

UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

The role of corruption in the gender capital gap:

Perspectives from women entrepreneurs in Colombia

Felicia Granlund

Master's Thesis in Political Science, Autumn 2024

Department of Government, Uppsala University

Supervisor: Dolores Calvo

Word count: 17 939

Abstract

The gender capital gap explains that the opportunity for women entrepreneurs to access capital is limited compared to male counterparts. The reason is often connected to informal institutions, but the role of corruption remains underexplored. Emerging literature has focused on gendered forms of corruption as an obstacle for resources in the public sector, but failed to give equal attention to the private sector. Previous research linking corruption to entrepreneurship is primarily using firm-level, survey data, or missing a gendered-lens. This study contributes to these gaps by doing a qualitative case study of Colombia, as a way of exploring the intersection of corruption and women entrepreneurs' access to capital. In-depth interviews are conducted to understand their unique experiences and perceptions of corruption, including sexual corruption. The findings show that corruption plays a role in women entrepreneurs' access to business funding, impacting factors such as opportunity, financial capital and human/organizational capital. To what extent the funding process is limited is conditioned on household/family context and meso/macro environment. Sexual corruption in the business sector is perceived to be institutionalized, that is, oppressive and indirectly initiated by those with entrusted power. As a result, women entrepreneurs use coping mechanisms prescribed by informal institutions that differ depending on being an opportunity-driven or necessity-driven entrepreneur. Due to the complexity of studying corruption, especially with sensitive and institutionalized dimensions of sex, power and gender norms, further research on the relationship between corruption and gender capital gap is called upon.

Keywords: *Colombia; women entrepreneurs; corruption; sexual corruption; gender capital gap; business sector; feminist institutionalism; informal institutions; case study*

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I sincerely thank my thesis supervisor, Dolores Calvo, for her valuable guidance, critical eye and constant support throughout this project. Thank you to everyone I met in Colombia, whose unconditional assistance directly or indirectly was vital for completing this study. I especially appreciate the time and effort of all participants.

I am truly grateful for receiving the Minor Field Study grant during the fall of 2024 that allowed me to conduct field work in Colombia. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my friends and family who have contributed with irreplaceable encouragement and compassion.

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION 5

1.1. Purpose and research questions 5

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT 7

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 8

3.1. Feminist institutionalism 8

3.1.1. Intersectional perspective 10

3.2. Framework for women's entrepreneurship 10

3.3. Gender and corruption 11

3.4. Defining corruption and sexual corruption 13

4. PREVIOUS RESEARCH 15

4.1. What is the gender capital gap? 15

4.2. How is corruption experienced and perceived by women? 16

4.3. How can we understand corruption as an obstacle for access to resources? 18

4.4. What is the relationship between corruption and women entrepreneurs? 20

4.5. Summary of the research gap 21

5. METHODOLOGY 22

5.1. Sampling and recruitment 23

5.2. Interview guides and operationalization 24

5.3. Analytical tools and coding 25

5.4. Case selection 26

5.5. Ethical considerations 27

6. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS 28

6.1. Gendered institutions 28

6.2. Corruption as an obstacle for business funding 29

6.2.1. Opportunity (market) 29

6.2.2. Financial capital (money) 30

6.2.3. Human and organizational capital (management) 32

6.2.4. Motherhood (household/family context) 32

6.2.5. Meso/macro environment (expectation of society and cultural norms) 33

6.3. Coping mechanisms for women entrepreneurs 34

6.3.1. Strategies among opportunity-driven entrepreneurs 35

6.3.2. Strategies among necessity-driven entrepreneurs 36

6.4. Sexual corruption 37

6.4.1. Categorization of different forms of sexual corruption 38

6.4.2. Institutionalized sexual corruption 39

7. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION 40

7.1. Caveats and limitations 41

7.2. Contributions and cumulativeness 43

8. REFERENCES 45

9. APPENDIX 52

9.1. Interview guides 52

9.2. List of respondents 58

9.3. List of key informants 59

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is crucial for economic growth, since it is a conduit for knowledge spillover that drives innovation, job creation and market development (Audretsch, Keilbach and Lehmann, 2006). A positive environment for entrepreneurs can furthermore play a key role in poverty reduction (Klapper and Parker, 2011; Sonneborn and Burns, 2020). To create new ventures and promote entrepreneurship, capital is needed. Unfortunately, the opportunity for women entrepreneurs to access capital globally is limited compared to male counterparts – including credit, equity financing or raising debt. Hence, women entrepreneurs are underrepresented at all levels of the financial system (Liaplina and Sierra-Escalante, 2022). This generates a gap in the level of capital that entrepreneurs gain, dependent on gender, which makes up the so-called gender capital gap (Brush et al., 2018). This gap hinders the growth of women-led businesses and limits their possibilities for agency and economic empowerment (UN Women, 2024; Kali Pal, Piaget, and Zahidi, 2024). Despite women being, on average, more educated than men, only 25% of businesses are women-led, and just 7% of venture capital[1] are invested in them (GEM, 2023; Liaplina and Sierra-Escalante, 2022).

The gender capital gap is often attributed to informal institutions (Vossenberg, 2020; Mat et al., 2022). Corruption being an informal institution (Bjarnegård, 2013; Bjarnegård, 2018b), can therefore be a potential contributing factor to the gap. Similarly to how corruption can serve as an obstacle for women to access resources in the public sector (UNDP-SIWI, 2017), it might increase the barriers for women entrepreneurs that are seeking capital for funding their businesses[2]. Feminist institutionalism theorizes that institutions are masculine in their formulation (Murray and Bjarnegård, 2023) where the relationship between informal and formal institutions have gendered mechanisms (Kenny, 2014). Therefore, a greater focus on gendered forms of corruption, such as sexual corruption – defined as the abuse of entrusted power in exchange for sex (Bjarnegård et al., 2024) – could help to explain why opportunities for women entrepreneurs are limited (Aja-Eke et al., 2024).

1.1. Purpose and research questions

Previous research has highlighted gender-based prejudice, behavioral differences and lack of networks as factors limiting women entrepreneurs' access to business funding (Brush, de

[1] Financial support for early-stage businesses with growth potential, often including technical expertise and managerial guidance to help these businesses succeed.
[2] In this study, capital (with a reason for funding one's business) is used interchangeably with business funding.

Bruin and Welter, 2009; Sheriff, 2024; Liaplina and Sierra-Escalante, 2022; Sonneborn and Burns, 2020; Vossenberg, 2020), but the role of gendered forms of corruption remains underexplored. While some studies have linked corruption to business growth, these analyses are primarily conducted at the firm level and rely on survey data (Statnik, Vu and Weill, 2023; Galli, Mascia and Rossi, 2017; Aja-Eke et al., 2024). Others often overlook a gendered perspective entirely (Zhou and Peng, 2012; Dreher and Gassebner, 2013; Kaufmann and Wei, 2000). This is voicing the need for contextualized research to understand the relationship between corruption and the gender capital gap. Even though studies are highlighting that the perception of corruption is dependent on contexts, there is no clear consensus nor understanding of the effects that corruption has on women (Behuria, Bian and Lin, 2023; GCB, 2019; Stensöta and Wängnerud, 2018). Furthermore, discussions on corruption among women are often focused on the public and governmental sector but neglecting an emphasis on the business sector (Aja-Eke et al., 2024).

This thesis addresses the research gap by conducting a case study of Colombia, a country with high corruption levels (CPI, 2024) and simultaneously a high start-up rate for women (GEM, 2023), to increase empirical knowledge and contextualized nuances. The study is explorative and its purpose is to contribute with a better understanding of how corruption intersects with women entrepreneurs' access to capital. This will be achieved by exploring individual women's unique experiences of corruption, and sexual corruption, when seeking funding. The study identifies how women experience obstacles in the business sector the way they do, as well as the strategies women may put into practice to overcome those obstacles. This allows for a closer analysis of how distinct types of corruption impact women. The following research question guides the study:

- *In what ways does corruption impact women entrepreneurs' access to capital?*

To collect knowledge on the main research question, three sub-questions will be answered:

i. *To what extent is the process of gaining funding for women entrepreneurs limited due to different forms of gendered corruption in Colombia?*
ii. *How do women entrepreneurs in Colombia experience and perceive sexual corruption?*
iii. *What coping strategies do women entrepreneurs in Colombia put into practice to overcome the obstacles faced in the business sector?*

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Colombia is an upper-middle income country and one of the most promising economies in Latin America, with a positive environment for investment due to low cost of production, a big market, an adequate infrastructure, and stable economic reforms (Business Sweden, n.d.). Since 2013, the country has had a trade agreement with the EU and in 2020 Colombia became a part of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Colombia is sometimes argued as one of the best places in Latin America for women entrepreneurs due to a high labor force participation and high representation of women business leaders. However, despite a high proportion (53.4%) of entrepreneurs in Colombia being women (GEM, 2023), only 25% of businesses are women-owned (USAID, 2023). Latin America and the Caribbean have the highest entrepreneurial intention rates (33%), but the region does not have the highest proportion of established business-women (GEM, 2023), indicating that there exist hindrances for transforming women's intention into action. One claimed reason for this is the unequal access to capital dependent on gender biases, incommoding women to grow their start-ups into mainstream businesses (Sonneborn and Burns, 2020). This is showing a gender gap in financial inclusion, due to women having less access to capital than men.

Latin America and the Caribbean have the highest global start-up rates for women (21.2%), with Colombia ranking second at 26.1% (GEM, 2023). However, the gender gap is wider for established business ownership than in start-up activity. Furthermore, women have higher business exit-rates in relation to entry-rate. That more women exited a business than started a business, illustrate that establishing a stable business is particularly challenging for women, possibly due to social conditions and limited access to key resources (GEM, 2023).

