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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gender matters: A study on job satisfaction in the dynamic environment of ecuadorian startups

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ABSTRACT

Job satisfaction is a key driver of organizational effectiveness, influencing productivity, employee retention, and overall workplace well-being. While extensive research exists in developed economies, there is limited evidence on how gender differences influence job satisfaction in the entrepreneurial ecosystems of emerging countries. This study examines gender-based variations in job satisfaction among 399 entrepreneurs from Ecuadorian startups operating in the production, commerce, services, and gastronomy sectors. A quantitative, cross-sectional design was employed, utilizing a structured questionnaire based on a multidimensional framework comprising five dimensions: work content, working conditions, remuneration, teamwork, and well-being. Descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests, and correlation analyses were conducted.

The results reveal significant gender differences in autonomy, task meaning, and task identification (work content); hygiene, aesthetics, and ergonomics (working conditions); sufficiency and equity (remuneration); and work schedule (well-being). In contrast, teamwork-related variables showed no significant disparities, suggesting that the collaborative culture of startups may buffer against traditional gender gaps.

The findings extend organizational behavior and social psychology literature by providing empirical evidence from a Latin American entrepreneurial ecosystem, highlighting the role of socio-cultural norms, domestic responsibilities, and sectoral conditions in shaping job satisfaction. From a managerial perspective, the study highlights the importance of equity-oriented policies—such as transparent remuneration systems, ergonomic workplace design, and flexible scheduling—to promote inclusive, sustainable, and competitive startup environments.

Keywords: Job satisfaction; organizational behavior; social psychology of work; workplace well-being; employee perceptions; gender differences; entrepreneurship; startups; work environment.

1. Introduction

Job satisfaction has long been regarded as a cornerstone of organizational management and social

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psychology because of its profound impact on both individuals and organizations. At the individual level, it is closely linked to well-being, motivation, and psychological health. At the organizational level, it is a predictor of productivity, employee retention, and resilience in dynamic environments. Dissatisfied employees are more prone to stress, burnout,[1,2] absenteeism, and turnover,[3] which in turn disrupt performance and increase organizational costs.[4] Furthermore, dissatisfaction is not confined to the workplace—it often spills over into family relations and broader social life,[5] highlighting the relevance of job satisfaction for both professional and personal domains. For this reason, organizations increasingly treat job satisfaction as not only an internal performance driver but also an expression of social responsibility and commitment to human well-being.

Given its multifaceted nature, job satisfaction has been the subject of extensive international research. Comparative studies have examined its determinants and consequences in Europe,[6-8] Asia,[9,10] and Latin America,[11,12] revealing both commonalities and context-specific dynamics. In professional terms, the concept has been applied across a wide array of fields, including healthcare,[10,13] higher education,[14] veterinary medicine,[15] engineering and construction,[16] journalism,[12] law,[17] remote work,[18] and religious organizations.[19] Collectively, this evidence underscores the universal relevance of job satisfaction as an analytical construct, while highlighting that contextual, cultural, and sector-specific factors influence its determinants.

A second line of scholarship has explored how individual diversity characteristics condition job satisfaction. Gender is among the most widely studied variables,[20,21] with multiple investigations documenting differences in how men and women evaluate their jobs. Other dimensions include race and ethnicity,[22] age,[8] physical disability, and even organizational size.[23] Such studies reveal that job satisfaction is not experienced uniformly across demographic groups; instead, it reflects a complex interplay between individual characteristics and structural conditions. However, despite this broad coverage, entrepreneurship and startups remain relatively underexplored domains, even though startups constitute the predominant business model in most countries and represent a vital source of employment in developing economies.

The entrepreneurial context differs from corporate or public-sector environments in several key ways. Startups typically operate with limited resources, flexible structures, and high levels of uncertainty. These conditions affect job design, leadership styles, and work-life integration, which in turn may alter the determinants of job satisfaction. For example, autonomy—often considered a positive driver—can be double-edged in startups: while it enhances flexibility and creativity, it also comes with the burden of responsibility and risk. Similarly, remuneration systems in small ventures are often limited, creating potential tensions regarding perceptions of fairness and sufficiency. In societies characterized by strong socio-cultural norms, such as Ecuador, these dynamics intersect with gender roles, potentially amplifying or mitigating satisfaction levels. Despite the significance of startups for innovation and employment in emerging economies, empirical evidence on how gender shapes job satisfaction in such contexts remains scarce.

The literature identifies several core variables that influence job satisfaction, typically grouped into internal and external factors. Internal factors include autonomy in decision-making, working conditions,[24] leadership and supervision practices,[25,26] remuneration systems and perceptions of fairness,[27,28] communication and participation processes,[29] opportunities for training and development,[30] and broader well-being provisions such as working hours and workplace safety.[31,32] External factors encompass work–family balance and broader social events,[33] including natural disasters and health crises,[34] which can

disrupt working life. While these factors are well established in the literature, their relative influence can vary considerably across organizational and cultural contexts.

In response to this complexity, multidimensional frameworks of job satisfaction have been developed to capture the breadth of relevant variables. Álvarez Santos et al.[35] proposed a model integrating five dimensions—work content, working conditions, remuneration, teamwork, and well-being—that collectively synthesize 26 variables relevant to satisfaction assessment. This model has been widely applied in institutional contexts, but its suitability for entrepreneurial environments remains underexplored. Moreover, while gender-based differences have been identified in corporate and public organizations, little is known about how these disparities manifest in startups operating under resource constraints and influenced by socio-cultural factors.

The Ecuadorian context presents a compelling case for this inquiry. Startups here play a pivotal role in job creation and economic diversification, but must contend with fragile ecosystems characterized by limited financial access, unequal domestic responsibilities, and entrenched cultural norms. For female entrepreneurs in particular, balancing professional demands with disproportionate household duties may limit perceptions of autonomy, fairness, and well-being, thereby shaping overall job satisfaction in distinctive ways. Male entrepreneurs, in contrast, may face different pressures, such as expectations of economic provision or sector-specific demands, leading to divergent satisfaction profiles.[36]

Accordingly, this study seeks to analyze gender-based differences in job satisfaction among entrepreneurs in Ecuadorian startups. Using a multidimensional framework and a cross-sectional research design, it examines how internal and external factors influence satisfaction across genders. By doing so, it addresses three critical gaps in the literature:[37] (a) the relative absence of studies on job satisfaction in startups, (b) the limited evidence from Latin America, and (c) the lack of integration of gender as a central analytical category in entrepreneurial research. Beyond its theoretical contribution, the study also provides practical insights for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and human resource practitioners seeking to foster inclusive and equitable work environments in emerging economies.

