

# Empirical study on the gender gap in telework in Colombia and Ecuador

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**Abstract**— *This research investigates how telework impacts work-life balance for women in Colombia and Ecuador, focusing on the respect for their right to digital disconnection. Despite regulatory advances, women face challenges such as increased workload and blurred boundaries between personal and professional life. This research employs a mixed methods approach to analyze teleworking's impact on women compared to men. A questionnaire with nine constructs was used, covering behavioral changes, health risks, and boundary management. The survey, distributed via digital platforms, utilized a Likert scale and included an optional open-ended question for qualitative insights. The study surveyed 146 participants (57 men, 87 women). Men averaged 40 hours/week (SD 7.5) while women with greater variability averaged 38 hours/week (SD 12). Both genders have fixed salaries, but women often telework during emergencies and report longer workdays with increased health risks and distractions. Women also assume more household responsibilities, impacting their work-life balance. The analysis identified five boundary management styles, with significant differences in how telework affects men and women, revealing that women face more pronounced challenges. Finally, this study highlights that telework significantly impacts women, extending their workday and adding dual responsibilities from home and work. Despite shared household duties, women face greater productivity perceptions and boundary control challenges. Interventions such as time management training and flexible policies are suggested to address these issues. This research emphasizes the importance of tailored strategies for different boundary management styles and calls for further research incorporating diverse perspectives and data sources to validate these findings.*

**Keywords**—Telework, gender gap, digital disconnection, sustainability.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Telework and the right to digital disconnection have recently been regulated in Colombia and Ecuador. Therefore, this research seeks to demonstrate how teleworking affects the work-life balance in Colombian and Ecuadorian women, discussing whether their right to digital disconnection is respected [1].

Colombia and Ecuador have historically lagged since 2015 in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals [2], especially SDG 5 on gender equity, to the detriment of women's conditions in these countries [3].

These working conditions are unfavorable for women in these countries, which could be accentuated by the telework modality. Telework is a form of work organization in which employees perform their work activities outside the traditional office environment [4], using information and communication technologies [5].

Teleworking can offer several advantages, including greater flexibility, increased job satisfaction, and better work-life balance management [6]. However, it also presents challenges, such as the possibility of excessive workload, the difficulty of disconnecting from work, and the risk of blurring the boundaries between the personal and the professional [1].

Work-life conflict has been estimated from self-assessment questionnaires by several authors. Although, in general, people say that their personal life is more important than their work life, it is not always the case that the conflict between work and personal life is more important [7], the substantial differences in the situations of men and women are not reflected in gender differences in the studies on this conflict [8]. Gutek & Searle show that this is because people interpret the time spent in their personal and work lives, and their perception of conflict between them, according to gender role expectations [9]. Thus, the authors found that women reported more work interference with family than men, despite devoting the same number of hours to paid work as men. In addition, although women devoted more hours to family work than men, they reported the same level of family interference with work as men.

Boundary management between personal and work life is related to perceived conflicts between boundaries, perceived control over boundaries, and individual identity [10]. Kossek et al. used a person-centered approach, rather than averaging the results by constructs, to identify 5 boundary management styles differentiated by boundary control [10]. The proportion of women is higher than 60% in two of the identified styles: “overwhelmed reactors” and “nonwork eclectics”. The first with the lowest average boundary control, identities centered in both domains (family and work) and with above average perceptions of both work interruptions in personal life and personal life interruptions at work. The second style has high boundary control, perceives themselves as not identifying strongly with work, but also does not identify significantly with family, and allows both work interruptions in personal life and personal life interruptions at work.

The effects of teleworking can be positive or negative depending on boundary management styles [11]. In addition, Jostell & Hemlin found that the variable most related and the only one significantly representative of personal work interruptions was gender [12]. Specifically, under teleworking conditions, male respondents reported having greater interruptions in this regard than female respondents.