The country places greater emphasis on informal communication, with a strong and consistent focus on networking and finding local collaboration partners (Business Sweden, n.d.). Besides, corruption is normalized in the country making it a part of the informal institutions. The Corruption Perceptions Index in Colombia is 40 out of 100[3], and ranks 87 out of 180 countries (CPI, 2024). Efforts to develop the anti-corruption reforms might have been a reason for slightly improved scores, leading to an improved business climate. Despite this, the country still has widespread problems with corruption (Business Sweden, n.d; CPI, 2024). 94% of people in Colombia consider government corruption to be a big problem in

[3] Perceived level of public sector corruption, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.

their country, which is one of the highest in the region, while 36% are perceiving business executives as corrupt. Additionally, surveys from 2019 in Latin America and the Caribbean, shows that over 50% of men as well as women considered sexual corruption as a common practice (Bauhr, Owasanoye and Pethericket, 2024), while in Colombia 16% has experienced sextortion or knows someone who has (GCB, 2019). However, it is important to notice that the rate is only based on experiences by citizens in the public sector and does not include the private sector. The percentage might therefore be underestimated. Further, it only covers sextortion, rather than all types of sexual corruption

Colombia has a history of a five decade long armed conflict that began in the 1960s between the state of Colombia, paramilitary groups, and guerrilla groups. During the conflicts, sexual violence against women was often used as a strategy of war (Corporación Sisma Mujer, 2017). This has left behind a legacy of gender-based violence, which is still a widespread problem where the perpetrators of the crimes are rarely held accountable (Human Right Watch, 2024). Even after the peace agreement in 2016, there is a continuum of abuse, and the normalization of sexual violence has permeated both the public and private spheres (Corporación Sisma Mujer 2017; Human Right Watch, 2024).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Feminist institutionalism

The probability of women entrepreneurs to access business funding is often argued to be dependent on structural differences as well as economic and country conditions (Pavlova and Gvetadze, 2023). These explanations draw on both institutional theory that highlights the norms, rules and beliefs which influence peoples' actions, and gender theory which emphasizes the necessity to analyze gender-divided perspectives. The linkage between the theories is the underlined conclusion that institutional mechanisms might constrain women's access to resources (Mat et al., 2022). It is therefore important to take socio-cultural structures and informal institutions into account when analyzing how corruption impacts women entrepreneurs' access to capital.

Feminist institutionalism is a perspective that effectively combines the two factors discussed above (Bjarnegård, 2018a). The theory argues that there is a male dominance within institutions. Due to this, the functions of the institutions are masculine in their designs with a gendered "logic of appropriateness" which sets the rule that masculine behavior is the norm, where those who cannot fulfill the masculine norm might be silenced for contravening the

expected behaviors of the institution (Murray and Bjarnegård, 2023). Specifically, it theorizes the dimensions and interplay between formal and informal institutions and how gendered causal mechanisms create a process of continuity, change and the role of power in it. It therefore highlights the importance of giving gender a significant role in institutional analysis, in particular how gendered institutional processes have gendered effects (Kenny, 2014). The gender-biased relationship between formal and informal institutions is so strong that it shapes operations of legal, bureaucratic, and political institutions. For example, gendered power imbalances that might exist within informal institutions can advance also to the formal institutions, causing women to be absent in e.g. lawmaking or governance. As a consequence, gender norms are embedded in both informal and formal institutions.

Feminist institutionalism within women entrepreneurship studies puts an emphasis on gendered informal institutions that impact women entrepreneurs' opportunities. It theorizes that women are underrepresented in the business sector due to the fact that it has always been associated with masculinity, where unique experiences of women are overlooked (Vossenberg, 2020). Without agency for women to be represented in the formation of institutions, it can result in a lack of understanding of their perspective – such as gendered challenges for capital or employed coping mechanisms. This might lead to crimes that men suffer to be salient, while not addressing the crimes commonly experienced by women, in particular those of sexually violent nature (Chappell, 2014). This means that even if new formal institutions e.g. anti-corruption policies or non-discriminatory reforms for entrepreneurship are created, they cannot fully protect women. The reason being that old informal institutions, permeated by gendered power asymmetries, overpower the new formal institutions, causing e.g. gendered forms of corruption – such as sexual corruption – to be less visible as a potential threat. Feminist institutionalism shifts the focus and its assumptions from a male to a female point of view. It therefore serves as a foundation for this study.

Based on the theoretical perspective discussed above, corruption can be seen as an informal institution, due to its linkage to the so-called "rules of the game". Informal institutions shape people's behavior in a way where certain actions are constrained and other actions are enabled (Bjarnegård, 2013). The institutionalization of corruption as a normalized practice in many contexts enables the corrupt action, by creating a belief that abuse of power directly or indirectly is "the way things are done around here". However, as seen above, how these actions (including corruption) are prescribed is connected to gender norms. Corruption, similarly to other informal practices, has gendered consequences and effects (Bjarnegård,

2018b). The phenomena can therefore be analyzed as a gendered informal institution that might impact the opportunities for women entrepreneurs to access business funding.

3.1.1. Intersectional perspective

While the approach of feminist institutionalism is seeking to identify gendered implications and conditions of formal and informal institutional rules, it has sometimes been criticized for mainly relying on the realm of western politics (Erikson, 2024). When failing to recognize a context-bounded rationality focused on the social context in which the institutions are formed (Mackay, Monro and Waylen, 2009), or historical tracing of inequality of power, resources and agency between actors (Waylen, 2009), it has implications for fully understanding contexts. Therefore, discussions have eroded regarding the need of advancing the feminist institutional approach with an intersectional perspective, where gender intersects with other social identities (Erikson, 2024). Similar to prescriptions about gender, identities such as race and class influence norms and intertwine with the logic of appropriateness, explained above. As a result, it can affect career progression and access to power (Grahn, 2024).

Intersectionality theory is arguing that individuals' experiences are not linked to one particular social group, but are created through belonging to multiple social groups (Crenshaw, 1989). The perspective highlights that power structures are prescribed not only based on gender, but on how social identities interact. Hence, applying intersectionality to feminist institutionalism is beneficial when studying institutional discourses (Sanders, 2022). Consequently, opportunities and constraints for women entrepreneurs arise from intersecting social positions of gender, race and socioeconomic class, motivating why social context should be used as a strategy when analyzing inequality within entrepreneurial activity (Martinez Dy and Aqwunobi, 2018). Studying intersectional deviation from the dominant logic of appropriateness is therefore needed to grasp the full picture of how corruption as an informal institution might impact women entrepreneurs' access to capital.

3.2. Framework for women's entrepreneurship

According to the 5M framework by Brush, de Bruin and Welter (2009), seen in figure 1, the possibility for venture creation[4] and business viability for women entrepreneurs is generally organized around five constructs – the three fundamental building blocks: market (opportunity), money (financial capital) and management (human and organizational capital), as well as two factors of social embeddedness, that make it more or less difficult to access

[4] The process of turning a new idea into a business that can succeed and attract investors.

the building blocks: motherhood (household/family context) and meso/macro environment (expectation of society and cultural norms). The three building blocks are crucial for both men and women entrepreneurs when wanting business funding, where they both might face challenges in accessing markets, money and management. However, it is argued that motherhood and the meso/macro environment have a larger impact on entrepreneurial activity of women. Male-biases in comparison with female-bias, "emerges not necessarily by intention but rather by omission" (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009). This is resulting in a more favorable environment for men-led businesses, while creating more barriers for women-led businesses when attempting to access the building blocks.

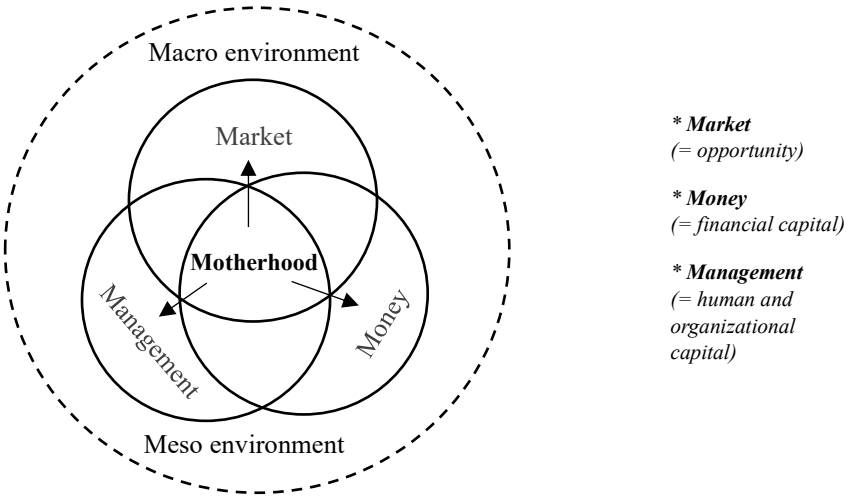


Figure 1: Framework of women's entrepreneurship (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009).

It is evident that women entrepreneurs in general face more challenges than their male counterparts, which limits the number of women-led businesses, e.g. limited access to key resources, support and business opportunities. This involves lack of access to markets, information barriers and less opportunities for training, as well as an unfriendly business environment that includes violence, discrimination, and burden of unpaid domestic responsibilities (GEM, 2023; Sheriff, 2024; Vossenberg, 2020). These challenges intensify one of the key obstacles that women entrepreneurs face, which is related to limited access to capital, especially the acquisition of venture capital (Brush et al., 2018).

3.3. Gender and corruption

Corruption is commonly defined as the abuse of entrusted power (or authority[5]) for private gain, which is measured as perception-based or experience-based (U4, n.d.). There is an

[5] Person with entrusted power or authority is used interchangeably in this study.

ongoing discussion whether women are less corrupt than men. On the one hand, it is observed that a high presence of women tends to correlate with low levels of corruption (Stensöta and Wängnerud, 2018). Likewise, a greater number of women in leadership roles in the business sector can contribute to increased transparency, internal controls, ethics, and anti-corruption compliance, which mean that agency for women-led business might foster fairer business practices and curb corruption (Behuria, Bian and Lin, 2023).

On the other hand, it is argued in Stensöta and Wängnerud (2018) that women are less corrupt, but not because they are inherently honest and less corrupt in their nature, but rather because of the circumstances with power imbalances that exclude women from corrupt opportunities. For example, a lack of resources to finance corrupt behavior, as well as a lack of access to patronage networks and clientelism, makes it harder for women to use corruption as a tool for advancement (Lindberg and Stensöta, 2018). Besides, the positions of entrusted power are mainly occupied by men, and hence it is often a male privilege to engage in corruption. In other words, prevailing gender norms might limit women's network and resources that often sustain corrupt practices (Bjarnegård et al., 2022). Additionally, the abuse of power is connected to gender norms of masculinity and femininity, where men in power in comparison with women, are more accepted to perform risk-taking behavior such as corruption to show dominance (Bjarnegård et al., 2022).

It is also identified that women are more likely than men to perform unpaid labor additionally to paid work, often leading to higher risks for poverty (Behuria, Bian and Lin, 2023). Consequently, women often are in more vulnerable situations and turning to corruption might be more likely. Furthermore, women-owned businesses are found to be smaller in less profitable sectors, e.g. informal sector. This is suggested to increase the risk for corruption, due to not being protected under labor laws and therefore unlikely to make official complaints (Behuria, Bian and Lin, 2023). Contrary to the previous statements, women might therefore be more corrupt, or at least more prone to experience corruption even if done involuntarily. The important change is the narrative of why and how someone is incited to the act of corruption. It is not always a question of what gender is inherently more corrupt, but rather how gendered hierarchies and gendered power dynamics make women and men, more or less likely to experience corrupt practices, as well as engage in it differently.

