunities that address societal needs. This form of motivation is referred to as transcendent motivations (López-Jurado and Gratacós, 2013). Consequently, female entrepreneurship and women's professional and economic advancement through self-employment can serve as a potent catalyst in rural areas (Nicolás et al., 2021; Vercher et al., 2020).

Motivational factors are related with career satisfaction (González et al., 2019). Consequently, entrepreneurs characterized by high intrinsic motivation tend to experience a heightened level of contentment in their profession, whereas those with low motivation, especially if it's intrinsic, tend to grapple with career dissatisfaction (Suárez-Ortega et al., 2020).

1.4. Business guidance and counselling needs

The greater invisibility of women's work in rural Spain (Gálvez and

Matus, 2010) and in international contexts such as Oman (Durrah et al., 2024) often concealed within the informal framework of assistance or collaborative roles within family enterprises that replace formal employment (Gálvez et al., 2013), underscores the necessity for guidance and advice during the entrepreneurial journey of women.

In accordance with Suárez-Ortega et al. (2020), entrepreneurs' perception of their mentoring needs is also linked to motivational factors. These authors highlight that entrepreneurs driven by intrinsic motivation tend to perceive a greater requirement for guidance compared to those who are extrinsically motivated or lack motivation. Two distinct needs are identified: first, Business Consulting addressing technical aspects of the enterprise (financing, planning, etc.), and second, career guidance, encompassing broader facets related to the entrepreneur's life and professional development (work-life balance, identifying training needs, skill development, etc.).

Almagro-Gavira and Manzano-Soto's (2021) study revealed that entrepreneurs identify key areas for enhancement in their entrepreneurial journey, including company management and administration, as well as personal aspects like emotional intelligence, fear management, and handling uncertainty. This presents a challenge for the training and guidance framework, which should not only cover technical aspects of business but also address psychosocial factors. Such an approach can aid in enhancing entrepreneurs' self-awareness and self-efficacy comprehensively (Palomares et al., 2019).

Business counselling, career guidance, and entrepreneurship training can all play a pivotal role in shaping women's decisions to pursue entrepreneurship. Al-Kwifí et al. (2019) found that having knowledge about business establishment serves as an influential factor that motivates women to embark on entrepreneurial ventures. Moreover, guidance and counselling initiatives play a significant role in sustaining enterprises, ensuring their continuity, facilitating progress, and ultimately contributing to their success (Jiménez et al., 2016). Consequently, these efforts have a direct bearing on career satisfaction. Therefore, it is crucial for guidance initiatives not to be isolated events but to provide ongoing support to entrepreneurs (Almagro-Gavira and Manzano-Soto, 2021).

In this process of guidance and advice, which can be delivered through various channels such as consulting firms, public entities, one's own family, and friends, among others (Gálvez and Matus, 2010), cooperatives play a significant role in fostering networks and catalyzing initiatives driven by a shared commitment to corporate social responsibility (Pérez-Sanz et al., 2019). Particularly in rural contexts, cooperatives offer guidance for accessing new markets, provide support for enhancing business operations, obtaining competitive advantages, and developing cooperative strategies, among other aspects (Esteban-Salvador et al., 2016). Within these cooperatives, women hold an essential role, both directly as leaders and advisors, and indirectly as role models and sources of inspiration for other women engaged in entrepreneurial initiatives. (Terjesen et al., 2009).

1.5. Research questions, hypotheses and objectives

Taking into consideration these arguments and against this contextual backdrop, this research seeks to address and answer a question of paramount significance: What are the factors that determine rural women's satisfaction with their careers? Although the answer is possibly multi-causal, we highlight, based on the above literature review, the following forecast of results.

1. Intrinsic motivation generates a higher degree of satisfaction with the professional career than extrinsic motivation.
2. Career orientation has a positive influence on career satisfaction.
3. Employer counselling does not necessarily determine career satisfaction.
4. Motivation linked to tradition and vocation has a positive influence on career satisfaction.

5. The articulation of personal and professional life also has a positive influence on career satisfaction.

2. Method

A binary logistic regression model was estimated using a set of predictors constructed on the basis of multidimensional scales. The data were transformed through a dimension reduction process, whereby the items of each scale were synthesized into composite variables that capture the underlying latent dimensions in a synthetic and conceptually coherent approach. This strategy reduces the complexity of the model, minimizes measurement error, and improves the interpretability of the estimated effects (Hair et al., 2014; Menard, 2002).