However, female teleworkers may face additional burdens, such as managing domestic responsibilities along with their work, which may result in a double workday [13]. This situation may aggravate the problems related to workload and stress felt by three out of four women in this type of employment [14]. Health and safety risks in teleworking are significant because of their impact on the physical and psychological health and social well-being of workers, resulting in isolation, burnout, depression, domestic violence, musculoskeletal and other injuries, eye strain, increased tobacco and alcohol consumption, excessive screen time, and harmful weight gain, leading the World Health Organization to issue an urgent call to protect the health of teleworkers [15]. It is also important to consider psychosocial risks with gender prevalence [16], in terms of workplace violence and new forms of harassment mediated by cybernetics.

The structure of the paper comprises a brief description of the methodology in terms of tool design and data collection, followed by the section on results and analysis by variables, then the section on results and analysis focused on individuals, and finally, the conclusions and perspectives are presented.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### A. *Mix approach research*

This research is aimed at measuring and understanding the effect of teleworking on women concerning men. Therefore, the question is aligned with a pragmatic approach that underlies the mixed-method questionnaire [17] [18].

### B. *Questionary methodology*

The questionnaire was proposed as a mixed method answered directly with closed questions to obtain concrete answers [19].

Survey questions were designed to address the effects of teleworking and boundary management styles [10]. Combining these studies, we defined 9 constructs:

1. Behavioral changes in Telework (8 items).
2. Affections of risk to physical health (4 items).
3. Affections of mental health risk (5 items).
4. Affections of risk to social relationships (6 items).
5. Interruptions of work for personal reasons (6 items).
6. Interruptions in personal life due to work (6 items).
7. Boundary control (3 items).
8. Work identity (2 items).
9. Family identity (2 items).

Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale (1: Strongly disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neither agree nor disagree, 4: Agree, and 5: Strongly agree).

At the end of the form, an optional open-ended question was established to find out how the respondents gave meaning to telework.

### C. *Procedure*

Non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used, distributing the survey form by various digital means to members of the Matilda Chair, HEIs in Ecuador, and known contacts who have worked in teleworking mode. The Google Forms tool was available for one month.

## III. RESULTS FOR THE VARIABLES

Perceptions were collected from 146 participants, of which 57 were men and 87 were women (40 and 60%, respectively). The average working week was 38 hours, however, men reported an average of 40 hours with a standard deviation of 7.5 hours, while women reported an average of 38 hours with a deviation of 12 hours. This indicates that while most women report fewer hours of paid work, there is greater variation among women. Of those surveyed, 87.72% of men and 82.76% of women have a fixed salary. Regarding the source of their income, 38.33 % of the women and 45.16 % of the men indicated that their income comes exclusively from their salary. The participants were mostly between 40 and 50 years old (40%) and came from various Latin American and Caribbean countries, with the majority from Colombia, Ecuador and Argentina (see Figure 1).

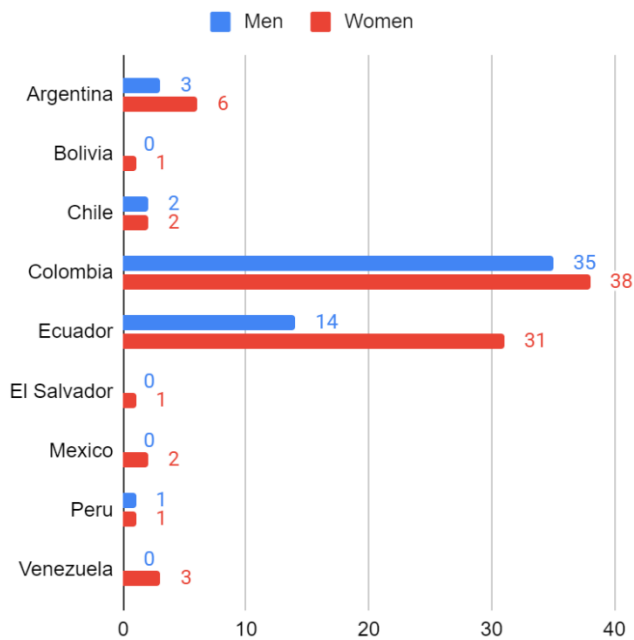


Fig. 1 Countries.