Furthermore, gendered institutions might impact the type of currency demanded or expected. Gender norms of masculinity and femininity signal what is expected from both men and

women in a certain context, emphasizing the idea that men are entitled to sex as well as exacerbating women's lack of resources. As a result, women have an increased likelihood of being in situations where sex constitutes the transactional currency rather than money, material benefits, favors-for-favors or services (Bjarnegård et al., 2022). This might disprove the arguments that women rarely engage in corruption, and rather shift the focus to the lack of understanding of the type of corruption that women experience (Bjarnegård et al., 2022).

3.4. Defining corruption and sexual corruption

As previously mentioned, corruption is commonly defined as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, which is measured as perception-based or experience-based (U4, n.d.). The phenomena can take many forms, but as far as the scope of this thesis is concerned, the most relevant forms of corruption are bribery, extortion, favoritism, and sexual corruption.

Bribery refers to an exchange of money, service, or other valuables to influence the judgment or conduct of a person in a position of entrusted power (U4, n.d.). A bribe can also be paid after the fact – for example as regular installments to officials issuing permits to street vendors as long as they are allowed to operate – but is in these cases called a kickback. It is by some perspectives understood as having two sets of incentives that contribute to bribery. That is, including both a demand-side (soliciting or receiving illicit benefits) and a supply-side (offering or providing the illicit benefit) to the act (U4, n.d.). Bribery might therefore be argued to be a transaction between two parties, where both engage in the corrupt practice as equal participants, despite who is defined as a recipient of the illicit benefit. As previously discussed, gendered power dynamics in society might place women in a position where they are in a greater need of receiving services or benefits, while men to a greater extent are in a position of authority (Lindberg and Stensöta, 2018). This might cause women to be more prone to be on the supply-side as service-seekers[6] e.g. as an active briber (giving the bribe) rather than a passive briber (receiving the bribe), in order to receive the services or benefits. Important to note though, is that active and passive bribery are not always related to who initiated the exchange (U4, n.d).

However, to define women as an active engager can be problematized, since it would indicate that the transaction is equal. The power dynamics that build the corrupt practice where the supply-side is usually in need of something, while the demand-side has an entrusted authority,

[6] Service-seeker is someone who is approaching a person in a position of entrusted power in order to receive a service or benefit, not dependent on if a corrupt transaction is occurring., e.g. a women entrepreneur seeking business funding.

makes it harder to justify that the transaction is mutually beneficial for both parties. Arguably, the focus should instead be perpetrator-based, where the responsibility lies with the person with the entrusted authority to act in a just and fair manner. Furthermore, it is not always a matter of illicit benefits that are being offered or provided in a corrupt transaction, but rather benefits or services that the service-seeker is entitled to. This brings us to extortion – the practice of obtaining money, favors, services, or valuables through threats or force (U4, n.d.). Extortion refers to cases where a person with entrusted power demands corrupt payments in exchange for not withholding benefits or services that the service-seeker is rightfully entitled to, rather than granting special advantages.

The forms of corruption discussed in the sections above, also include cases where there is an abuse of entrusted power in exchange for sex rather than e.g. money – sexual corruption. This gendered form of corruption can happen regardless of who took the initiative and is dependent on three criteria; an abuse of authority, a service or benefit is conditioned on a favor, and the currency of transaction is a sexual favor (Bjarnegård et al., 2024). Further, sexual corruption as a wider concept consists of four dimensions of abuse of entrusted power. (See figure 2). It involves both opportunistic transactions (sex in exchange for more than the service-seeker is entitled to) and oppressive transactions (threatens to withhold a service or benefit that the service-seeker is entitled to, if sex is not exchanged). The specific type of sexual corruption – sextortion (sexual extortion) – is focused only on the oppressive manner. There is also a dimension of initiative to sexual corruption, which is either direct (directly initiated by the authority) or indirect (offered by the service-seeker but indirectly initiated by the authority) (Bjarnegård et al., 2024).

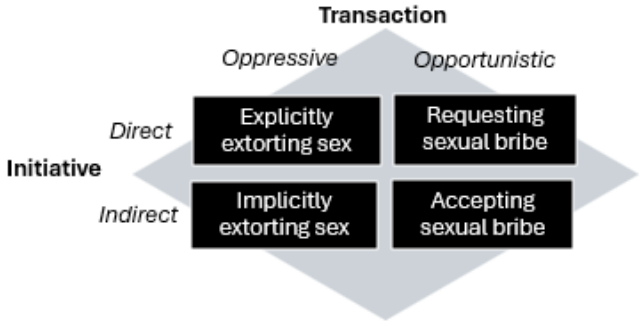


Figure 2: Categorization of sexual corruption (Bjarnegård et al., 2024).

The questions of women as an active engager discussed above can also be problematized in relation to sexual corruption, since the transactional aspect of sexual corruption can be

misinterpreted as reciprocity and consent rather than coercion or abuse (Bjarnegård et al., 2022). The responsibility should lie with the person on the demand-side, not the person that is willing to pay with their body due to their vulnerability. Even if a sexual favor was explicitly offered in exchange for benefits or services, rather than demanded by a person with the power to grant or withhold those services or benefits (Eldén et al., 2020), the transaction should not be claimed as equal. The existence of consent arguably ceases to exist when there is an unequal power (Mahtani, 2024). The gendered informal institutions constructing the behaviors and norms around sex, creates a belief that women's sexual activity is shameful. The gendered informal institutions can on the other hand contribute to the belief that men's sexual activity is legitimized and normalized. These gender norms contribute to sexual corruption by creating a perception that women are behaving immorally while men are just doing what men do, signaling that the responsibility is on the woman (Bjarnegård et al., 2022). These norms shape the context of sexual corruption, where corrupt exchanges involving sex are influenced by different socially constructed rules for women and men. As an example, in contexts where sexual corruption or sextortion is more commonly acknowledged by the public, such as Tanzania or Nigeria, the terms used for the phenomena are often defined as including consent, or having a tone of blaming the women and implying that the sexual corruption is initiated by the service-seeker rather than the one in power (Bauhr, Owasanoye, and Pethericket, 2024; Eldén et al., 2020).

Favoritism has a slightly different set up and can at times be defined as a form of corruption if it is being used as an informal exploitative system of exchanges (resources, services, favors). The concept is focused on the biased and unfair distribution of resources based on personal preference, regardless of qualification (U4, n.d). For it to include a corruption dimension, an authority needs to abuse the entrusted power by using his/her control inequitably to distribute the resources to personal networks. By violating the boundaries of legitimate influence, the authority might fail to provide adequate resources, and hence exclude certain members of society from a fair chance of assistance (U4, n.d).

4. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

4.1. What is the gender capital gap?

Arguably, a determinant of a start-up's success in accessing capital is the gender of the entrepreneur who is seeking the funding (Sonneborn and Burns, 2020). When there is an inequality in the capital received, dependent on that gender, it creates a gap between men and

women. Gender inequalities in the access to capital persist across several sectors and all types of financing (e.g. private investment funds, bank loans, debt offerings and angle investment[7], or venture capital such as equity financing and private credit), where women are underrepresented at all levels of the financial systems and women-led businesses have less capital. This makes up the gender capital gap (Liaplina and Sierra-Escalante, 2022).

The obstacle for women entrepreneurs to access capital incorporates raising debt, equity, credit or supplying to global value chains, which is often claimed to be constructed due to gender-based prejudice, behavioral differences and lack of networks among women entrepreneurs (Sheriff, 2024; Liaplina and Sierra-Escalante, 2022; Sonneborn and Burns, 2020; Vossenberg, 2020). As an example, the global credit gap for women-owned small and medium sized enterprises is estimated to be USD 1.7 trillion and the rate of nonperforming loans among women borrowers is 53% lower than among male clients (Liaplina and Sierra-Escalante, 2022). Male-led startups that participated in accelerators[8] also receive 2.6 times more equity finance than women-led counterparts (Sonneborn and Burns, 2020).

The hindrances identified are usually rooted in social norms and customary practices. This creates gender biases where women's entrepreneurial abilities are questioned. As a result, they might have less opportunities in reaching their full potential (Behuria, Bian, and Lin, 2023). These social norms lead to consequences that might exacerbate the hindrances even more, resulting in women entrepreneurs facing systemic barriers that their male counterparts do not e.g. limited time and skills (Sheriff, 2024). It is also important to note, that women are overrepresented among the smallest businesses and more likely to be solopreneurs compared to men – particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean and especially in highly competitive low-margin markets (GEM, 2023). Lager companies, often run by men, have more financial options available, e.g. traditional bank loans, which can impact the ability for women entrepreneurs to access capital (Sheriff, 2024).

4.2. How is corruption experienced and perceived by women?

Corruption, as an abuse of entrusted power for private gain, does not only weaken democracy and hamper economic development but further magnifies inequality (Transparency International, n.d.). In order to understand how the structural differences intersect with the manifestation of corruption, it is important to let the gendered dimensions permeate the

[7] Individual or informal investor who provides capital to a business, usually in exchange for equity.
[8] Entities designed to train and support the development of start-ups to become investment ready. These programs can be funded by private actors or public sector e.g. governments and organizations.

analysis of corruption. It is argued that women are disproportionately affected by some forms of corruption, but there is a lack of data on how (GCB, 2019).

Petty corruption is the everyday type of abuse of entrusted power when someone is trying to access basic goods or services (Transparency International, n.d.). Women are claimed to suffer disproportionately from petty corruption due to already existing power imbalances between men and women, which causes women to be the least well-equipped to resist solicitation (Behuria, Bian and Lin, 2023). Hence, women entrepreneurs are more susceptible to extortion and discrimination, as well as more prone to encounter demands for bribes when seeking e.g. business loans (Galli, Mascia and Rossi, 2017). Additionally, case studies show that women are often victims of "double bribery", where they are not only obligated to give monetary transactions but also provide sexual favors as an extra payment (Stahl, 2021). Hence, women who fall into corruption in order to access services are often exploited further.

The lack of legal awareness among some women can increase their risk of physical and sexual harassment (Behuria, Bian and Lin, 2023). In a corrupt setting, this might increase the risk for sexual corruption, where women often are the victims. Due to the misconception of treating sexual corruption as a type of sexual harassment, some researchers highlight the need of viewing sex as a currency in corrupt transactions (Bjarnegård et al., 2024). However, all forms of sexual corruption, from sexual bribery to sextortion, have an element of exploitation since the transaction is not equal. Especially since it might generate the same kind of shame that rape and sexual violence victims experience. Sexual corruption can therefore be placed in the intersection between corruption and gender-based violence (Elden et al., 2020).