2. Literature review

Job satisfaction has been approached as a multidimensional construct shaped by diverse organizational and psychosocial variables. Several models exist to capture this complexity, but one of the most widely used is the framework proposed by Álvarez Santos et al.,[35] which synthesizes five broad dimensions—work content, working conditions, remuneration, teamwork, and well-being—into 26 variables. This model not only integrates key findings from prior research but also provides a flexible structure adaptable to different organizational contexts.

Table 1 and **Table 2** present the principal dimensions and variables of job satisfaction, along with examples of how different authors have studied them. These tables illustrate that, while studies vary in scope and methodology, they can generally be categorized within a five-dimensional framework.

Table 1. Dimensions and variables of job satisfaction.

Dimensions	Variables	Description
Work content	Autonomy	Decision-making authority.
	Variety of skills	The number of different skills required by the task in the job position.
	Task meanings	Social importance of the task.
	Feedback	Degree of information achieved about the work and its results.

Dimensions	Variables	Description
Working conditions	Task identification	The possibility of recognizing the individual contribution within the result.
	Hygiene	Perceived degree of hygiene in the work area.
	Security	Perceived degree of safety in the work area.
	Esthetic	Aesthetic appeal is perceived in the work area.
	Ergonomics	Adaptation of job design to meet the requirements of workers.
	Work regime	Correspondence between the work and rest regime and the working conditions of the position and the work area.
Teamwork	Leadership	Acceptance of leadership applied by the manager
	Climate	Acceptance of the existing climate in the work team
	Cohesion	Degree of unity in the work team
	Variety of group work	The degree to which the team allows the development of different skills
Remuneration	Sufficiency	The degree to which the remuneration received covers the required expenses.
	Bonding	Relationship between the training of workers and their remuneration.
	Justice	Perception of fairness in the application of remuneration.
	Perception	Understanding the design of the remuneration system.
	Equity	The degree to which remuneration is assigned to each person according to their contribution
	Correspondence	Relationship between the individual contribution and the assigned remuneration
Well-being conditions	Working hours	Acceptance of work schedule
	Health care	Provision of health services in the organization
	Transport	Provision of transportation services in the organization
	Uniform	Existence of uniforms for work

Table 1. (*Continued*)

Note. *Adapted from Álvarez Santos et al.* [35].

Many other investigations delve into one or more of these variables, add new ones, or present them from different perspectives, but they can generally be framed within these dimensions. **Table 2** provides a synthesis of how various authors have addressed variables related to job satisfaction and how they align with the five dimensions described above.

Table 2. Variables and authors related to job satisfaction.

Authors	Work content	Working conditions	Remuneration	Teamwork	Well-being conditions
Penttilä et al. [8]	Workload; Variety of activities; Achieve goals; Link with training; Work content	Job security	–	Participation-Communication	Training possibilities
Solís-Carcaño et al. [38]	Organizational policies; Variety; Creativity; Responsibility; Achievements; Authority; Skill utilization	Security	Reward: Social status	Teamwork; Social and technical supervision; Values; Human relations	Promotion opportunities
Milovanska-Farrington and Farrington [5]	–	Health	Job household income; Personal income	–	Leisure; Family life; Spouse's life
O'Hara et al. [39]	Autonomy; Internal work motivation	–	–	Communication; Teamwork; Conflict management; Cultural sensitivity	–

Authors	Work content	Working conditions	Remuneration	Teamwork	Well-being conditions
Lee et al. [22]	Employee development	–	Recognition of good work; Organizational justice; Payment	Participation in the workplace; Relationships with co-workers; Relationships with supervisors	Diversity management

Table 2. (*Continued*)

Building on these foundations, subsequent research has examined how job satisfaction varies across demographic and organizational categories. Studies have consistently shown that diversity variables influence perceptions of satisfaction. Gender, for example, has been widely analyzed as a key determinant, with evidence pointing to both differences in work-related values (e.g., prioritizing pay vs. interpersonal relations) and inequalities in outcomes such as remuneration fairness [27] and leadership opportunities.[37] Age and generational cohorts also matter, as younger employees often seek variety and autonomy, while older cohorts may value security and stability. Race and ethnicity have been linked to disparities in public-sector job satisfaction in the United States.[22] At the same time, studies on workers with physical disabilities highlight the importance of organizational support and inclusive practices.[23] Organizational size also conditions satisfaction, with employees in smaller firms often reporting greater autonomy but fewer resources.[30]

Among these factors, gender remains one of the most robust predictors of differentiated job satisfaction outcomes. Early work [35] identified distinct gendered preferences: men tended to emphasize extrinsic rewards, such as pay and advancement, whereas women often valued intrinsic factors, such as task significance and interpersonal relationships. More recent evidence confirms that context plays a decisive role. When women and men occupy similar roles with equivalent resources, differences in satisfaction tend to diminish.[37] Conversely, in professions marked by persistent gender discrimination, women continue to report lower satisfaction. For example, Burns et al.[20] documented significant gender differences in career satisfaction among Canadian critical care physicians, primarily attributed to moral distress and incivility. In Chile, Leiva and Riveros [12] found that female journalists consistently reported lower work satisfaction than their male counterparts, linking the disparity to experiences of discrimination in the newsroom. Likewise, Santos et al.[12] highlighted that during the COVID-19 lockdown in Portugal, telecommuting women faced greater dissatisfaction due to the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic work. These findings emphasize that satisfaction is not only shaped by organizational practices but also by broader socio-cultural structures, including the division of household responsibilities.