Regarding the academic background of the participants, 60% have engineering degrees and 48% have postgraduate degrees in STEM areas (see Figure 2). 71.93% of the men and 57.50% of the women have engineering degrees. Likewise, 42.11% of the men and 55% of the women have a graduate degree in STEM areas.

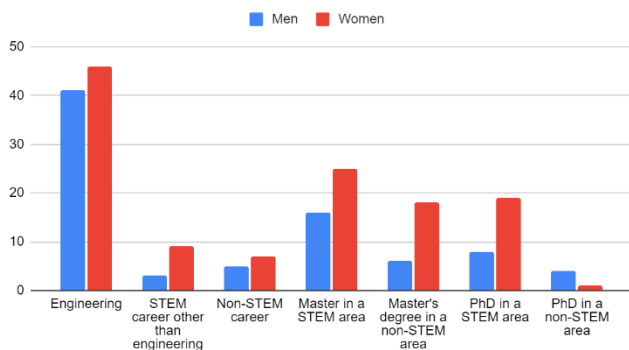


Fig. 2 Academical degree.

#### A. Telework modalities

According to a test of statistical independence, there is a dependence between telework conditions and sex. Specifically, it was observed that 43.52% of women telework in situations of national emergency or contingencies, such as natural disasters or unexpected office closures, compared to 18.46% of men. This data could reflect a greater presence of women at home to take care of children or people in a vulnerable state, as well as the combination of work tasks with domestic chores in emergent situations. On the other hand, 27.69 % of men work

remotely from home every day, in contrast to only 9.26 % of women. This could suggest that men have a higher proportion of jobs that allow daily telecommuting, while women may have more limited access to this modality. In addition, 33.85 % of men and 25 % of women have the flexibility to choose whether to work from home or in the office. These data suggest that, although there is a greater presence of daily telework among men and a slight advantage in the flexibility of choosing the place of work, face-to-face work remains the predominant modality in both genders in Colombia and Ecuador. Differences in telework on specific days are not notable between genders.

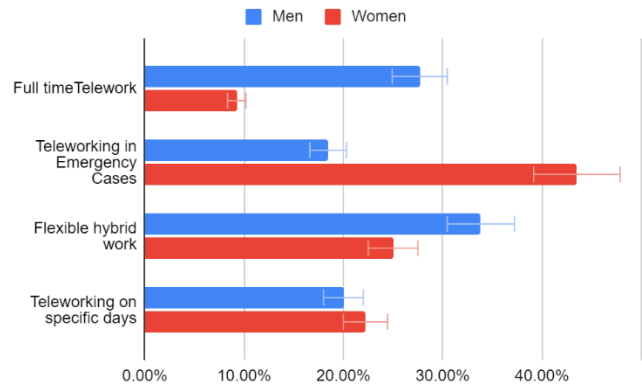


Fig. 3 Telework modalities.

#### B. Telework conditions

Regarding teleworking conditions, notable differences have been identified between men and women (see Figures 4a and 4b). During remote work, it is observed that women tend to extend their working days and work longer hours compared to their male colleagues. In addition, women acknowledge that they consume more food and, although they engage in less physical activity, they also consume fewer energy drinks compared to men. Despite the higher reported workload, women seem to perceive themselves as less efficient than men. This finding suggests that it is necessary to delve deeper into the reasons why women might have difficulty recognizing an increase in their efficiency during telework. Women also report taking less time for breaks compared to men. Although the difference is not extremely large, it is important to investigate whether there are specific reasons behind this trend and to consider strategies to balance break time and overall well-being. This analysis reveals that women feel greater pressure to demonstrate their productivity, which could be related to the longer length of their workday, furthermore, this could suggest that women perceive greater pressure to show their results or justify their performance. In addition, women report a higher frequency of distractions in remote work compared to men, although these differences are not excessively large, they are consistent. This pattern suggests the need to design strategies to help mitigate distractions and improve efficiency in the telework environment.