Gendered structures in society impact how women and men engage in corruption. Previous research indicates that women are more at risk of sexual forms of corruption than men (Aja-Eke et al., 2024). Sextortion, and sexual corruption more broadly[9], should therefore be seen as an example of a gendered type of corruption. In post-conflict Colombia, sextortion is institutionalized across sectors and at various levels. Despite this, the concept of sextortion is not very well known or used in the country, making the situation complex. The invisibilities in combination with the normalization often makes sextortion self-perpetuating (Eldén et al., 2020). Additionally, case studies for example from Malawi, illustrate that the risk for women to be subjected to sexual corruption is higher in informal network settings. This becomes highly relevant when analyzing corruption among women entrepreneurs, since businesses

[9] In this thesis, when talking about sexual corruption I am referring to the definition by Bjarnegård et al. 2024 that includes all forms of sexual abuse of power, while sextortion equals solely sexual extortion.

usually take place in such informal networks. Hence, informal corrupt networks have a significant role in magnifying gender-specific inequalities (Stahl, 2021). Furthermore, since women entrepreneurs are often excluded from male-dominated business networks, the issue of sexual corruption and gendered violence in the business sector is rarely addressed and limits the possibilities for reporting incidents (Stahl, 2021).

In Colombia, corruption has been so institutionalized that it creates scenarios referred to as "if no money then sex". Women are often the ones expected to pay with their bodies, what men might be able to pay with money (Eldén et al., 2020), making this type of experience with corruption highly gendered. At the same time, gender norms in society have a pivotal role in the formation of corruption and bring sexual corruption into existence. Therefore, the mechanisms of how women experience and perceive corruption work in a continuous circle. (See figure 3). Consequently, women not only suffer risks of corruption to a greater extent but also experience and perceive it differently (Behuria, Bian and Lin, 2023). In some cases, gender also affects how corruption is reported and acted upon, where corruption reported by men is more likely to result in action (GCB, 2019).

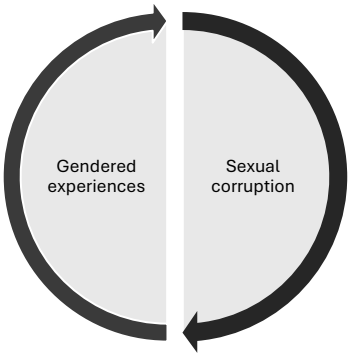


Figure 3: Mechanism of women's perception and experiences of corruption (by author).

4.3. How can we understand corruption as an obstacle for access to resources?

Corruption can be distinguished as either "need corruption" (corruption is needed to gain access to fair treatment) or "greed corruption" (corruption in order to gain special illicit advantages). Need corruption therefore has bigger implications for gaining access to public services that one is entitled to, and to avoid transgression of government power (Bauhr, 2017). When comparing women and men, it is argued that women are more likely to perceive that corruption is driven by need rather than greed. In particular, socialization and marginalization theory explain that women are more exposed to need corruption due to a

greater care-taking responsibility and exclusion from the forms of corruption that are dependent on embeddedness in collusive networks (Bauhr and Charron, 2020). Studies often position corruption as a blockage for resources, where women are particularly vulnerable. Since women are often dependent on public services, they are therefore more vulnerable to certain types of bribery, e.g. for health services and public-school education (GCB, 2019). Corruption is argued to exacerbate power imbalances. As seen above, it might further restrict women's access to public resources and decision-making (Behuria, Bian and Lin, 2023).

When focusing on sexual corruption specifically, previous research has recognized it as a major obstacle in the public sector e.g. judiciary systems, universities, employment and housing processes (Bjarnegård et al. 2024). An example of a case is the water sector in Bogotá, where it has been identified that male water utility staff are sometimes demanding sexual favors from women in exchange for water services (UNDP-SIWI, 2017). Within the migration sector, both academic journals and policy reports have voiced the grave situation of sexual corruption, for example that women traveling alone are specifically vulnerable to engage in sexual corruption as a survival strategy when crossing borders (Merkle, Reinold and Siegel, 2017; Amnesty International, 2016). There have also been occurrences of other situations, underlining the demands for sex in exchange for services such as educational grades or favors in courts (IAWJ, 2012), as well as cases where diplomats have abused their position in order to demand sex in exchange for visas (Towns, 2015). In Nigeria, sexual corruption in universities has received a wide range of slang terms, due to it being such a normalized practice (Bauhr, Owasanoye and Pethericket, 2024). Hence, studies show that the abuse is not only done by governmental officers such as police and border authorities, but also people with entrusted power from a wide range of sectors, e.g. teachers and aid workers.

As seen, the identified patterns of corruption, especially sexual corruption, are often found in the public sector. However, similar studies in the private sectors such as businesses are scarce (Aja-Eke and Gillanders, 2024). One of the few studies, highlights that gendered forms of corruption, such as sextortion, double bribery or other types of sexual corruption, are common practices for business-women in Malawi when accessing informal networks. These networks are essential for amplifying resources, both financial and human. Nevertheless, this study is based on a small sample in one particular context, indicating that more research and policy attention on this topic is urgently needed (Stahl, 2021). However, in relation to how evident sexual corruption is in the process of accessing services in the public sector, it can be assumed that the same will apply also in financial sectors, for example when accessing

capital. One difference, however, is that many of the public services are vital. Even if some necessity-driven entrepreneurs are operating businesses as a way of making a living, other opportunity-driven[10] entrepreneurs might be deterred from accepting financial resources or starting a business completely (Aja-Eke et al., 2024) when they realize it will be at the expense of sexual transactions. As a result, sexual corruption might enhance the gender capital gap and minimize the existence of women-led businesses. Unfortunately, due to a lack of research about sexual corruption in the private sector, there is no clear policy recognition of e.g. sextortion as a major obstacle for women entrepreneurs (Behuria, Bian and Lin, 2023).

4.4. What is the relationship between corruption and women entrepreneurs?

When comparing previous studies that have analyzed the corruption-entrepreneurs link, there is a contradiction whether corruption helps or limits entrepreneurs. The so-called "grease the wheel" effect of corruption (Zhou and Peng, 2012) arguably helps entrepreneurs by eliminating bureaucratic burdens (Dreher and Gassebner, 2013). Contradictory, corruption is claimed to create barriers by increasing costs and distorting competition (Kaufmann and Wei, 1999) that might "sand the wheel" of entrepreneurship (Dutta and Sobel, 2016). Unfortunately, these studies often fail to consider the gendered aspects of corruption.

Recently, the relationship between corruption and women entrepreneurs have received more focus. Previous research identifies a challenging environment for women entrepreneurs to obtain sufficient knowledge and access to networks (Sheriff, 2024), which are essential for navigating corrupt environments, making it harder to secure capital (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009). Hence, women-led businesses suffer more from corruption compared to men-led, due to having less management experience and thus less experience in dealing with corruption, which can discourage them from seeking credit (Statnik, Vu and Weill, 2023).

Studies focusing specifically on how gendered forms of corruption, e.g. sexual corruption, intersect with women entrepreneurs are limited. Although, researchers such as Aja-Eke and Gillanders (2024) have expanded the field by examining how women entrepreneurs view sextortion and how they protect themselves against it. They claim that sextortion is a rampant occurrence which is facilitated by corrupt informal networks. Furthermore, the emerging literature shows that sexual corruption is likely to deter women from starting businesses. Aja-

[10] Opportunity-driven entrepreneurs have other job options but participate in entrepreneurship to increase their income. Necessity-driven entrepreneurs have entrepreneurship as their main income.

Eke et al. (2024) for example, argues that the rate of sextortion is associated with reductions in early-stage entrepreneurial activities. This trend can only be found among women, where there is no association between sextortion and male entrepreneurial activity. Furthermore, the impact of sextortion on women's entrepreneurial activity is higher among opportunity-driven entrepreneurs than necessity-driven entrepreneurs (Aja-Eke et al., 2024). The field is broadened by the contribution of Gillanders (2024), showing that sextortion has an impact on economic decision-making and its outcomes. The research illustrates that sextortion conducted by corrupt officials in charge of registering, licensing, and overseeing small businesses serves as an obstacle for entrepreneurship – especially for women. He concludes, however, that sextortion does not aggravate women's perceptions of their own ability to start a business by having poorer skills and competencies, but rather a deterrent from availing economic opportunities (Gillanders, 2024).

4.5. Summary of the research gap

The purpose of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of how corruption intersects with women entrepreneurs' access to capital. In summary, previous research has conflicting results when it comes to the correlation between corruption and entrepreneurship. This calls for more contextualized knowledge. Notably, there is not a clear understanding of how gendered power relations play a role in shaping the impact that corruption has on women. The effects of gendered informal and formal institutions need more attention when analyzing how women interact with corrupt practices. Therefore, more gender-focused research within the field of corruption is needed to fully grasp the picture. While there is plenty of previous research on corruption within politics, or corruption as a blockage of resources, it is highly concentrated on the public sector. A greater emphasis on the business sector is therefore beneficial to distinguish what conclusions can be drawn on the role that corruption has in accessing capital. However, to fully understand women's obstacles for funding in the business sector, both private and public actors need to be considered.

The newly emerging studies on the impact that gendered forms of corruption have on women entrepreneurs is mostly quantitative based on survey data. As a result, more qualitative work is needed to provide a deeper understanding of the behaviors and institutions at play. Due to the lack of understanding and sensitive nature of gendered forms of corruption, and sexual corruption in particular, qualitative research can explore the topic in a more strategic and nuanced way by bringing in new dimensions and tangible experiences. Since previous research shows that the concept of sexual corruption is not fully defined nor agreed upon in

the case of Colombia, a qualitative single-case analysis can better visualize the mechanisms within institutions and help to operationalize in a way that survey data could not. By conducting in-depth interviews in the field, this study is striving to contribute to these gaps.

5. METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the research questions and fulfill the purpose of understanding how corruption intersects with women entrepreneurs' access to capital, a single-case study method has been used to draw out within-case evidence through field research (Gerring, 2007). When establishing causal relationships, it is important to identify causal mechanisms, rather than only relying on measurements of causal effects. Therefore, the chosen approach can effectively contribute to a deeper understanding of the research problem (George and Bennett, 2005). To qualitatively study the chosen case – Colombia – in-depth semi-structured interviews have been conducted as this method effectively captures how people perceive their world (Esaiasson et al., 2017). Interviews were done with both respondents (women entrepreneurs) and key informants (experts), and lasted around 45 – 60 minutes. The data collection focused on gaining firsthand information and a deeper understanding of how and why women entrepreneurs experience obstacles the way they do, as well as the strategies that women may put into practice to overcome those obstacles. This also opened up the possibility of analyzing how distinct types of corruption impact women. This illustrates ambitions of an explorative nature that are more closely related to introducing new ideas and generating potential hypotheses, rather than testing existing theories (Gerring, 2007).