The entrepreneurial and startup context introduces additional complexity. Startups often promise greater autonomy and flexibility—factors traditionally associated with higher satisfaction. However, empirical evidence suggests that these benefits are not always realized. Han and Wang,[24] in their study of self-employed workers in China, found that while autonomy increased, poorer working conditions offset the gains, resulting in lower satisfaction overall. In Latin America, Sandoval-Reyes et al.[11] observed that remote work during the pandemic heightened stress and work–life conflict, particularly for women, underscoring the fragile balance between autonomy and support structures in emerging economies. Pérez-Campdesuñer et al.[40] further demonstrated how socio-economic conditions in Cuba and Ecuador directly shape entrepreneurial behavior, suggesting that job satisfaction in these contexts cannot be disentangled from external economic and cultural constraints.

Despite their growing importance in economic ecosystems, startups remain under-researched in job satisfaction literature, especially in Latin America. Most existing studies focus on large corporations,[40] public institutions, or traditional professional sectors, leaving unanswered questions about how satisfaction

manifests in small, agile, and resource-limited firms. Furthermore, little is known about whether gender-based differences observed in corporate settings persist, intensify, or diminish within the more informal and collaborative cultures often associated with startups.

Taken together, this body of literature highlights three critical gaps. First, although the multidimensional determinants of job satisfaction are well established, their operation in entrepreneurial contexts is insufficiently understood. Second, empirical research from Latin America remains scarce, limiting the global diversity of perspectives on job satisfaction. Third, while gender has been widely studied in traditional organizations, its intersection with entrepreneurial environments—where socio-cultural norms, limited resources, and flexible structures converge—has not been systematically addressed. These gaps justify the present study, which examines gender-based differences in job satisfaction in Ecuadorian startups through a multidimensional framework. By doing so, the study contributes to theory by extending established models into new contexts and to practice by offering evidence-based insights for entrepreneurs and policymakers in emerging economies.

3. Materials and methods

To examine the relationship between gender and job satisfaction within Ecuadorian startups, a quantitative, cross-sectional research design was adopted. The methodological approach was structured to ensure representativeness across different sectors and to capture both organizational and psychosocial dimensions of satisfaction. The study followed a sequence of stages that began with the definition of variables, continued with the characterization of the target population and the selection of a sampling schedule to obtain a statistically valid sample, and concluded with the application of rigorous data analysis techniques.

The research framework incorporated two main groups of variables. The first group consisted of classification variables that enabled segmentation of respondents by demographic and organizational characteristics. The second group comprised job satisfaction variables, structured into dimensions validated in prior literature. This dual grouping allowed for both descriptive profiling and inferential testing, facilitating the identification of patterns and statistically significant differences across gender and other diversity-related factors.

3.1. Definition of variables

Two groups of variables were used in the research, each of which is detailed below:

- Group I – Classification variables: Productive sector and type of entrepreneurial activity; age; gender; and educational level of the entrepreneur.
- Group II – Variables and dimensions of job satisfaction: For the analysis of job satisfaction, the dimensions proposed by Álvarez Santos et al. [35] were used.

The nominal scale was applied to the variables in Group I, while those in Group II were evaluated through an ordinal scale of 10 values.

3.2. Characterization of the population and the sample

According to data from the Ecuadorian Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC) as of December 2022, there were 815,419 micro and small businesses registered in the country (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Sample characterization by sector and activity.

Sector	Activity	Number	%	Sector	Activity	Number	%
Commerce	Textile	17	4.3	Services	Cutting and sewing	8	2.0
	Others	26	6.5				
	Pharmacy	15	3.8		Shoe repair	10	2.5
	Furniture	8	2.0		Cleaning	17	4.3
	Hardware store	9	2.3		Appliance repair	27	6.8
	Shoe shop	9	2.3		Beauty	9	2.3
	Transport	4	1.0		Maintenance	8	2.0
	Food	4	1.0		Others	7	1.8
	Perfumery	5	1.3		Household workers	7	1.8
	Flower shop	8	2.0				
	Technology	29	7.3		Health	17	4.3
	Total	134	33.6		Total	110	27.6
Gastronomy	Restaurant	12	3.0	Production			
	Coffee shops	11	2.8		Food	12	3.0
	Bakeries	24	6.0		Drinks	12	3.0
	Ice cream parlors	12	3.0		Furniture	4	1.0
	Pubs	8	2.0		Souvenir	24	6.0
	Others	36	9.0				
	Total	104	26.1		Total	51	12.8

The population was defined as the focus of analysis, and the corresponding sample size was determined using Equation 1.

$$n = \frac{N*p*q*z^2}{e^2*(N-1)+ z^2*p*q} \quad (1)$$

Where:

N: population size

p: probability of success (0.5)

q: probability of failure (0.5)

e: researcher error (5%)

z: constant of the normal distribution (1.96 for the 95.5% confidence level)

The companies participating in the research were representative of the sectors of production, commerce, personal services, and gastronomy (**Table 3**). The final sample size was 399 respondents, slightly exceeding the required minimum (384). **Table 4** summarizes the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 4. Sample characterization by age, educational level, and gender.

Variables	Levels	Quantity	%	Variables	Levels	Quantity	%
Composition by age	Less than18	44	11.0	Composition by educational level	1	51	12.8
	18-25	38	9.5		2	174	43.6
	26-40	103	25.8		3	121	30.3
	40-60	127	31.8		4	53	13.3
	More than 60	87	21.8	Composition by gender	Female	212	53.1
	Total	399	100.0		Male	187	46.9

Regarding age, five groups were presented, with a relatively balanced distribution that reflects the country's labor structure. Notably, 11% of respondents were under 18 years old, a proportion consistent with national figures for youth entrepreneurship, while 9.5% were between 18 and 25 years old. The educational level distribution covered all four categories, with secondary and university levels being the most represented. Many university graduates reported having chosen—or been compelled—to engage in entrepreneurship as a source of employment.[41] The sample also showed a relative gender balance.

3.3. Survey instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on Álvarez Santos et al.'s multidimensional model.[35] The instrument included two sections: (a) classification variables and (b) job satisfaction items across five dimensions (work content, working conditions, remuneration, teamwork, and well-being). Each indicator was measured on a 10-point ordinal scale (1 = very dissatisfied, 10 = very satisfied).