The internal consistency of each scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to examine the reliability of the measures before their inclusion in the model. Because the constructs are conceptually distinct, reliability analysis was conducted independently for each subscale. Most of the scales report acceptable alpha values ($\alpha \geq .70$). As a complement, a reliability analysis was also conducted for the overall of the items, providing a broader indication of internal consistency through the multidimensional structure, in accordance with recommendations for the treatment of multidimensional instruments (DeVellis, 2017; Tavakol and Dennick, 2011).

The composite variables were incorporated as predictors in a binary logistic regression model. The dependent variable was first constructed as a composite score by averaging the items of the scale that measured the underlying construct. To adapt it to this type of analysis, the resulting variable was then dichotomized using the arithmetic mean as a cutoff point (DeCoster et al., 2009). This procedure is especially useful when is desired to ensure a balanced distribution of cases among the categories, facilitating the stability of the logit model estimations (Moldes-Anaya et al., 2018).

Model selection was carried out using the stepwise backward elimination procedure, which allows retaining only those variables whose contribution is statistically significant, optimizing the explanatory efficiency of the model without compromising its statistical robustness (Hosmer et al., 2013). The goodness of fit of the logistic model was evaluated by means of the likelihood ratio statistic (-2LLL), the Nagelkerke and Cox-Snell coefficient of determination, the Hosmer-Lemeshow test and the residuals, which made it possible to assess the degree of adequacy of the model to the observed data. Additionally, discriminative capacity was examined through the analysis of the Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curve, calculating the area under the curve (AUC) as a measure of classificatory accuracy (Zhou et al., 2011).

2.1. Participants

Of the 535 questionnaires collected, 70.8 % corresponded to cases with complete data, resulting in a final sample of 379 valid observations. Considering the nature of the design, the exploratory approach of the study and the sample size, a listwise deletion method was applied, whereby all observations with missing values in any of the variables involved were excluded from the analysis. This decision responded to the need to maintain the internal consistency of the multivariate analysis and was considered methodologically adequate, given that the pattern of missing data showed no signs of systematicity, which made it possible to assume a completely random missing data mechanism (MCAR) (Little and Rubin, 2002).¹

¹ Note that the sample universe was composed exclusively of women, so no gender bias was introduced as a result of the elimination of cases. Although this approach implied a reduction in sample size, the number of cases retained ($n = 379$) remained within acceptable margins to ensure the robustness of the results (Allison, 2001).

2.2. Measures

Data were collected through the Questionnaire on Motivation and Conditioners of Entrepreneurial Career (MCCE) (Suárez-Ortega et al., 2020). The instrument has revealed evidence of reliability and validity in the Spanish context. It provides an assessment of several factors that determine the entrepreneurial career. The structure and content of the instrument are relevant to the objectives of the present study.

2.3. Description of variables

This study analyzed the following variables.

2.3.1. Dependent variable

2.3.1.1. Satisfaction with entrepreneurial career. The variable “satisfaction with entrepreneurial career” refers to the level of personal and professional satisfaction experienced by a person with respect to his or her career. It evaluates the subjective perception of success, fulfilment and well-being associated with the development of their entrepreneurial career.

2.3.2. Independent variables

2.3.2.1. Perceived conflict between personal and professional sphere. The variable “conflict between personal and professional life” refers to the degree to which the requirements of the work sphere interfere negatively with the responsibilities or well-being in personal life. It measures the perception of incompatibility or tension between both domains.

2.3.2.2. Perceived conflict between professional and personal sphere. The variable “perceived conflict between professional and personal sphere” refers to the individual perception of incompatibility or interference between the requirements of the professional sphere and the responsibilities or needs of the personal sphere. It evaluates the subjective impact of this tension on life balance.

2.3.2.3. Intrinsic motives for entrepreneurship. The variable “intrinsic motives for entrepreneurship” measures the internal motivations that drive entrepreneurship, such as personal satisfaction and interest in a challenge.