To gather the most comprehensive picture of the situation for women entrepreneurs as possible, a semi-structured format for the interviews were employed. This approach allowed for guided discussion, while giving the interviewees the flexibility to share their unique experiences (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2013). Interviews were recorded and conducted mainly face-to-face, but a few were also done online through Zoom[11]. Around half the amount of the interviews were done in English, and the other half were done in Spanish[12] with an interpreter helping with the translation in exchange for a payment. For the most part it was the same interpreter, however two interviews were done with another interpreter[13] due to the region where the interviews took place.

[11] 8 online, 16 face-to-face.
[12] 20 respondents (12 Spanish, 8 English), 4 key informants (1 Spanish, 3 English).
[13] Women. Fluent in Spanish/English. Experience with interpretation of sensitive topics. One native Colombian (11 interviews) and one residing in Colombia since 5 years back but extensive experience with the region (2 interviews).

5.1. Sampling and recruitment

Using strategic collection (Esaiasson et al., 2017) for respondents, this study tried to identify both successful and aspiring but "unsuccessful" women entrepreneurs, as well as opportunity-driven and necessity-driven entrepreneurs, capturing the nuances within this group (women entrepreneurs) rather than comparing genders. Interviews were conducted in different geographical regions[14] until saturation was reached. The first interview was treated as a pilot interview to evaluate and potentially refine the interview guide. If a specific subgroup was expected to potentially contradict the results after reaching saturation e.g. a specific age group or business sector, additional interviews were conducted to increase the variation. This approach resulted in a total of 20 respondent interviews.[15] This was a suitable amount to in a timely manner finish the process of compiling the research data. Recruitment was done by spontaneous interview requests through LinkedIn and email to women entrepreneurs that were identified. This strengthened mainly the representation of successful entrepreneurs. Additionally, my network in the country including the interpreters, helped to identify key actors, provide contextualized knowledge, and forwarded me to potential interviewees. This increased the variety by also including less-successful entrepreneurs. Thereafter I used snowball sampling and expanded my network through Facebook groups for women entrepreneurs and expats in Colombia.

Furthermore, interviews were conducted with four experts as key informants, prior to the respondent interviews. Key informants were recruited based on centrality and perspective (Esaiasson et al., 2017).[16] There were two purposes for the informant interviews. Firstly, to gain background information and refine the approach. This allowed for both an increased understanding of contextual and thematic insight, but also served as a preparation for what type of questions should be asked during the respondent interviews. Secondly, to elaborate on the experiences and perceptions shared by the women entrepreneurs. While the main material used for the foundation of the analysis is the respondent interviews, the data gathered during the informant interviews also assists in enhancing the understanding of the results.

[14] Bogotá, Medellín, Caribbean coast (Santa Marta, Barranquilla).
[15] See appendix for list of respondents.
[16] See appendix for list of key informants.

5.2. Interview guides and operationalization

Two different interview guides[17] were designed. One for the respondents (women entrepreneurs) and one for the key informants (experts). For respondents, the interview guide was strategically organized (Esaiasson et al., 2017) and made up of four sections with different objectives: 1) introductory questions to ease the interviewee into the conversation and determine if they fit the selection criteria, 2) questions focused on the main themes of the study, 3) scenario-based questions to make it easier to talk about sexual corruption, and 4) closing questions to end the interview on a positive note, clarify any issues and leave room for adding something if needed. For key informants, the interview guide was simpler and addressed the context in general, rather than individual experiences. The interviews were conducted less structured, and the follow-up questions were adapted to their expertise. For all interviewees, questions for clarification were asked to ensure that the answers were understood in the same way as the interviewees intended. Complicated wordings were minimized, and important concepts were explained if needed. To improve the comfortability that could increase the likelihood of receiving sincere and detailed answers, the interviews started with introductory questions before entering more personal topics.

The operationalization was done inductively with open questions, exploring both 1) personal experiences with gender norms and corrupt institutions, including perceptions of different forms of gendered corruption e.g. petty corruption and sexual corruption, and 2) how they view corruption as an obstacle for access to funding, the potential impact on their businesses and their coping mechanisms for these hindrances. If the experience-based topics were too sensitive or resulted in a lack of detailed answers, perception-based questions about corruption among women entrepreneurs in general were used as a back-up. One part of the interview focused exclusively on sexual corruption. Due to its fragility and complexity to study, the interviewees were given scenarios that described distinct types of sexual corruption. Respondents were then asked whether or not they recognized these situations, or something similar, rather than imposing a need for them to express their firsthand experiences. The scenario-based questions were based on the four dimensions of abuse of entrusted authority within sexual corruption by Bjarnegård et al. (2024), presented in the theoretical framework and visualized in figure 2. These different scenarios were used to cover diverse types of sexual corruption that the respondents might have experienced or perceived.

[17] See appendix for interview guides.

5.3. Analytical tools and coding

Detailed notes were taken during the interviews to make it possible to quickly identify patterns and distinguish if saturation had been reached, or if some areas needed more data generation to be able to draw conclusions. The notes were later expanded by transcribing the interviews, in order to draw out direct quotes. For compiling and gathering all data, Google Pinpoint was used. This service allowed to use a program for transcribing the interviews, as well as label, categorize, and search within existing documents. It also facilitated the process of listening to the audio recordings to manually correct the transcriptions.

The material gathered from the interviews was thematically analyzed using color coding to inductively find themes that could be divided into categories, such as "barriers to funding," "corrupt practices encountered," "gender-specific challenges" and "coping mechanisms". A second analysis was then done to point out common patterns within the identified themes, in correlation with the theoretical framework. These patterns were more detailed and directly related to the research question, as well as allowing for finding differences and similarities across all interviewees. Even if the analysis was done inductively, the theoretical framework was used as a way of systematically recognizing and understanding the themes and patterns. The 5M framework was used as a base for identifying to what extent corruption serves as an obstacle for fundamental building blocks for entrepreneurship, which are all important for obtaining venture creation as business funding – opportunity (market), money (financial capital) and management (human and organizational capital). The dimensions of social embeddedness – motherhood (household/family context) and meso/macro environment (expectation of society and cultural norms) – were used to understand in what ways corruption impacts access to capital. Feminist institutionalism served as an overlaying perspective throughout the analysis as a way of distinguishing gendered institutions, gender norms and gendered power asymmetries, but also intersectional identities. The literature on gender and corruption assisted in recognizing gendered effects of corruption, access or exclusion from corruption, as well as differencing need and greed corruption.

When thematically coding the material, elements of narrative analysis were used, especially when analyzing sexual corruption. Due to the sensitivity of this type of corruption, as well as its stigma and lack of awareness, it became important to more deeply interpret the experiences and perceptions that the interviewees addressed. Even if they might not call it sexual corruption, but rather defined it as sexual abuse or harassment, I tried to distinguish

elements of sexual corruption based on the definitions used in the theoretical framework – the three criteria of the concept and the four dimensions of abuse of entrusted power.

5.4. Case selection

For this study, fieldwork was conducted in Colombia for eight weeks during October – December 2024. As discussed in the background section, Colombia has an allegedly positive climate for women entrepreneurs but simultaneously a normalized existence of corruption (GEM, 2023; Business Sweden, n.d; CPI, 2024; GCB, 2019), Furthermore, the post-conflict setting might increase the likeliness of sexual corruption (Corporación Sisma Mujer, 2017; Human Right Watch, 2024), where sexual violence and corruption appear to be interlinked (Mahtani, 2024). This is profiling the country as a relevant most-likely case to study when analyzing the intersect between corruption and women entrepreneurs' access to capital, particularly when using a gendered-lens. Even though this study does not strive for testing theories, this case is likely to fulfill the dimensions of theoretical interest (Gerring, 2007), that is, the propositions that corruption might impact the gender capital gap. Additionally, Colombia has a prominent level of start-ups and high entrepreneurial intention rates, but simultaneously also high exit-rates and low levels of established businesses (GEM, 2023; Sonneborn and Burns, 2020). It is therefore interesting to use Colombia as a case when trying to identify the factors influencing this relationship. In other words, this is a critical case when investigating gendered types of corruption as a potential hypothesis that can later be systematically tested with a larger number of cases (Flyvbjerg, 2011).

Furthermore, the paradox of a having a high level of start-ups but also high exit-rates serves as a motivation for focusing the research on small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), in order to capture the experiences of the entrepreneurs that are in the initial stage of finding funding to grow their business, or recently have been in that stage. Women tend to be solopreneurs to a bigger extent than men (GEM, 2023), which further strengthens the motivation for emphasizing the case on smaller firms. To capture the gendered forms of corruption and highlight the vulnerability among smaller businesses in regard to gaining funding, an emphasis is put on petty corruption rather than grand corruption.[18]

The scope of the study gathers the unique experiences among women entrepreneurs on an individual-level rather than a business-level, which is compelling due to the likelihood of

[18] Grand corruption is the abuse of high-level power that benefits the few at the expense of the many resulting in widespread harm to society. Petty corruption is the everyday abuse of entrusted power during interactions with citizens who are trying to access basic goods or services (Transparency International, n.d.).

generating representation of entrepreneurs that have both been successful and unsuccessful in accessing funding. Conducting field work in a heterogeneous country and across a variety of sectors might enhance the possibility of capturing the experiences of both opportunity-driven and necessity-driven entrepreneurs. Therefore, the study focuses on regions with entrepreneurial interest such as Bogotá (55% of start-ups) and Medellín (25% of start-ups) (GSE, 2024), but also to the area around Cartagena along the Caribbean cost, due to the high estimated amount of women entrepreneurs, especially migrant women (Pro Mujer, n.d.).

5.5. Ethical considerations

First of all, the study made efforts in balancing ethical principles while also ensuring reliability and transparency (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2013). Asking about corruption, and especially about sexual corruption, can be triggering. Since corruption is illegal, it was needed to consider the possibility that the interviewees are put in situations where they are vulnerable if they choose to disclose information of delicate nature. It could potentially result in consequences for their future if they get exposed. Therefore, it was made clear in the beginning of the interview that disclosing names of people should be avoided when talking about corruption. To ensure their comfort, a lot of effort was put into creating a safe space where they felt no pressure to share firsthand experiences, and without exposing them to possible emotional damage. The interviewees' rights were emphasized, including participating freely, anonymously and having the option to skip questions or answer them off the record. The study only refers to the material generated from the interviewees in the analysis if it does not in any way reveal their identity.