The questionnaire was pre-tested with 20 entrepreneurs from different sectors to ensure clarity, content validity, and reliability. Based on feedback, minor adjustments were made in wording before full deployment. On average, completion time was 20 minutes.

3.4. Data collection procedure

Surveys were conducted between January and March 2023 using a mixed-mode strategy. In urban centers (Quito, Guayaquil, and Santo Domingo), surveys were administered face-to-face through structured interviews. In rural or remote areas, an online version was distributed via entrepreneurial networks and associations. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with each respondent completing an informed consent form.

3.5. Information processing and statistical analysis

The data was processed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. The analysis followed three stages:

1. Descriptive statistics to characterize the behavior of each variable and provide central tendency and dispersion indicators.
2. Inferential analysis using the Chi-square test of independence to evaluate the existence of statistically significant differences in job satisfaction variables across gender, sector, age, and educational level.
3. Correlational analysis (Pearson’s r) for variables where significant differences were identified, to assess the strength and direction of relationships among dimensions of job satisfaction.

This combination of descriptive, inferential, and correlational techniques ensured a comprehensive assessment of gender-based differences in job satisfaction within the Ecuadorian startup ecosystem, following best practices in quantitative research methodology.[42]

4. Research Questions

Building on the multidimensional framework of job satisfaction[35] and the literature on gender differences in organizational behavior,[27,36,37] this study seeks to explore how men and women experience satisfaction in the dynamic context of Ecuadorian startups. While prior research has documented disparities in autonomy, remuneration fairness, and work–life balance, little is known about whether these patterns persist in entrepreneurial environments characterized by flat structures, resource constraints, and collaborative cultures.[11,24]

Accordingly, the following research questions guide the empirical analysis:

- **RQ1:** How do male and female entrepreneurs differ in their levels of job satisfaction across the five dimensions—work content, working conditions, remuneration, teamwork, and well-being?
- **RQ2:** Which specific indicators within these dimensions (e.g., autonomy, equity, work schedule) display significant gender-based differences?
- **RQ3:** Beyond gender, how do educational level and productive sector influence variations in job satisfaction among entrepreneurs?
- **RQ4:** Are there dimensions, such as teamwork, where the collaborative nature of startups attenuates gender-based disparities observed in other organizational contexts?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to clarify whether the gendered patterns identified in traditional organizations hold in entrepreneurial ecosystems and to highlight the contextual variables that shape satisfaction in startups.

5. Hypotheses

Grounded in the literature review and the guiding research questions, this study formulates specific hypotheses to be tested empirically. The hypotheses reflect expectations derived from prior evidence on gender and job satisfaction, adapted to the startup context:

- **H1 (Work Content):** Female entrepreneurs will report lower levels of autonomy, task meaning, and task identification than male entrepreneurs. This expectation is consistent with studies showing that women often perceive restricted autonomy and recognition due to socio-cultural norms and unequal domestic responsibilities.[24,32]
- **H2 (Working Conditions):** Female entrepreneurs will perceive poorer working conditions—specifically in hygiene, aesthetics, and ergonomics—than their male counterparts. Prior evidence suggests that women are more sensitive to environmental and ergonomic aspects of work, partly due to differences in task allocation and physiological factors.[32]
- **H3 (Remuneration):** Female entrepreneurs will express lower satisfaction with remuneration, particularly regarding sufficiency and equity. This expectation is supported by studies highlighting persistent gender pay gaps and perceptions of distributive injustice in entrepreneurial and professional contexts.[27,28]
- **H4 (Well-being):** Female entrepreneurs will report lower satisfaction with well-being conditions, especially work schedule, given their disproportionate share of unpaid domestic work and greater challenges in achieving work–life balance.[21,31]
- **H5 (Teamwork):** No significant gender differences are expected in teamwork-related variables (leadership acceptance, climate, cohesion, variety of group work). Startups are characterized by flatter hierarchies and more collaborative dynamics, which may mitigate traditional gender-based disparities in teamwork.[37,39]

Together, these hypotheses provide a structured framework for the empirical analysis, linking theoretical expectations with the statistical tests conducted in the following section.

6. Results and findings

The analysis began with a descriptive examination of the variables associated with job satisfaction, providing an overview of the average scores, variability, and observed ranges across the five dimensions defined in the literature. This initial step aimed to identify general patterns and highlight areas of relative strength or weakness in the respondents' perceptions before proceeding with the inferential analysis. **Table 5** presents the descriptive statistics for each variable.

Table 5. Behavior of customer satisfaction variables.

Dimension	Variables	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Deviation	Mean deviation
Work content	Autonomy	4.80	3	7	1.288	6.2
	Variety	6.98	5	9	1.358	
	Meaning	6.40	3	10	1.971	
	Feedback	7.02	5	9	1.391	
	Identification	5.82	2	10	2.001	
Working conditions	Hygiene	7.44	5	10	1.485	7.08
	Security	7.06	5	9	1.447	
	Esthetic	7.43	5	10	1.543	
	Ergonomics	6.42	4	9	1.468	
	Work regime	7.10	5	9	1.449	
	Sufficiency	5.84	3	9	1.751	
Remuneration	Bonding	7.01	5	9	1.440	6.70
	Justice	6.95	5	9	1.397	
	Perception	6.93	5	9	1.415	
	Equity	6.53	3	10	1.826	
	Correspondence	6.94	5	9	1.379	
Teamwork	Leadership	6.05	4.00	8.00	1.43528	6.71
	Work environment	7.00	5.00	9.00	1.41153	
	Cohesion	6.92	5.00	9.00	1.42080	
	Variety of work	6.90	5.00	9.00	1.38403	
Well-being conditions	Work schedule	4.76	1.00	9.00	2.42652	3.68
	Health care	3.45	1.00	6.00	1.71820	
	Transport	3.55	1.00	6.00	1.73248	
	Working clothes	2.99	1.00	5.00	1.41236	

These results provide a comprehensive view of how entrepreneurs in the sample evaluated aspects such as work content, working conditions, remuneration, teamwork, and well-being conditions, thereby establishing the foundation for subsequent statistical significance tests. As can be seen, the most affected dimension is the "well-being conditions", and within this, the least representative is the use of working clothes. This is because many organizations have not established its use; however, people do perceive the advantages that derive from it. Likewise, many recognize the lack of transportation or access to health services. The work schedule, despite being the best evaluated, does not even reach half of the scale.