2.3.2.4. Extrinsic motives for entrepreneurship. The variable “extrinsic motives for entrepreneurship” measures external motivations for entrepreneurship, such as economic rewards, social recognition or material benefits.

2.3.2.5. Tradition and vocational motives. The variable “tradition and vocational motives” measures the influence of cultural and vocational factors, such as family heritage or personal vocation, on the decision to become an entrepreneur.

2.3.2.6. Guidance for business counselling. The variable “guidance for business counselling” measures the need or use of professional advice and guidance for business development and management.

2.3.2.7. Entrepreneurial career guidance. The entrepreneurial career guidance variable measures the support and guidance received to plan and develop the entrepreneurial career.

2.4. Analysis procedure

The internal consistency of each of the scales used in the study was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, in order to ensure the reliability of the measurements before performing the logistic regression

analysis using composite variables derived from the scales. Each scale is composed of several Likert-type items that measure specific constructs; hence the reliability analysis was performed independently for each of them and at a global level to assess the internal coherence among the items analyzed and included in the questionnaire.

The scale of satisfaction with the entrepreneurial career presents good internal consistency ($\alpha = .859$), as does the scale of articulation of personal and professional life ($\alpha = .870$). As for the motivations for entrepreneurship, an adequate value is observed ($\alpha = .839$). Likewise, the entrepreneurial orientation and counselling scale ($\alpha = .774$). The estimated reliability for the set of items was ($\alpha = .895$), indicating a satisfactory overall level of internal consistency across the questionnaire. The logit model offered a five-step block. The goodness of fit of the model was contrasted with the likelihood ratio test, the Cox-Snell and Nagelkerke pseudo R-squared tests, the Hosmer-Lemeshow test and, finally, point by point with the analysis of residuals using the corresponding normal test, the diagnostic performance analysis (ROC curve) and the corresponding predictive values (see Table 1). The statistical significance of the parameters in the model was studied with their respective Wald tests and the exponential of the parameters (Odds Ratio) that proved significant was interpreted in terms of the predictive ratio of a negative versus a positive response regarding satisfaction with the entrepreneurial career of rural women (see Table 1).

3. Results

The estimated logit model identified the factors that contribute to a higher level of satisfaction with the entrepreneurial career of rural women and that are directly linked to the formulated hypotheses.

The data showed that participants who claim to possess a higher level of intrinsic motivation are more likely to experience a greater degree of satisfaction in their career. Specifically, the satisfaction level regarding the entrepreneurial career of these individuals is 2.4 times higher than that of those with lower intrinsic motivation.

Another factor influencing the degree of career satisfaction is related to the guidance they received during their career journey. Specifically, those who received guidance are 2.7 times more likely to have a higher level of satisfaction compared to those who indicate a desire for more support in this regard. This illustrates the importance of career guidance in entrepreneurship, as it is demonstrated to be a highly influential factor in the perception of satisfaction.

The estimated model has also yielded insights into the factors considered in this analysis that did not demonstrate a significant influence on the degree of satisfaction. It was observed that factors related to extrinsic motivation, motivation associated with tradition and vocation, as well as business counselling, did not exert a significant influence.

The fact that extrinsic motivation did not influence satisfaction was somewhat expected, as intrinsic motivation is often associated with higher career satisfaction (Suárez-Ortega et al., 2020), especially in developed economies (Solesvik et al., 2019).

The lack of significance of business counselling was also an expected result that confirms the hypotheses of other studies that advocate more for counselling based on the personal skills of the entrepreneur (Palomares et al., 2019). This is, in turn, congruent with the fact that our context of study is that of a developed economy where motivations towards entrepreneurship tend to be more intrinsic and socially tinged (Solesvik et al., 2019; Morales-Valero et al., 2024).

On the other hand, with respect to tradition and vocation, it is possible that this variable was not a determining factor, possibly due to the idiosyncrasies of the context of study and/or possible generational differences. In other words, it is possible that past generations, possibly led by men, attributed a more extrinsic motivation to their work, while presently women redefine it as a space for empowerment (Trápaga et al., 2019; Wright and Annes, 2016). In this way, women would not have reference models (tradition and vocation) to represent them.

Regarding work-life balance, although it has not been found to be an

Table 1
Logit satisfaction with entrepreneurial career.