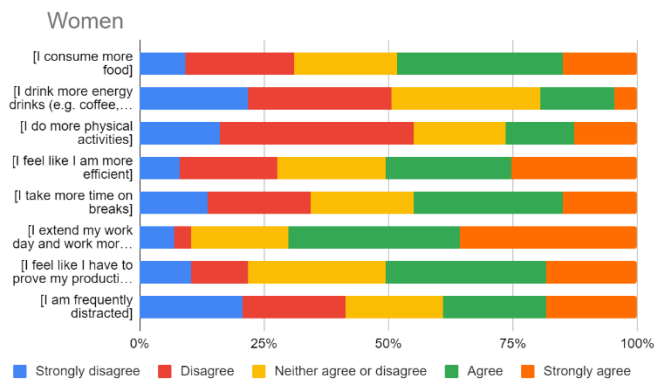


Fig. 4a Telework in women.

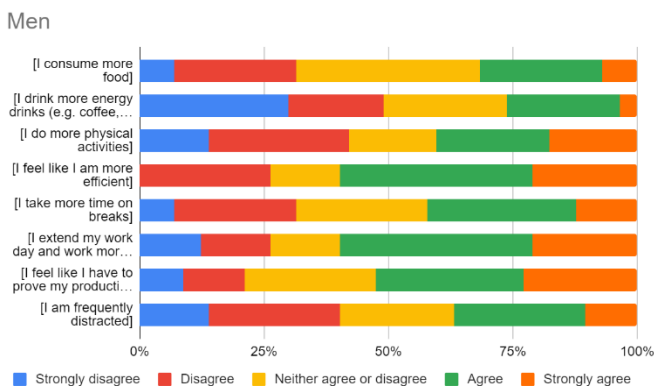


Fig. 4b Telework in men.

### C. Home responsibilities

Regarding household responsibilities, there are notable differences in the allocation of these responsibilities. Women assume more responsibilities in the home, mostly in management and care work (see Figure 5).

Most participants reported sharing responsibilities with their partner. However, the analysis shows that female respondents have a higher proportion of shared responsibilities with their partner (71.9%) compared to male respondents (36.8%). This suggests that women are more involved in shared responsibilities with their partners. It is also reported that women are responsible for household chores in a higher proportion (24.6%) than men (14%). This suggests that a significant number of women are solely responsible for household chores, although less than in the category of responsibilities shared with a partner.

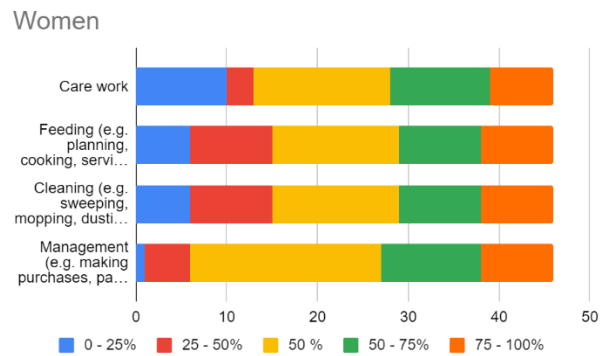


Fig. 5 Women responsibilities.

Women assume a significantly higher proportion of household responsibilities compared to men. This includes a greater burden in food, cleaning, and management tasks, evidencing an inequality in the distribution of household chores (see Figure 6).

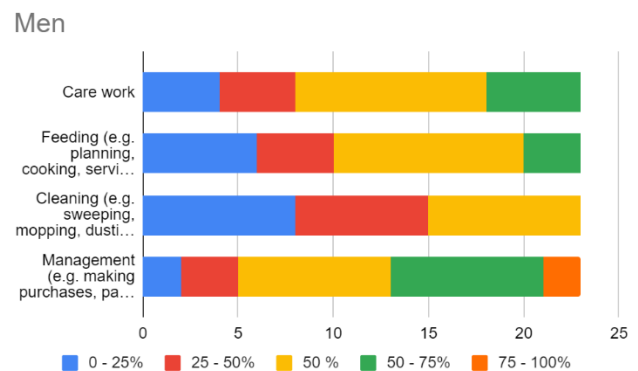


Fig. 6 Men responsibilities.

### D. Risk factors

To analyze the data on health risk factors for teleworkers reported by men and women in the present study, the information is broken down according to the differences in the perceived severity of these disorders between the genders.