The dimension of work content is the second-worst evaluated. Within this, autonomy presents the worst situation, reaching a value of just 4.8, the only one that does not exceed half of the scale. Feedback is the most highly evaluated (7.02), reflecting the presence of direct communication channels between workers, a characteristic of small companies. The rest of the variables of this dimension are located at intermediate values.

The "remuneration" and "teamwork" dimensions are in a relatively more favorable and similar situation. Within the remuneration dimension, the variables that present the most significant difficulty are sufficiency, associated with entrepreneurs' low income, and low correspondence. This second variable is closely related to income at the entrepreneurial level: employees perceive that, despite their high effort, entrepreneurial income is low; consequently, their income is also low. The best evaluated variable is bonding, although it is far from the desired state; this behavior corresponds to the fact that more than 56% only reach the second level of training. The variables justice, perception, equity, and correspondence are located on the 6 points.

Teamwork does not present a favorable situation, but it does yield a homogeneous set of variables that characterize it, reflecting the fact that small organizations are the primary focus of study. Within this dimension, the least favored variable is leadership. From the respondents' opinions, a predominance of management styles with autocratic traits can be identified, which corresponds to the lack of autonomy observed in the evaluation of the work content dimension.

Working conditions are the only dimension that exceeds the value of 7 on the scale, but is still far from the desired state. Within this dimension, the best evaluated variable is hygiene, followed by aesthetics, work regime, and safety. In this context, only ergonomics exceeds the value of 7, indicating that many workers do not have jobs with the required conditions; they must remain standing for a significant part of their workday, or work in unfavorable conditions that affect their health or cause discomfort.

Once the description of the variables' behavior was completed, the existence of significant differences in the observed means of the variables comprising each dimension was evaluated, depending on the variables within the diversity category, as shown in **Table 6**.

Table 6. Chi square test for the difference between the variables (Asymptotic significance (bilateral)).

Variables	Sector	Activity	Gender	Age	Educational level
Autonomy	0.000	0.816	0.000	0.656	0.000
Variety	0.066	0.695	0.500	0.434	0.066
Meaning	0.899	0.305	0.000	0.018	0.899
Feedback	0.357	0.637	0.602	0.656	0.357
Identification	0.560	0.950	0.000	0.628	0.560
Hygiene	0.325	0.976	0.000	0.968	0.325
Security	0.763	0.784	0.655	0.430	0.763
Aesthetics	0.133	0.111	0.000	0.317	0.130
Ergonomics	0.962	0.395	0.000	0.994	0.962
Work regime	0.386	0.423	0.116	0.060	0.386
Sufficiency	0.876	0.754	0.000	0.783	0.876
Bonding	0.466	0.503	0.903	0.089	0.466
Justice	0.373	0.032	0.266	0.203	0.373
Perception	0.900	0.304	0.205	0.887	0.900
Equity	0.891	0.802	0.000	0.883	0.891
Correspondence	0.085	0.863	0.206	0.105	0.085
Leadership	0.764	0.259	0.079	0.453	0.764

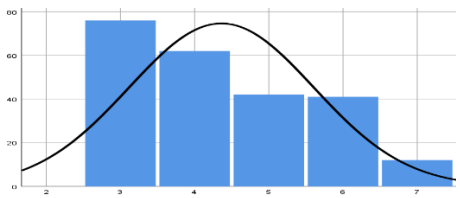
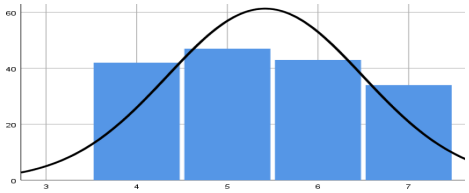
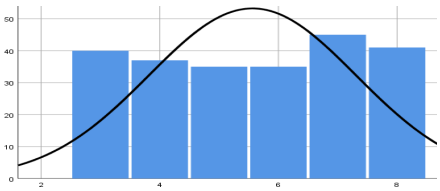
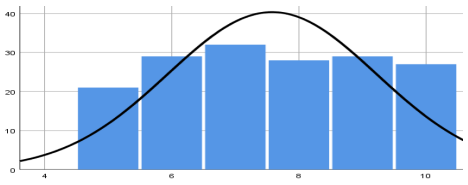
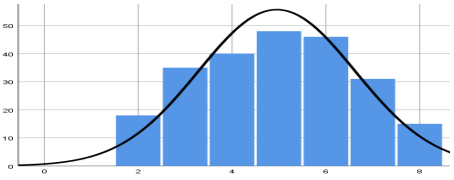
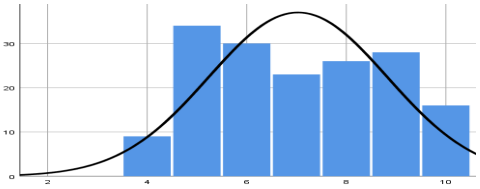
Variables	Sector	Activity	Gender	Age	Educational level
Work environment	0.636	0.052	0.053	0.276	0.636
Cohesion	0.062	0.298	0.857	0.573	0.062
Variety of work	0.768	0.464	0.286	0.236	0.768
Work schedule	0.448	0.980	0.000	0.220	0.448
Health care	0.960	0.777	0.030	0.128	0.960
Transportation	0.354	0.318	0.053	0.072	0.354
Working clothes	0.179	0.418	0.971	0.426	0.179

Table 6. (*Continued*)

According to the results, there are no significant differences in the variables related to the organizations' activities or respondents' age. Regarding the variable productive sector and educational level, a difference is only observed in the autonomy variable. Gender is the variable concerning which the largest number of variables are reported, in which significant differences are observed, including meaning and identification of the task, as well as autonomy. In the working conditions dimension, three of the variables show substantial differences: hygiene, aesthetics, and ergonomics. In the remuneration dimension, the variables sufficiency and correspondence are those in which differences are observed. In the teamwork dimension, no variable shows a different behavior between the two genders. In the well-being conditions dimension, the work schedule variable is the only one showing significant differences.