Variables in the equation							95 % IC for OR		
		B	E. E	Wald	gl	p-value	OR	lower	upper
Step I	Personal vs. Professional	.246	.150	2.667	1	.102	1.279	.952	1.717
	Professional vs. Personal	-.018	.129	.020	1	.887	.982	.762	1.265
	Intrinsic reasons for entrepreneurship	1.026	.196	27.500	1	.000***	2.789	1.901	4.093
	Extrinsic reasons	.010	.146	.004	1	.947	1.010	.759	1.344
	Motives Tradition Vocation	-.087	.117	.549	1	.459	.917	.729	1.153
	Business Consulting	-.274	.220	1.550	1	.213	.761	.494	1.170
	Career counselling	1.062	.412	6.629	1	.010**	2.892	1.289	6.490
	Satisfaction with the entrepreneurial career	-4.867	.986	24.383	1	.000***	.008		
Step II	Personal vs. Professional	.246	.150	2.668	1	.102	1.279	.952	1.717
	Professional vs. Personal	-.017	.128	.018	1	.894	.983	.765	1.263
	Intrinsic reasons for entrepreneurship	1.030	.185	31.081	1	.000***	2.801	1.950	4.024
	Motives Tradition Vocation	-.086	.117	.544	1	.461	.918	.730	1.153
	Business Consulting	-.271	.217	1.565	1	.211	.762	.498	1.166
	Career counselling	1.065	.409	6.772	1	.009**	2.902	1.301	6.472
	Satisfaction with the entrepreneurial career	-4.861	.981	24.539	1	.000***	.008		
	Personal vs. Professional	.233	.118	3.919	1	.048*	1.263	1.002	1.591
Step III	Intrinsic reasons for entrepreneurship	1.028	.184	31.170	1	.000***	2.796	1.949	4.011
	Motives Tradition Vocation	-.090	.113	.635	1	.425	.914	.733	1.140
	Business Consulting	-.270	.217	1.558	1	.212	.763	.499	1.167
	Career counselling	1.048	.388	7.302	1	.007**	2.851	1.333	6.095
	Satisfaction with the entrepreneurial career	-4.842	.970	24.900	1	.000***	.008		
	Personal vs. Professional	.222	.117	3.631	1	.057	1.249	.994	1.570
	Intrinsic reasons for entrepreneurship	.975	.171	32.506	1	.000***	2.651	1.896	3.707
	Business Consulting	-.268	.217	1.531	1	.216	.765	.500	1.170
Step IV	Career counselling	1.020	.386	6.996	1	.008**	2.773	1.302	5.904
	Satisfaction with the entrepreneurial career	-4.891	.966	25.656	1	.000***	.008		
	Personal vs. Professional	.190	.114	2.799	1	.094	1.209	.968	1.511
	Intrinsic reasons for entrepreneurship	.902	.158	32.521	1	.000***	2.464	1.807	3.359
	Career counselling	1.022	.386	7.025	1	.008**	2.779	1.305	5.918
	Satisfaction with the entrepreneurial career	-5.422	.876	38.316	1	.000***	.004		
	Goodness of fit	Test Omnibus		$\chi^2 = 68.266$			g.l.3	p =	.000***
	ROC curve	Test R ²						R _{mg} ²	.222
Predictive values							R _{cs} ²	.165	
		Test H. L.		$\chi^2 = 8.118$			g.l. 8	p =	.422 ⁺
		Residuals						Z%	1.05 %
		ROC						ABC	.732
		Predictive values						VPP	87.7 %
							VPN	49.1 %	

Note: n = 379; ***p < .001; **p < .010; *p < .050; + p > .050. Reference category in response variable: 0 = "lower satisfaction" vs. 1 = "higher satisfaction". ABC= Area under the curve. PPV= Positive predictive value; NPV= Negative predictive value. Goodness-of-fit tests, ROC and predictive values for the fifth step. Positive true state is "higher satisfaction". Made by authors.

influential dimension either, the model sheds some light on the possibility that these factors may have some positive influence on satisfaction, which means that better work-life management could have a relative influence on satisfaction. However, this question cannot be definitively confirmed, as there are inter-factor confounding effects that do not guarantee that this hypothesis can be corroborated.