In general, men tend to report fewer musculoskeletal disorders compared to women. 13.79% of women seem to experience “much more” disorders while in men it is 5.26%.

The data on chronic disease prevalence among men and women suggest that women perceive a greater burden and severity of chronic disease compared to men, both in terms of stability and increasing conditions.

Most participants report that their chronic diseases remain “about the same.” However, women reported a higher prevalence of chronic diseases compared to men. Women also report an increase in chronic diseases to a greater extent than men.

A considerable group, of women (47.13%), reported that their weight alterations have increased. This indicates a higher prevalence of more pronounced or severe weight changes among women. Men tend to report fewer significant weight alterations compared to women. This suggests that men experience weight alterations to a lesser degree or less frequently.

Males reported vision impairments to a lesser degree compared to females, while females are significantly over-represented as they more frequently reported more severe vision impairments in the “more” and “much more” categories.

Women tend to report more frequently accident-related injuries in higher severity categories, such as “more” and “much more”. This indicates a higher prevalence and severity of damage in females compared to males in this study.

### E. Boundary control

Both men and women agree with maintaining clear boundaries between their work and personal lives. However, the responses indicate that a significant portion of both genders are in a neutral position or disagree with total control of these boundaries.

The majority tend to agree with boundary control, suggesting that men, in general, may have a greater perception of control over the separation between their work and personal lives. While women also tend to agree, the group of women who are neutral or disagree is slightly larger, which may indicate that women face more challenges in maintaining clear boundaries or balancing their work and personal activities. Neutral positions indicate uncertainty or lack of clarity in how work-life balance is perceived. Disagree and strongly disagree responses reflect specific difficulties in maintaining these boundaries.

Most participants, both men and women, believe they have control over their work-life separation and the integration of their activities throughout the day but there is a notable proportion of participants who feel neutral or disagree.

Telework has been a varied experience for many people, and its effects have been perceived in different ways. According to the various opinions gathered, telework offers significant advantages for both genders, such as flexibility, time savings, and better management of work-life balance. However, it also presents challenges, such as the difficulty of establishing clear boundaries and the loss of social interaction, which can affect both men and women, although with different nuances depending on their specific responsibilities and contexts.

### F. Perceptions on telework

Common comments about telework are summarized based on the responses provided in the survey, highlighting both positive (see Table I) and negative aspects (see Table II).

TABLE I. POSITIVE ASPECTS.

Men	Women
<p>1. Flexibility and Autonomy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pace Control: Allows you to work at your own pace without constant interruptions.</li> <li>- Flexibility: Improves time management and allows you to optimize travel, which is especially beneficial in roles that require deep concentration.</li> </ul>	<p>1. Flexibility and Balance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time Management: Provides better ability to manage work-life balance, especially valued by those with domestic responsibilities or childcare.</li> <li>- More Time with Family: Makes it easier to spend more time with children and adjust schedules according to family needs.</li> </ul>
<p>2. Time and Cost Savings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Travel Reduction: Avoids time wasted on transportation, which frees up time for family or to work more efficiently.</li> <li>- Cost Efficiency: Decreases expenses associated with transportation and working in a physical office.</li> </ul>	<p>2. Time Savings and Stress Reduction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transportation Stress Reduction: Reduces the stress associated with commuting, which contributes to a better quality of life.</li> <li>- Time Optimization: Allows more time for personal and professional activities.</li> </ul>
<p>3. Better Work-Life Balance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More Family Time: Facilitates sharing more time with family and adjusting work-life balance.</li> </ul>	<p>3. Improved Productivity and Concentration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Productivity and Well-Being: Provides an environment that can be more conducive to concentrating and maintaining a better mental disposition for work.</li> </ul>
<p>4. Productivity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Greater Concentration: Allows for greater focus and productivity by reducing common distractions in the office</li> </ul>	

TABLE II. NEGATIVE ASPECTS.