In line with the previous results, Table 7 presents a characterization of the variables, showing detailed significant differences for both genders.

Table 7. Behavior of the variables by gender.

Variables	Female	Male
Autonomy	Minimum: 3 Maximum: 7 Medium: 4.36 	Minimum: 4 Maximum: 7 Medium: 5.42 
Meaning	Minimum: 3 Maximum: 8 Medium: 5.56 	Minimum: 5 Maximum: 10 Medium: 7.48 
Identification	Minimum: 2 Máximo: 5 Medium: 4.95 	Minimum: 1 Maximum: 5 Medium: 7.03 

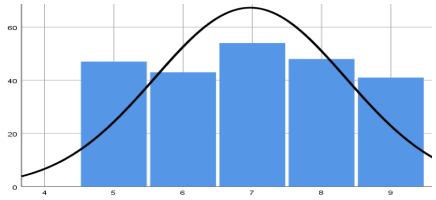
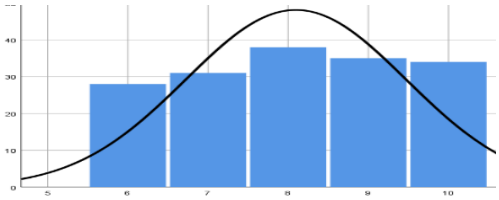
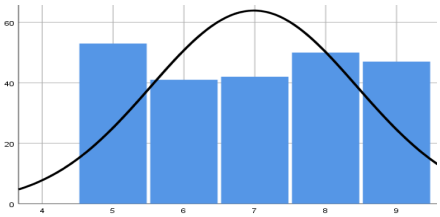
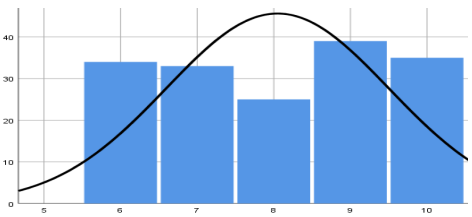
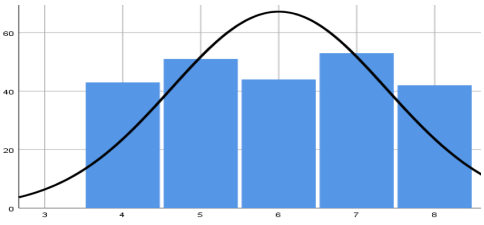
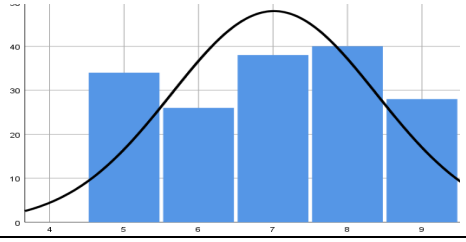
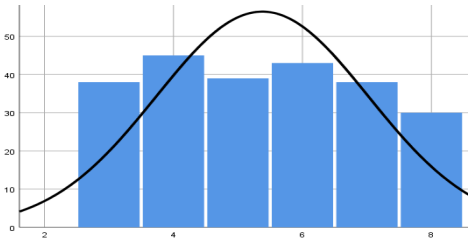
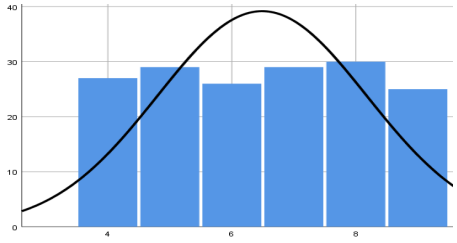
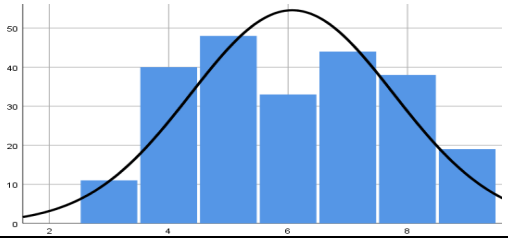
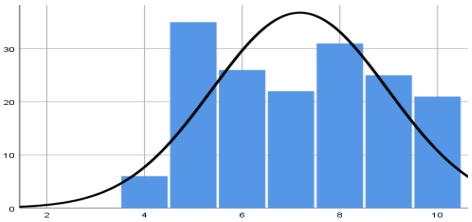
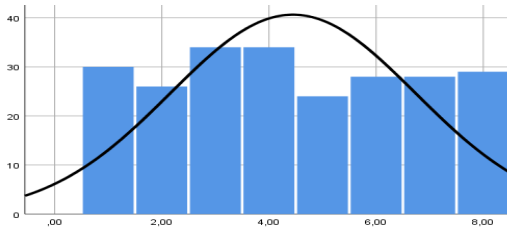
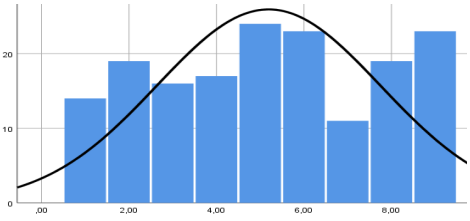
Variables	Female	Male
Hygiene	Minimum: 5 Maximum: 9 Medium: 6.97 	Minimum: 6 Maximum: 10 Medium:8.10 
Esthetic	Minimum: 5 Maximum: 9 Medium: 6.99 	Minimum: 6 Maximum: 10 Medium: 8.05 
Ergonomics	Minimum: 4 Máximo: 8 Medium: 6 	Minimum: 5 Maximum: 9 Medium: 7.01 
Sufficiency	Minimum: 3 Máximo: 8 Medium: 5.38 	Minimum: 4 Maximum: 9 Medium: 6.49 
Equity	Minimum: 3 Máximo: 9 Medium: 6.07 	Minimum: 4 Maximum: 10 Medium: 7.18 
Work schedule	Minimum: 1 Maximum: 8 Medium: 4.44 	Minimum: 1 Maximum: 9 Medium: 5.19 

Table 7. (*Continued*)

Figure 1 illustrates the summarized behavior of the variables, highlighting significant differences between the two genders.