Prior to starting the interviews, the project was briefly explained without giving away too much information that could influence their responses. Verbal consent was used to respect the dubiously of signing forms in a post-conflict context when potentially talking about criminal acts. To not violate their integrity, a disclaimer was given before entering sensitive topics and ensured that they were comfortable proceeding. Furthermore, I confirmed that the interviews were conducted in a calm location where both me and the interviewees felt safe but made it a priority to choose a location that was convenient for them, e.g. their office.

To make sure that they participated out of free will, without any incentives of feeling coerced, a pay was not offered for the interview. This was particularly important due to the vulnerability of the interview topic. I did not want to put them in a situation where they would share their story despite potentially having reservations, only because I paid them to.

However, I did offer to compensate them for travel costs and time, in case they needed to transport themselves to participate or lost out on work opportunities. While no ethical permit was required, a thank you message was sent out after the interviews with information about the project and contact details for follow-up questions or withdrawal from the study. In case it was needed and consented, contact information to local organizations that provide support for women in vulnerable situations was also included, e.g. Sisma Mujer.

6. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Below, the findings gathered from the data are presented based on identified patterns. The analysis is focused on answering the three sub-questions: 6.1) To what extent is the process of gaining funding for women entrepreneurs limited due to different forms of gendered corruption in Colombia?, 6.2) What coping strategies do women entrepreneurs in Colombia put into practice to overcome the obstacles faced?, and 6.3) How do women entrepreneurs in Colombia experience and perceive sexual corruption? Based on this information, the main research question – in what ways does corruption impact women entrepreneurs' access to capital? – is answered in section 7) concluding discussion.

6.1. Gendered institutions

To understand the findings, in relation to how corruption impacts women entrepreneurs' access to capital, it is important to identify the informal and formal institutions at play.

An overwhelming majority of the interviewees referred to structures of machismo to be present in the country, causing the experiences for women entrepreneurs to be challenging. This is an example of gender norms causing certain behaviors to be "manly" e.g. honor, aggression, power and sexism. As a result, gendered power imbalances are created where – according to key informants – certain actions are "reserved" for men while others are deemed justified due to the manly responsibility, impacting women negatively e.g. demanding respect and asserting dominance over women. As explained by feminist institutionalism, gender norms such as machismo cause gender biases that permeate the informal institutions – both corruption resulting in gendered effects and conditions, as well as the function of expectations where women entrepreneurs might be silenced for contravening the designated behavior.

Despite the existence of machismo, most of the respondents at first considered there to be equal opportunities and a positive environment for women entrepreneurs in Colombia. Obstacles such as financing, connections, and information were perceived to occur for all

entrepreneurs not dependent on gender. However, throughout the interviews it became clear that women entrepreneurs to a bigger extent suffer from low credit history due to less employment experiences, increased domestic responsibilities impacting the workload, they feel excluded from networks, and had their authority and skills questioned. When adding corruption as a factor, the preexisting gendered obstacles influence in what ways corruption impacts women entrepreneurs' access to capital. Both respondents and key informants explain that petty corruption serves as a common hindrance in the business sector, including stages of registering, funding, operating and growing one's enterprise, where women many times are more vulnerable. This illustrates that gender norms of machismo that saturate the informal institutions, have also continued to the formal institutions, e.g. bureaucracy for entrepreneurship, employment opportunities, and venture creation.

The findings from the interviews show that formal and informal institutions are gendered, and therefore impact in what ways corruption intersects with the identified experiences and perceptions. Hence, gender institutions – according to feminist institutionalism – will be embedded in the analysis throughout this study.

6.2. Corruption as an obstacle for business funding

According to the findings, corruption serves as an obstacle for business funding in all fundamental building blocks – opportunity, financial capital and human/organizational capital. In what ways corruption impacts these fundamental building blocks are dependent on household/family context and expectation of society/cultural norms, which are constituted by the gendered institution and intersectionality. The likeliness of corruption for women entrepreneurs when accessing capital is argued to be dependent on what type of actor, where the trust towards public actors seemingly is lower compared to private actors.

6.2.1. Opportunity (market)

First of all, many respondents stated that the external funding and support that exist are not enough. It is *"a way of surviving, not for expanding"(R10)*[19]. As a result, the opportunity for capital as a way of growing one's business is limited, whereas corruption might be a way to speed up the process (R7; R9).

It is perceived to be easier to network for finance for men, where gender biases might cause women entrepreneurs to sometimes be faced with a condescending attitude by actors that

[19] Respondents are referred to as R and their respective number from the list of interviewees in the appendix.

provide funding (R1; R10; R16). One interviewee explained that there were often degrading jokes towards women in the sector. She continues by explaining that when she attended meetings for investments – even with governmental agencies – she was often accused of flirting when she was only networking. She was then told that she needed to meet privately instead, since that was *"the way it works"* for business-women (R2). Hence, corruption might be a way to hinder women from entering or succeeding in the business world. As seen, gender biases and the underrepresentation of women entrepreneurs, might cause a lack of recognition for sexism that can negatively impact the opportunity for capital.

If a woman entrepreneur decides to work against the corrupt system, she might face more challenges, and risks threats to her or her family. Or at times – as a consequence of machismo – sexist menaces of spreading fake porn videos to destroy her reputation (R1; R4). Due to this, there were occurrences where women felt pressured to step aside and leave her spot to a man, even if it was her own business (R2). In these situations, corruption has a gendered effect, since it serves as a way for men to assert dominance over women but also has dimensions of sexual corruption. Consequently, corruption reinforces patriarchal structures and limits women's possibilities for growing their businesses.

6.2.2. Financial capital (money)

Some women entrepreneurs raised concerns of having to fight harder for respect. This connects to gendered power hierarchies causing women to be seen as inferior. For example, it was perceived that the possibilities for women to gain finance or support are lower if going to an investment meeting alone, compared to if a man is also present (R2; R10). At the same time, it was a perception to be higher risks for women to be approached by manipulation and corrupt requests when alone (R13). For example, one interviewee said:

> *In some sectors it is harder for women to be respected […] I was not taken seriously and my authority was not enough for men […] they tried to manipulate me in order to take advantage of me […] They will think that you are vulnerable and pressure you until they can manipulate you. (R16)*

When it comes to private actors for financial capital, such as banks, it was stated that there sometimes were discrimination or extra requirements for women if being within a specific age-range associated with the prime time for having children (R2). This connects to the household/family context constituted by the 5M framework – embedded by gender norms explained by feminist institutionalism – that can create a more challenging environment for

women entrepreneurs to advance in the business sector. It was perceived that women entrepreneurs sometimes struggle to receive loans or investments based on lower possibilities of gathering a strong credit history compared to men, indicating that they have to turn to alternative options for financial capital. In these situations, key informants claim that there is less regulation in the private sector that can increase the risk of corruption. However, many respondents argue that the process of being accepted or not for credit from a financial institution is not related to corruption. While respondents often said that seeking a bank loan to grow the business was not an alternative – due to high interest rates and strict requirements – these actors were not perceived as corrupt.

Despite the common perception that private actors, especially banks, are considered "safe" from corruption, one respondent claimed that *"even if they will not ask for it directly [upfront at the meeting for a loan] they might want to discuss it in another setting"(R2).* This indicates that the person in power might want to meet informally as a way of initiating corrupt practices rather than at their professional office. There were also instances of corrupt third-party actors, who in reality were representatives from the authority, resulting in women entrepreneurs that are dependent on them for reaching capital to be exploited further. According to one respondent:

> *I could not find credit or get an appointment with the bank to discuss an investment […] I got contacted by a man who said he was an expert in finding funding. He arranged a meeting with the bank, and I had prepared information and statistics […] We did not meet at the bank but instead a café […] I became suspicious because he told me to stay quiet and it was very informal. After only 3 minutes I was approved for the money […] After the meeting he asked for a cut of the money […] I then found out that he was working for the bank all along. (R15)*

When discussing governmental agencies or organizations that provide business funding, support systems or accelerating programs, they were perceived as more corrupt. It was claimed that bribes or extra payments were sometimes needed despite already being accepted for funding. One respondent said that *"there is always another requirement […] giving a cut will be faster"(R7).* As seen, extra requirements would arise after already establishing that the requirements are met, where corruption can occur to speed up the process. Unfortunately, women were perceived to be the most vulnerable group for this type of corruption, due to a lack of respect and less options (R7; R10; R20) caused by gendered power asymmetries.

6.2.3. Human and organizational capital (management)

Another common theme that was expressed is lack of access to information and networks, which impacts the possibilities for human/organizational capital. While key informants argued that there were a wide variety of funds and programs supporting women entrepreneurs, there was a perception among respondents that there is not enough open information regarding available support systems and funding opportunities which limits the accessibility. Interestingly, this lack of accessibility was often connected to corrupt networks. It was expressed that certain actors use favoritism or other corrupt ways, to favor some people with information that benefits them during the process of business funding (R2; R4; R6; R7; R10; R11; R16; R17; R19; R20). One respondent stated:

> *I have friends that work for an NGO that gives support [to entrepreneurs][…] They have money allocated to pay to certain people […] without checking for requirements. Even if they have documents missing they will claim that the application is complete […] The informal contacts will influence the process. (R15)*

Consequently, it is harder for entrepreneurs outside of these corrupt networks to access the support and a lot of the interviewees felt that the funding programs were not reachable. As one respondent put it*, "for funding, it is not about what you do, but who you know"(R7).* Some interviewees said that the programs were not for them or that they already knew there was no possibility for them to access it (R6; R7; R9; R10; R11; R19). One respondent even questioned: *"Support for women [entrepreneurs]? That is not real […] They are not really supporting but rather just want something [in return]"(R14).* Key informants explain that women often lack knowledge due to limited resources. Hence, women entrepreneurs are usually systematically excluded from these corrupt networks. It is therefore a gendered form of corruption, since gender biases have perpetuated the informal institution (corruption), causing gendered power asymmetries to limit women entrepreneurs' access to corruption as a tool. As one respondent said*, "even in corruption there is machismo"(R10),* which is in line with previous research on gender and corruption.