Men	Women
<p>1. Flexibility and Balance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time Management: Provides better ability to manage work-life balance, especially valued by those with domestic responsibilities or childcare.</li> <li>- More Time with Family: Makes it easier to spend more time with children and adjust schedules according to family needs.</li> </ul>	<p>1. Additional Burden and Distractors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased Workload: Increased workload and domestic responsibilities, can lead to a sense of overload.</li> <li>- Distractors at Home: The presence of domestic distractions, especially for those with young children, can affect productivity.</li> </ul>
<p>2. Time Savings and Stress Reduction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transportation Stress Reduction: Reduces the stress associated with commuting, which contributes to a better quality of life.</li> <li>- Time Optimization: Allows more time for personal and professional activities.</li> </ul>	<p>2. Emotional and Health Challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loss of Social Life and Stress: Feeling of isolation and emotional stress due to lack of social interaction and difficulties balancing work and home life.</li> </ul>
<p>3. Improved Productivity and Concentration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Productivity and Well-Being: Provides an environment that can be more conducive to concentrating and maintaining a better mental disposition for work.</li> </ul>	<p>3. Problems in Autonomy and Control:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Autonomy and Control: Difficulty in maintaining autonomy and setting clear boundaries, which can lead to extended work schedules and difficulties in disconnecting work activities from domestic activities.</li> </ul>

#### IV. RESULTS FOR THE PARTICIPANTS

For the quantitative analysis, the Likert scale was changed to values from 1 to 5 for negative variables as mentioned in section II, and the values were inverted for variables that had a positive effect, following the methodology of Kossek et al. [10]. First, the average results and standard deviation differentiated by gender of the 9 constructs are presented (see Table III). Like what was evidenced in the previous section, although the differences are not marked in all cases, in general, the negative effects of teleworking are greater in women than in men.

TABLE III. STATISTICAL RESULTS

		Media			Standard deviation		
		All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women
1	Behavioral changes in Teleworking	3.07	2.99	3.12	1.29	1.25	1.31
2	Physical health risk conditions	2.82	2.67	2.92	1.10	1.06	1.11
3	Risk effects on mental health	2.92	2.79	3.00	1.07	1.14	1.01
4	Affections of risk to social relations	2.63	2.52	2.70	1.08	1.14	1.03
5	Interruptions of work due to personal	3.40	3.28	3.47	1.16	1.15	1.16
6	Interruptions of work due to personal	3.10	3.07	3.12	1.36	1.34	1.37
7	Boundary control	2.54	2.52	2.56	1.06	1.01	1.09
8	Work identity	2.11	2.11	2.11	0.86	0.85	0.87
9	Family identity	2.61	2.56	2.65	0.89	0.89	0.89

The internal consistency or reliability of the set of items in each construct in the questionnaire was evaluated based on Cronbach's alpha value for the total number of responses and separated by gender. The results shown in Table IV show good to excellent reliability (greater than 0.8 and 0.9) for most of the constructs. It is noteworthy, however, that the low value in the work identity question, especially in men, is due to the low correlation between the two work identity items the perception of how much people see you as very focused on your work and how much you invest a large part of yourself in your work.

TABLE IV. CONSISTENCY OF CONSTRUCTS RESULTS

		All	Men	Women
1	Behavioral changes in Teleworking	0.56	0.45	0.61
2	Physical health risk conditions	0.84	0.89	0.80
3	Risk effects on mental health	0.90	0.89	0.90
4	Affections of risk to social relations	0.82	0.85	0.79
5	Interruptions of work due to personal	0.93	0.95	0.91
6	Interruptions of work due to personal	0.90	0.89	0.91
7	Boundary control	0.92	0.94	0.91
8	Work identity	0.51	0.19	0.67
9	Family identity	0.83	0.85	0.81

Finally, the Kossek et al. methodology was used, with a people-centered approach, instead of averaging results by constructs, to identify 5 styles of limit management mainly differentiated by the control of these limits. These aspects were added to the constructs to differentiate the effects of teleworking according to the profiles and the gender variable. The profiles were determined by applying clustering analysis by partitioning them into k groups with the k-means algorithm to group the data according to similarities, previously dimensionally reduced with principal component analysis (PCA), which allowed groups to be identified. different based on key characteristics (see Table V).