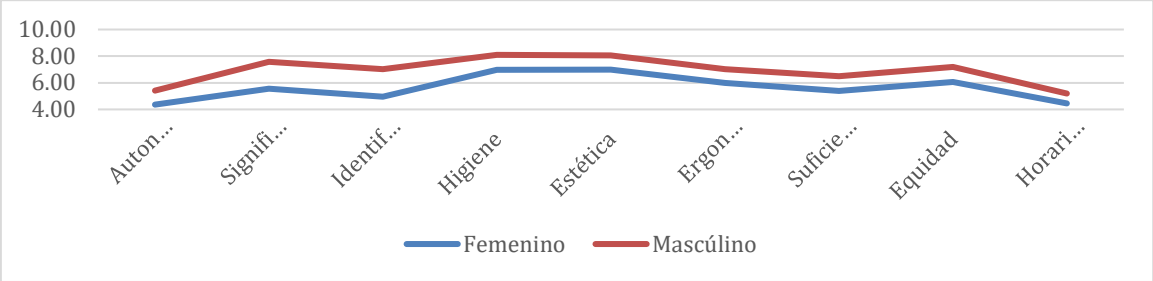


Figure 1. Representation of the differences between variables by gender.

Table 8a and **Table 8b** present the correlation coefficients between the variables. As can be seen, although the reported levels of significance are relatively high, the correlation coefficients are low in all cases. The variables "task meaning" and "autonomy" exhibit the highest correlations with other variables. On the other hand, the variables related to teamwork and well-being conditions exhibit the least correlation.

Table 8a. Correlation and significance of variables: autonomy, task meaning, identification, hygiene, esthetic, and ergonomics.

Variables	Autonomy	Task meaning	Identification	Hygiene	Esthetic	Ergonomics
Autonomy	1	0.228**/0.000	0.153**/0.002	0.185**/0.000	0.137**/0.006	0.114*/0.023
Task meaning	0.228**/0.000	1	0.279**/0.000	0.208**/0.000	0.175**/0.000	0.232**/0.000
Identification	0.153**/0.002	0.279**/0.000	1	.256**/.000	.209**/.000	0.204**/0.000
Hygiene	0.185**/0.000	0.208**/0.000	0.256**/0.000	1	0.076/0.132	0.108*/0.032
Esthetic	0.137**/0.006	0.175**/0.000	0.209**/0.000	0.075/0.132	1	0.203**/0.000
Ergonomics	0.114*/0.023	0.232**/0.000	0.204**/0.000	0.108*/0.032	0.203**/0.000	1
Sufficiency	0.131**/0.009	0.144**/0.004	0.229**/0.000	0.108*/0.031	0.082/0.101	0.082/0.102
Justice	0.010/0.837	(0.022/0.653)	0.011/0.834	0.038/0.442	0.0003/0.995	0.004/0.93
Equity	0.117*/0.019	0.142**/0.004	0.201**/0.000	0.122*/0.015	0.087/0.084	0.073/0.146
Correspondence	(0.076/0.129)	0.025/0.624	(0.000/0.994)	0.0754/0.132	0.024/0.633	0.013/0.803
Work schedule	0.096/0.055	0.0882/0.078	0.055/0.269	0.128*/0.011	0.045/0.373	0.034/0.492
Health care	(0.009/0.847)	0.028/0.574	0.076/0.125	0.026/0.594	(0.015/0.763)	(0.0175/0.726)

Note: *Variables that did not show significant correlation with other variables are excluded. **. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-sided). *. The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-sided).*

Table 8b. Correlation and significance of variables: sufficiency, justice, equity, correspondence, work schedule, and health care.

Variables	**Sufficiency**	**Justice**	**Equity**	**Correspondence**	**Work schedule**	**Health care**
Autonomy	0.131**/0.009	0.010/0.837	0.117*/0.019	0.589/0.002	0.096/0.055	(0.01/0.847)
Task meaning	0.144**/0.004	(0.022/0.653)	0.142**/0.004	0.025/0.624	0.088/0.078	0.0282/0.574
Identification	0.229**/0.000	0.010/0.834	0.201**/0.000	0.000	0.055/0.269	0.076/0.125
Hygiene	0.108*/0.031	0.038/0.442	0.122*/0.015	0.075/0.132	0.128*/0.011	0.027/0.594
Esthetic	0.082/0.101	(0.000/0.995)	0.087/0.084	0.023/0.633	0.044/0.373	(0.01/0.763)
Ergonomics	0.082/0.102	0.004/0.930	0.072/0.146	0.0125/0.803	0.034/0.492	(0.017/0.726)
Sufficiency	1	0.055/0.268	0.967**/0.000	(0.052/0.301)	(0.017/0.737)	(0.004/0.936)

Variables	Sufficiency	Justice	Equity	Correspondence	Work schedule	Health care
Justice	0.056/0.268	1	0.060/0.235	(0.133**/0.008)	0.024/0.641	(0.045/0.372)
Equity	0.967**/0.000	0.060/0.235	1	(0.038/0.447)	(0.015/0.765)	(0.0078/0.877)
Correspondence	(0.052/0.301)	(0.133*/0.008)	0.039/0.447	1	(0.000/0.990)	0.101*/0.044
Work schedule	(0.016/0.737)	0.023/0.641	(0.015/0.765)	(0.000/0.990)	1	0.060/0.238
Health care	(0.0040/0.936)	(0.044/372)	(0.007/0.877)	0.101*/0.044	0.059/0.238	1

Note: *Variables that did not show significant correlation with other variables are excluded. **. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-sided). *. The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-sided).*

7. Discussion

The significant gender-based differences observed in the variable autonomy, belonging to the work content dimension, are partially consistent with the findings of Han and Wang.[24] Several factors may explain this disparity, including socio-cultural norms within the home environment, where women have often been relegated to a subordinate role under the guidance of fathers or husbands. Such patterns may foster expectations for greater freedom in professional settings, while simultaneously limiting the autonomy that organizations grant to women. Similar dynamics, likely rooted in analogous socio-cultural mechanisms, were also found in the variables related to the meaning of the task and the identification of individual contributions to the final output.