6.2.4. Motherhood (household/family context)

Due to gender norms, the household/family context is constituted by an emphasis on "motherhood", signaling that women have an increased responsibility of caring for the family and household. Nearly all women entrepreneurs report experiencing an increased workload, largely due to greater domestic responsibilities compared to men. One interviewee explained

that *"being a woman is being a mom"(R4).* Motherhood being a core value for women entrepreneurs, does not only come from an internal pressure, but also an external pressure rooting from e.g. machismo. This setting consists of a pressure for women entrepreneurs to exit the business environment and instead pursue being a mother, causing challenges for accessing capital, in relation to all fundamental entrepreneurial building blocks – opportunity, financial capital and human/organizational capital. The respondent continued to say that when she was trying to access business funding; "*I felt constantly pressured to go home to my kids instead"(R4).*

As a result, women entrepreneurs feel a need to sacrifice a lot and have less time available to increase their experiences in the business sector, and hence less opportunities to handle corrupt situations. The increased responsibility for the household puts women in a vulnerable position, where it was mentioned that there was an increased urgency for some women entrepreneurs to grow the business as a way of supporting their children (R1; R10; R11, R12; R18; R20). This might increase the vulnerability of engaging in corruption to gain a business advantage (R10). As one respondent said, *"if women need it [corruption], they will go for it" (R14).* This is in line with previous research, arguing that women are prone to be on the supply-side of corruption and more exposed to need corruption rather than greed-based.

6.2.5. Meso/macro environment (expectation of society and cultural norms)

The meso/macro environment impacts in what ways corruption intersects with women entrepreneurs' access to capital. During the interviews, it became clear that to what extent corruption serves as an obstacle for access to funding is dependent on social context, since the expectations of society and cultural norms are not similar for all women entrepreneurs. This increases the importance of taking an intersectional perspective during the analysis.

Different social layers in society cause socioeconomically less fortunate people to have less opportunities for accessing business funding, resulting in a situation where the vulnerability for corruption increases (R2; R11; R14; R17). Interviewees explain that Colombian big cities are divided into different "estratos sociales", described as a social stratification system. The neighborhoods in Bogotá, for example, are ranked on a scale from one to six causing a divide between the higher social classes and the poor. It is evident in the findings that those in lower social districts face more obstacles and judgement when trying to get capital, e.g. harder to get a bank loan due to credit scores, and therefore more incentives for turning to corruption as an alternative plan (R1; R14; R19).

Similarly, respondents perceive certain neighborhoods in Medellín to be more corrupt which impacts the operating processes (R4; R13; R14; R17; R18). For example, it was expressed that in some districts it is common that kickbacks are needed to be paid regularly to a variety of actors, e.g. police to allow the businesses to stay open, to governmental agencies that provide permits for food/health, or to corrupt networks built up by gangs in exchange for being provided with "security" (R9; R13; R14; R16). If these kickbacks are not paid, it might result in threats, destruction of property or extra fees. A respondent gave an example: *"They came to the shop and shut down all the power for no reason. I had to pay for them to turn it back on"(R14).* Another told a story about her friend who was running a company but was asked to pay kickbacks in exchange for being allowed to operate their company. The friend refused, but due to her information being public, she had to leave the country (R17). This indirectly impacts the funding opportunities, since a good credit score, movement in accounts, or showing proof of being sustainable for a few years is required to access capital.

Additionally, it is perceived that factors such as being young, single mother, migrant, indigenous or rural habitant increase the likelihood of exposure to corruption as an obstacle to an already challenging process of growing one's business (R1; R6; R9; R11; R12; R16; R17). For example, along the Caribbean coast, there is a big amount of migrants, especially from Venezuela. According to the interviewees, migrant workers might be more prone for necessity-driven entrepreneurship, which can result in a greater need for capital to support themselves (R10; R12; R18).

6.3. Coping mechanisms for women entrepreneurs

Obstacles with obtaining funding or maneuvering corruption have caused women entrepreneurs to adopt certain coping mechanisms. These coping strategies apparently are consequences of the gendered informal institutions that are causing opportunities and conditions for women to access capital to be challenged. Three strategies that are common for all women entrepreneurs are identified: 1) collaboration with male connections, 2) using middle-men, or 3) internal funding.

Firstly, it was a common strategy to collaborate with a male colleague, family or friend, due to the perception that the possibilities for support increase if a man is present – this is caused by gender biases as explained by feminist institutionalism. For example, as respondent 17 said: *"If you are young without a man present it will lead to less opportunities […] Having support of a man in meetings makes it easier to set boundaries and be respected."*

Furthermore, one respondent claimed to have married as a way to increase her financial stability (R11), others explained that a male partner is an advantage (R2; R4; R10; R12; R15), while several respondents stated that they had their husband, boyfriend or dad apply for bank loans for them (R4; R13; R15; R16). It is also stated that being alone can increase the vulnerability, impacting women negatively since they more often than men are solopreneurs. One respondents explained:

> *At first I had the mentality of doing everything by myself, but I realized that it is going to be too much. It is important to have a partner to support with insight […] It is different for men […] Financially it is easier. (R14)*

Secondly, another strategy is to contact a so-called "middle-man", with a task to help the entrepreneur to negotiate during the funding process. It is said that these third-parties are essential to use if you do not have an extensive network of your own that allows you to access support systems (R15; R18). Unfortunately, these third-party actors can take advantage of women, increasing the exploitation further. At times, as seen in the section above regarding financial capital, it can also involve instances of corruption.

Thirdly, many women entrepreneurs chose to turn to internal funding, such as personal savings, bootstrapping[20] or borrowing money from friends and family, rather than trying to access external funding. As one respondent said, *"I am running away from all external business funding. It is better to just invest my personal savings"(R13).* Two main reasons for this were addressed; 1) a common perception that loans from financial institutions are too expensive, with high interest rates and strict credit history requirements. 2) a common perception that governmental programs are too complicated and do not work effectively, due to a lack of transparency and corruption resulting in limited accessibility. However, if the women entrepreneur is not economically fortunate to have personal savings or support from family or friends, they have to rely on external funding and potentially turn to corruption for obtaining capital.

6.3.1. Strategies among opportunity-driven entrepreneurs

Intersectionality and previous literature making a distinction between need and greed corruption, theorizing that not all women entrepreneurs have the same possibilities. This can impact the coping mechanisms that they are forced to relate to. For example, the possibility

[20] Bootstrapping is the self-financing process of starting a business with little capital, without attracting outside investment or minimal external capital.

to self-finance is highly dependent on being an opportunity-driven entrepreneur with another stable income. Therefore, it is relevant to make a distinction between opportunity-driven entrepreneurs and necessity-driven entrepreneurs when studying coping mechanisms. This is in line with previous research. For women entrepreneurs who are opportunity-driven, one specific strategy was recognized in the findings: 1) not growing/staying opportunity-driven.

Opportunity-driven respondents often showed a lack of motivation due to the difficulties in obtaining funding, where avoiding corrupt settings seems to be a deterrent from growing businesses. Key informants described this as self-censoring, meaning that there is a lack of interest in becoming successful or visible.

> *If you have a need and are faced with a bribe you say yes, because you have to and feel forced. Therefore, it is better to stay small than to grow and have pressure. Because they can pressure you continuously until you break. One person can destroy you. (R4)*

As seen in the quote above, the challenges could increase the lack of intention to grow the business and make yourself visible – or at least a hesitation to become too financially dependent on your entrepreneurship – in order to avoid paying e.g. kickbacks. The strategy would therefore not only be to not grow, but to stay opportunity-driven. However, it is important to note that the opportunity-driven respondents to a higher extent were identified as aspiring rather than successful, which also can have impacted their motivation.

6.3.2. Strategies among necessity-driven entrepreneurs

Necessity-driven women entrepreneurs, employed a couple of other strategies; 1) surrender to corruption, or 2) drop-by-drop loans

Firstly, it was more common to express that women entrepreneurs have no other option than to say yes to corruption. As one woman entrepreneur said: "*Strategy? The only strategy is to give in to it [the corruption]. There is no option there"(R9).* Out of fear, people feel obligated to surrender to corruption. Even in situations where sex becomes the currency, e.g. women entrepreneurs that are highly dependent on their necessity-driven entrepreneurship, it was expressed that the only strategy was to *"offer themselves for money"(R13).*

Secondly, many necessity-driven women entrepreneurs expressed that it is common to be solicited by unofficial investors such as gangs to receive business loans with a so called "drop-by-drop" set-up, especially if they do not have access to bank credit or traditional loans (R1; R13; R14; R17; R19). Drop-by-drop refers to borrowing small sums of money at high

interest rates from informal networks, traditionally built up by mafias. However, according to respondents this is very dangerous and *"might get you killed"(R19).*

Another respondent, who is opportunity-driven, expressed that she preferred to operate small as a way to avoid the informal loans and payments that the necessity-driven entrepreneurs often are forced to turn to (R4). This example effectively illustrates the coping mechanisms that both necessity-driven and opportunity-driven entrepreneurs are adopting.

6.4. Sexual corruption

When analyzing the answers focusing on sexual corruption, patterns of victim blaming and stigma associated with sexual activities were identified, indicating that the phenomenon of sexual corruption might be misunderstood and underreported. For example, it was common to receive responses similar to: "*It depends on the woman. Even if they are a feminist on the street they might still feel attracted to use men […] It is normal that men are very forward, it is up to you to leave if you do not like it"(R8),* or "*Some women work for it, while others take the easy way out"(R13).* In contrast to literature linking gender and corruption and theories about gendered institutions, which explain gendered power hierarchies between men and women, it was often expressed by respondents that *"she [the woman entrepreneur] has the power […] she has the option of engaging in sexual corruption or not"(R12).* This therefore needs to be taken into consideration when analyzing the responses. According to key informants sexual corruption occurs in all sectors. Due to a post-conflict setting as well as waves of migration, women are often exposed to sexual forms of corruption. Unfortunately, key informants express that there is a lack of open spaces for expression where feelings of being suppressed and restrained make women stay quiet.

Even though there is a belief that corruption that involves money transactions rather than sexual favors is a bigger obstacle, there are occurrences of sexual corruption among women entrepreneurs. When asked about sexual corruption some interviewees stated to have personal experience or know someone who has, while others had a perception about it. Despite fewer respondents claiming to have firsthand experiences of sexual corruption when trying to access business funding, a majority of respondents perceive that some dimension of sexual corruption is a common practice. In order to categorize how women entrepreneurs experience and perceive sexual corruption, questions regarding the transaction and the initiative were asked. In relation to the operationalized scenarios based on the theoretical

framework seen in figure 2, respondents were asked how common they believe the scenarios are to happen. Their responses varied from common, could happen, to not common.