Table V shows that behavioral changes and risk affectations in teleworking affect people differently according to the interruptions between work and personal life, the management they have of the control of limits, and their identity in the work or family. To that extent, the profiles that reported the greatest affectations and behavioral changes due to telework were family guardians and overwhelmed reactors, who reported the highest and lowest scores in boundary control, respectively. In addition, apart from the work guardian profile, they correspond to profiles with the highest proportion of women. These profiles have opposing identities, with the former being more identified with the family identity. In addition, they have asymmetrical barriers between personal and work in that the family guardians report greater interruptions in the personal for work, while the overwhelmed reactors present greater interruptions of work for the personal. In contrast, fusion lovers have low boundary control, dual identities, and medium interruptions in both directions, with slightly greater interruptions of work by personnel. It is noteworthy that assessing the effect of telework from these profiles generates that there is greater differentiation in the impact of telework.

TABLE V. CONSISTENCY OF CONSTRUCTS RESULTS

Profiles	Low control			High control	
	1	2	3	4	5
	Overwhelmed reactors	Fusion lovers	Guardians of labor	Separators	Guardians of the family
1	3.02	2.80	2.97	2.36	3.62
2	3.19	1.78	2.85	2.22	3.49
3	3.42	1.70	2.91	2.28	3.69
4	2.91	1.81	2.66	2.25	3.13
5	3.71	3.12	3.43	1.16	3.97
6	1.95	2.30	3.60	1.90	4.08
7	1.71	2.30	2.43	2.97	3.26
8	2.24	2.04	1.97	3.10	2.00
9	2.17	2.19	2.69	3.35	2.91
%Women	17%	14%	34%	7%	28%
%Men	14%	26%	30%	7%	23%

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Telework affects women, in terms of the extension of their working day and the double working day they assume simultaneously from their work and home. Although responsibilities in the home are distributed between men and women, this study suggests areas for improving equity in the distribution of household tasks.

The present work helps to identify possible inequalities in the perception and management of the remote workday, additional responsibilities at home, or other factors that affect concentration and time management in the context of telework, enabling organizations to take steps to improve balance and equity in the work environment, while simultaneously providing a more efficient and equitable work environment for all employees.

The analysis reveals that women, in the context of remote work, feel they must demonstrate their productivity more often than men. This perception could be related to performance expectations or additional pressures in the remote work environment. However, the perception of boundary control problems is more prevalent among women compared to men.

It is important to consider strategies to help both genders, but especially women, establish and maintain clear work-life boundaries. Interventions could include time management training, the development of flexible work policies, and work-life balance support. It highlights the importance of further investigating the observed differences and considering strategies to address the specific challenges women face in teleworking and their daily lives as women take on a significantly higher proportion of household responsibilities compared to men. This includes a greater burden in feeding, cleaning, and management tasks, evidencing an inequality in the distribution of household chores.

The person-centered approach has practical implications for developing different interventions appropriate to the style of each group. While this study is based on many professionals in Latin America, the results are derived from individuals

professionally successful, with a high level of education, and could be replicated in other settings and analyzed for each country and region. Likewise, the relationships found do not allow us to evidence causality but only to report on the findings of self-perceived responses. It would be useful to have other perspectives, e.g., from partners and colleagues, and other sources, e.g., work performance and hours of each job.

In Colombia and Ecuador, telework has significantly affected women by extending their workday through a "double shift" of professional and domestic responsibilities. Although household duties are shared between men and women, there remain significant inequities in the division of these tasks. Women report greater difficulties in managing remote work, concentration, and time, as well as a higher need to demonstrate productivity. These challenges, combined with unequal household responsibilities like cleaning and caregiving, highlight the persistence of gendered expectations in the home and workplace, further widening the gender gap in telework.

To address this issue, organizations and policymakers can implement solutions that promote work-life balance. These include flexible work policies, time management training, and specific support for women, such as parental leave and affordable childcare options. Encouraging equitable distribution of household tasks between partners and providing cultural training to break traditional gender roles are also essential steps. By promoting shared responsibilities both at home and work, it can create a more balanced and inclusive telework environment, reducing the gender gap and easing the burden of the double shift on women.

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