Three variables within the working conditions dimensions — namely, aesthetics, hygiene, and ergonomics — also exhibited significant gender differences. The disparities in hygiene and aesthetics may reflect socially constructed gender roles and expectations, both in society and within the family, which influence perceptions of the work environment. In contrast, ergonomic differences could be associated with physiological and anatomical distinctions between genders, as well as the gendered allocation of work tasks. These results parallel earlier findings by Kirkcaldy et al.,[32] who emphasized the interaction between physical work requirements and worker characteristics.

In the remuneration dimension, significant differences were observed in sufficiency and equity, both of which were rated low by men and women, but with a more pronounced negative impact on women. The number of economic dependents may influence sufficiency, a factor often exacerbated for single mothers, despite legal requirements in Ecuador for both parents to contribute to child support. Equity, in turn, appears closely linked to sufficiency; a high correlation was observed between the two variables, suggesting that although conceptually distinct, respondents may perceive them as strongly interconnected. These results align with the work of Smith [27] and Buchanan,[28] who highlight the importance of perceived fairness in pay systems.

Within the well-being conditions dimension, significant gender differences were found in work schedule satisfaction. Qualitative responses suggest that this is primarily due to the additional unpaid workload many women assume in the home, a burden not equally shared by men. These findings are consistent with the evidence presented by Kirkcaldy et al.[32] and Costa and Silva,[31] reinforcing the notion that women disproportionately experience challenges in work–life balance.

These results align with broader evidence on the gendered division of paid and unpaid work, as well as work–family dynamics. Gender segregation in both spheres continues to place disproportionate domestic responsibilities on women, with downstream effects on their work evaluations and overall well-being.[43] In dual-earner couples, progress on non-work goals contributes to life satisfaction but unfolds differently by gender,[44] and women often report less spousal support for career demands than men.[45] Moreover, the

impact of workload on marital satisfaction is contingent on parental status and gender, underscoring that schedule strain is not uniformly experienced.[46] Together, these insights help explain the gender differences we observe in workplace well-being, especially in satisfaction with work schedules, in Ecuadorian startups.

Interestingly, no significant gender differences were observed in teamwork-related variables, despite previous studies reporting disparities in leadership acceptance[25] and in participation or communication processes.[29] This absence of difference may be linked to the smaller scale and flatter structures of startups, which can foster more egalitarian collaboration dynamics regardless of gender.

Finally, beyond gender, significant differences in autonomy were also identified according to educational level and the organization's productive sector. This finding resonates with Johnson and Johnson's research,[30] which suggests that autonomy can be influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by the structural and sectoral context of employment.

Overall, these findings reveal that gender differences in job satisfaction among Ecuadorian startups are most pronounced in variables related to autonomy, task meaning, identification, working conditions, remuneration sufficiency, equity, and work schedule. These disparities appear to be shaped by a combination of socio-cultural norms, organizational practices, and structural inequalities. From a social psychology perspective, the results highlight the importance of addressing both the perceptual and structural drivers of satisfaction, acknowledging that interventions to promote workplace equity must consider gendered expectations, domestic responsibilities, and sector-specific conditions.

8. Conclusions

This study provides empirical evidence of gender-based differences in job satisfaction within Ecuadorian startups, offering new insights into an underexplored entrepreneurial context. The analysis revealed that the most significant disparities occurred in work content (autonomy, task meaning, and task identification), working conditions (hygiene, aesthetics, and ergonomics), remuneration (sufficiency and equity), and well-being (work schedule and work-life balance). These differences are shaped by a combination of socio-cultural norms, unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities, and sector-specific practices that condition how entrepreneurs perceive and evaluate their work.

In contrast, no significant gender differences were observed in teamwork-related variables, suggesting that the collaborative, less hierarchical nature of startups may foster more equitable dynamics than traditional organizational structures. Additionally, autonomy was influenced not only by gender but also by educational level and production sector, highlighting the interaction between individual characteristics and structural factors in shaping job satisfaction.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings extend the literature on organizational behavior and social psychology by applying a multidimensional framework of job satisfaction to a Latin American entrepreneurial ecosystem. The study helps fill a research gap on startups, demonstrating that gendered experiences remain relevant even in flexible, innovative environments.

From a practical perspective, the results underscore the need for equity-oriented strategies in entrepreneurial settings. Initiatives such as transparent remuneration systems, ergonomic workplace design, and flexible scheduling can help reduce disparities and enhance employee satisfaction among both genders. By promoting inclusive practices, startups can strengthen both individual well-being and organizational sustainability, contributing to the broader goal of equitable and resilient economic development.

9. Future directions and limitations

Like all empirical studies, this research has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis was conducted exclusively among Ecuadorian startups, which constrains the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or economic contexts. Second, the cross-sectional design prevents inferences about causality and does not capture how satisfaction levels may change over time. Third, the study relied on self-reported measures, which may introduce response bias despite the anonymity and confidentiality guaranteed to participants.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a foundation for future research on gender and job satisfaction in entrepreneurial contexts. Several avenues merit exploration:

1) Cross-national comparisons: Extending the analysis to startups in other Latin American countries or emerging economies to identify similarities and divergences across contexts.
2) Longitudinal designs: Tracking entrepreneurs over time to observe how gender-based differences in job satisfaction evolve as startups mature or stabilize.
3) Mixed-method approaches: Complementing survey data with qualitative interviews or case studies to capture the lived experiences and nuanced perceptions of male and female entrepreneurs.
4) Intervention-based research: Evaluating the impact of equity-oriented strategies—such as flexible scheduling, transparent remuneration systems, and ergonomic improvements—on reducing disparities and enhancing satisfaction.

By pursuing these directions, future studies can deepen understanding of the intersection between gender, job satisfaction, and entrepreneurial dynamics, ultimately contributing to the design of more equitable and sustainable work environments in emerging economies.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, RPC and MMG; methodology, MMG, GGV, CVM and RPC; validation, MMG, RPC and ASR; formal analysis, CVM, ASR and RPC; investigation, MMG, ASR, RPC, GGV and RMV; data curation, RPC; writing—original draft preparation, MMG and CVM; writing—review and editing, RPC and ASR; visualization, ASR and RPC; supervision, RMV; project administration, GGV. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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