4. Discussion

This study confirms that while there are various factors that can influence rural women's perception of their professional career development, motivational factors in particular play a crucial role in shaping their satisfaction. Specifically, the results obtained affirm that intrinsic motivations, such as self-fulfilment, self-improvement, and personal and professional growth, in the context of entrepreneurship, are significant predictors of career satisfaction. This aligns with findings reported in studies like those conducted by Suárez-Ortega et al. (2020) and Martínez-García et al. (2019).

A more in-depth exploration of the characteristics and meanings of these intrinsic motivations was undertaken in a qualitative study conducted with the same population of Spanish rural women. This study highlighted their connection with a keen interest in the profession, such as a deep connection with nature, the countryside, outdoor settings, or natural products, as well as a strong desire for entrepreneurship, including an interest in owning their own business (Morales-Valero

et al., 2024). Moreover, the intrinsic motives analyzed align with those reported by female entrepreneurs in various international contexts (Özsungur, 2019). However, it is important to note that while these intrinsic motivations currently influence career satisfaction, they may evolve over time and in response to socio-cultural circumstances (Pintrich and Schunk, 2006).

In this regard, other research highlights how women's motivation towards entrepreneurship is influenced by their socialization, often leaning towards fulfilling social needs (such as environmental sustainability, poverty alleviation, health, educational challenges, etc.) (Solesvik et al., 2019). This orientation toward intrinsic or transcendent motivations adds an ethical dimension to motivation, in line with Pérez López's definition (López-Jurado and Gratacós, 2013).

Furthermore, this phenomenon is more prevalent in developed economies (like Spain), as opposed to emerging economies where extrinsic motives such as growth or profit tend to take precedence (Solesvik et al., 2019). Thus, in the case of emerging economies such as Oman, it is precisely extrinsic motivations that determine women's behaviour to a greater extent (Durrah et al., 2024), explaining the possible absence of intrinsic motivations by the socialization model of Omani women. Thus, in future studies it would be interesting to study the influence of the socio-economic and socio-cultural context as an explanatory variable of interest.

As suggested by the initial hypotheses, the significance of Career counselling as a determining factor for satisfaction can be confirmed.

This finding is consistent with the results reported by [Suárez-Ortega et al. \(2020\)](#), where, additionally, the presence of intrinsic motivation among entrepreneurs is linked to a greater need for guidance. It is noteworthy how women place particular value on this kind of guidance compared to more technically focused Business Consulting. The study conducted by [Almagro-Gavira and Manzano-Soto \(2021\)](#) highlights the importance of incorporating actions to facilitate self-awareness within mentoring processes, including the exploration of one's own strengths and weaknesses, as these factors often play a pivotal role in triggering failure or the abandonment of entrepreneurial initiatives ([Palomares et al., 2019](#)).

On the other hand, it is crucial to establish guidance or counselling processes that bolster the perception of control over the situation and enhance women's capacity for self-determination, as both variables have an impact on the level of intrinsic motivation among individuals ([Pintrich and Schunk, 2006](#)). Furthermore, independent decision-making contributes to women's empowerment, a factor that has been linked to career satisfaction in other studies ([González et al., 2019](#)). This evidence underscores the significance attributed to career guidance in the new model of Vocational Education and Training in Spain (Organic Law 3, 2022) and provides direction for its legislative development.

In a similar vein, as previously mentioned, given the evidence of the potential of female entrepreneurship to invigorate local economies and enhance professional development ([Nicolás et al., 2021](#)), it becomes imperative to nurture local support networks for self-employment. These networks can empower women by strengthening their decision-making capabilities and self-determination ([Vercher et al., 2020](#)), while also fostering intrinsic motivation. Some international experience shows how the creation of such support networks can foster entrepreneurial activity ([Sisay and Mulaw, 2024](#)). In this regard, as previously noted, worker cooperatives can play a significant role in establishing networks and catalyzing entrepreneurial initiatives ([Pérez-Sanz et al., 2019](#); [Esteban-Salvador et al., 2016](#); [Terjesen et al., 2009](#)).

Finally, while not conclusive, we have identified indications that factors related to work-life balance may play a role in shaping satisfaction with an entrepreneurial career. Greater control over the balance between personal and professional life appears to correspond to a higher level of satisfaction, as suggested by certain studies ([Baylina et al., 2017](#); [Loewe et al., 2015](#); [Bryant and Pini, 2011](#)).

5. Policy and Practical implications

As career satisfaction is a key indicator of success in entrepreneurship, we note the need to adopt holistic approaches set out by [Naguib and Barbar \(2025\)](#) when designing public policies. Thus, both individual (micro), organisational (meso) and societal (macro) factors need to be taken into account.

In this sense, [Esteban-Salvador et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Pérez-Sanz et al. \(2019\)](#) in the Spanish context, point out how cooperatives and networks can strengthen support for women by promoting greater involvement and active participation in management and decision-making, which in turn fosters their sense of usefulness, personal fulfilment and autonomy. To this end, they point to the design of policies that consider individual factors, such as training in management and leadership skills, and that enhance women's self-awareness and self-esteem. At the organisational level, measures could be established to facilitate work-life balance, making working hours more flexible and promoting inclusive self-management spaces, as well as encouraging the presence of women in management positions. In this sense, the "Equality Plans" established by Spanish regulations for companies with 50 or more workers can be a great policy. In the social sphere, it is key to develop awareness-raising campaigns that reinforce gender equality and eliminate stereotypes, together with community support networks that promote the accompaniment and visibility of women entrepreneurs.

Ultimately, the Spanish regulatory framework offers a holistic approach to career guidance, adopting a gender perspective and addressing not only professional but also personal development. In future research it would be important to know the real and concrete impact of these policies on rural women's work and job satisfaction.

Furthermore, despite Spain being ranked as a high-income developed economy, rural women continue to face persistent barriers to accessing financial resources, such as the strict requirements for collateral, formal credit history and guarantees demanded by traditional banking institutions. These constraints reduce their ability to launch or expand entrepreneurial initiatives, especially in economically depressed or depopulated rural areas. The experience of microfinance institutions such as Grameen Bank or FINCA in developing countries in the Global South -where microcredits are effectively combined with financial training and continuous technical support-offers a valuable and transferable model that can be adapted to the Spanish context.

In Spain, financial institutions such as MicroBank (a CaixaBank initiative) and the BBVA Microfinance Foundation have already begun to implement inclusive financial products such as collateral-free microcredits, green finance, agricultural microinsurance and financial education programs targeting vulnerable populations, including rural women. In addition, national NGOs such as Fundación Nantik Lum, through its PEM platform, and the Federation of Rural Women and Families (AMFAR) offer tailored support services that largely replicate financial inclusion strategies developed in international programs.

Incorporating these microfinance experiences into professional orientation and entrepreneurship support programs in rural areas -especially those led by autonomous governments or grassroots NGOs-would make it possible to build a comprehensive support ecosystem. This approach would combine personalized mentoring, access to seed capital and technical assistance for business development, thus strengthening the sustainability of women-led projects, reducing the gender gap in rural entrepreneurship, increasing levels of career satisfaction and contributing to the socio-economic revitalization of rural areas in Spain based on a sustainable approach in line with the SDGs roadmap of the 2030 agenda ([Estapé-Dubreuil and Torreguitart-Mirada, 2010](#)).

6. Conclusions

Considering the findings of this study, it is deemed essential to continue advancing the development, construction, or validation of diagnostic instruments aimed at assessing the satisfaction of rural women with their entrepreneurial careers. This endeavor will help us better understand the needs of this group, particularly at a time when rural depopulation is on the rise, exacerbating the social problem of rural migration. Promoting professionalization in rural areas presents an opportunity for sustainable development based in resilience. In light of increasing urbanisation, climate change advances, greater labour precariousness, among other aspects, improving the conditions of rural women should be a key target. Finally, it is worth emphasizing the significance of associative initiatives like the Confederation of Rural Women (CERES), as they represent a clear commitment to sustainability in the context of depopulation while contributing to the empowerment of rural areas in Spain.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Manuel Morales Valero: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Sergio Moldes-Anaya:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Diana Amber Montes:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Resources. **Cristina Cruz González:** Writing – review &

editing, Writing – original draft, Resources.

Declaration of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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