6.4.1. Categorization of different forms of sexual corruption

When analyzing the responses it is perceived that the category where the authority with power **accepts sex in exchange for fair treatment (implicitly extorting sex)**, is the most common form of sexual corruption. *"It is common for this situation to happen, especially as a way of getting credit"* one respondent said (R11), while another interviewee shared a story about an experience with a public entity:

> *Business permits are hard to get. I really needed it to be accepted, but he said we needed to talk about it at his house. I dressed up nicely, because I thought maybe he wanted to have a drink, but he ended up wanting more. (R9)*

As seen in the quote, the institutionalization of sexual corruption causes the women to feel obligated to dress up and meet the actor in an unofficial setting as a way of receiving fair treatment, however, it also includes dimensions of direct request for sexual favors. Even if a transaction might at first be implicitly and indirectly initiated by the one in power, it can transform into a more explicit and direct demand, illustrating the vulnerability that many women entrepreneurs face. As respondent 16 expressed: *"manipulation and corruption often happen simultaneously here. Even if it does not always include sex directly, it can be other types of sexual manipulation."*

When focusing specifically on **direct requests of sex in exchange for fair treatment (explicitly extorting sex),** it seems to be a practice that could happen. It was often perceived that *"they [authorities] have a problem with boundaries and personal space […] it is a cultural thing I think […] They might be touchy which makes it difficult to draw a line in professional settings"(R7).* For example, two women entrepreneurs claimed to frequently have been asked to go on dates in relation to funding meetings (R2; R6), while another said that she avoids governmental agencies for support at all costs since her mother once applied for business funding and was asked for sexual favors (R4). Unfortunately, it was an expressed fear that *"even if you agree to do it [the sexual favor], you can still be rejected [for receiving the fair treatment]"(R9).*

Throughout the interviews, it also became clear that this type of sexual corruption did not only occur when applying for loans, credit or investments, but also in other business stages that could impact the possibilities for capital at a later stage. One respondent expressed that

a woman entrepreneur that she knows agreed to have regular sexual relationships with a gang member in exchange for not having to pay kickbacks to keep her business operating (R13). Even though this is not directly corruption due to a lack of abuse of power by an authority, it does give an idea of the business setting in some neighborhoods which can directly impact women's possibilities for accessing capital as business funding.

Similarly to the previous scenarios, **accepting sex in exchange for unfair advantages (accepting sexual bribe),** seems to be a practice that is likely to happen, but relative to how big the "need" is for the women entrepreneur. It is a common belief that women's bodies are a way to create good relationships that might increase the likelihood of getting a business advantage – an advantage that might be a make or break when trying to access funding. *"Women use their bodies to deal with it"* as one respondent expressed (R13). Another interviewee explained that "*women – especially in male dominated settings such as the business sector – are trained. She knows that she might have an advantage if she is being nice or gives favors"(R5).*

Respondents expressed that this type of sexual corruption is frequent among vulnerable groups, e.g. migrants, who might not fulfill all the requirements for the support (R5; R14; R10; R16). Meaning that the support is not something you are entitled to, but an unfair advantage that is need-based. Another interviewee explained that in these situations, sexual corruption is common, since it will be faster for the need-based woman to get to the point of receiving the business funding that they otherwise would not be able to receive (R9).

On the contrary to the other categories, it is perceived that **requests for sex in exchange for unfair advantages (requesting sexual bribe)** is the least common, referring to when an authority with power requests sex in exchange for unfair advantages. When asking about this type of sexual corruption, they often referred to informal networks rather than an authority that can abuse his (or her) entrusted power. One respondent said: "*I do not think it is common to happen with these actors, but I know it can happen with unofficial investors"(R4).*

6.4.2. Institutionalized sexual corruption

Implicitly extorting sex occurs when the transaction is oppressive and the initiative is indirect from those with entrusted power. When this happens, sexual corruption is defined as institutionalized. Out of all forms of sexual corruption it is apparent – based on the findings above – that institutionalized sexual corruption is the most referred to by respondents.

Based on what was stated by the interviewees, the context often involves oppressive transactions rather than opportunistic transactions. Comparatively to engaging in sexual corruption as a way to receive an unfair advantage for the business, respondents believe that it is more common to turn to corruption when seeing no other options to receive the funding entitled to. For example, it was stated that *"it is more common to happen [sexual corruption], when [a woman entrepreneur is] trying to get a fair opportunity at all"(R13).* The only time sexual corruption for unfair advantage was perceived to occur frequently, was when the woman entrepreneur was especially vulnerable and when she did not meet the basic requirements at all. This is signaling an increased likelihood of need corruption rather than greed corruption among women entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, sexual corruption is perceived to more often be introduced by the women entrepreneur, meaning that the transaction indirectly is initiated by the one with entrusted power. For example, one respondent summarized that *"women propose and men accept"(R8).* This means that sexual corruption is normalized in a way where the authority does not even need to be the one directly initiating the transaction. The authority only needs to accept sex in exchange for fair treatment, due to the woman entrepreneur feeling an obligation to be the one offering sexual favors. Respondents claim that the reason for this is due to the common knowledge that sex can be used as a strategy to negotiate and speed up the process, but it was perceived to be too risky for the person in power to take direct initiative to sexual corruption.

7. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The overarching research question guiding this paper was to explore in what ways corruption impacts women entrepreneurs' access to capital. Colombia was used as a qualitative most-likely case, where field work in the country was performed. By conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with 20 women entrepreneurs, elaborated by information from four key informants, the research question could be answered according to their perspectives. Given this approach, relevant data regarding the sub-questions could be generated; to what extent is corruption limiting business funding, experiences and perceptions of sexual corruption, as well as adopted coping mechanisms. Based on a combination of thematic analysis and narrative analysis done inductively, the results suggest that corruption does indeed serve as an obstacle for business funding – impacting important building blocks for venture creation such as opportunity, financial capital and human/organizational capital. In what ways

corruption is impacting these building blocks are based on household/family context and meso/macro environment. Furthermore, how corruption intersects with women entrepreneurs' access to capital is conditioned on the type of actor that is offering the support, where the risk of corruption is perceived to increase in the public sector.

The setting in which all these factors operate is constituted by gender norms, leading to the causal mechanisms to be gendered. Hence, the manifestation of corruption in the gender capital gap is determined by preexisting gendered power imbalances. This study argues that petty corruption, such as bribery, extortion, favoritism and sexual corruption could be considered gendered forms of corruption due to gender hierarchies that make women experience and perceive these corrupt institutions differently. By using the theoretical framework of sexual corruption to operationalize scenario-based questions, the findings suggest that women entrepreneurs perceive sexual corruption as a frequent practice in the business sector. There is a strong perception that sexual corruption is institutionalized to the extent that men in positions of entrusted authority do not need to explicitly demand bribes. As a woman entrepreneur you know that there are situations where you may need to engage in sexual corruption to obtain even things to which you are entitled.

The coping mechanisms that women entrepreneurs employ to overcome these challenges are embedded in the consequences of gendered informal institutions, but also tied to what type of entrepreneur: necessity-driven or opportunity-driven. While opportunity-driven entrepreneurs might be deterred from growing and decide to stay opportunity-based as a strategy, necessity-driven entrepreneurs are more resilient due to a higher need and might instead turn to drop-by-drop loans, or be more prone to see corruption as the only option. Mutual strategies for all women entrepreneurs are to collaborate with male connections, turn to internal funding, or use middle-men as third-party negotiators, but unfortunately it can lead to being exploited further.

7.1. Caveats and limitations

When analyzing corruption, this study strived for generating experience-based answers. However, due to the sensitivity of the topics it is hard to reach this goal, often resulting in answers similar to "not me, but everyone else". Exploring sexual corruption adds another dimension of fragility, where the data demonstrated a lot of stigmatizing and victim-blaming associated with this type of corruption. Therefore, a lower level of experience-based sexual corruption but prominent level of perception-based, might not be a certain visualization of

the occurrence and lead to an underestimated result. However, since the study did not intend to measure causal effects of corruption or focus on prevalence, but rather understand the causal mechanisms behind the phenomena, this caveat is deemed not crucial for generating relevant results (Gerring, 2007).

Another challenge was the recruitment of interviewees. Even though the planned number of interviews were conducted, the lack of connections in the country served as an obstacle. As a result, respondents were overrepresented from the region around Medellín. However, due to the similarity in answers among all regions it is estimated that this has not impacted the result too negatively. Additionally, due to limitations surrounding the scope of this study e.g. time and resources, it was hard to recruit interviewees in rural areas, especially from the informal sector. Key informants could however provide insight into these areas, but it might have led to an underestimation of the result since the data suggests that these subgroups might be more vulnerable.

The positionality as an interviewer might also impact the result (Esaiasson et al., 2017). There is a possibility that my background can impact what answers I receive. Despite trying to stay neutral and use open-ended questions, the interpretation of the responses can be influenced by my own experiences. This in combination with using an interpreter for some of the interviews might negatively affect the reliability. It is not possible to rule out that the results might be slightly different if the study is repeated by someone else. Furthermore, the semi-structured format of the interviews might cause some limitations regarding reliability and internal validity, due to the variation of the follow-up questions. Additionally, the mix of online/physical interviews, as well as English/Spanish, could have resulted in a dissimilar experience for the interviewees, potentially impacting both the reliability and internal validity. To minimize this, a detailed interview guide was organized where all interviews have addressed the same main themes (Kvale and Brinkman, 2013). The interview guides were also organized in both English and Spanish, to make sure that the translation was as close as possible to what was intended. The internal validity could also have been taunted due to the general lack of understanding of sexual corruption as a phenomenon. Using narrative analysis for this part of the study can unfortunately lead to misinterpretation. The scenario-based questions were used as a tool for exploring this complex type of corruption, however it is a risk that the interviewees did not perceive the scenarios in the same way as intended.

Using a within-variation case study approach, the goal of the research was more oriented towards a strong internal validity rather than external (Gerring, 2007). Despite this, the external validity is argued to be adequate for this study, since the results for this specific case can be generalized to other cases. The increased understanding of gendered effects of corruption for women entrepreneurs is valuable for enhancing the knowledge of challenges for women entrepreneurs also in other contexts, including potential coping mechanisms that might be used in the business sector. Additionally, the findings on how women entrepreneurs experience and perceive sexual corruption are applicable to future research focused on this phenomenon more generally. However, when it comes to how corruption intersects with women entrepreneurs' access to capital, it should be noted that the result is dependent on the corruption levels and institutions in the specific case, as well as what actors provide support to businesses. The result might therefore not manifest itself in the same way in other cases.

7.2. Contributions and cumulativeness

Academically, this study contributes with a better understanding of how corruption intersects with women entrepreneurs' access to capital. Besides, the study adds to the understudied field of gendered forms of corruption. Previous research highlights that we do not fully understand how women experience and perceive corruption. By focusing on gendered forms of corruption during funding processes, this study contributes with relevant knowledge to this gap. The results of this study support previous findings regarding women's exclusion from corrupt networks (Stensöta and Wängnerud, 2018), as well as how preexisting gender hierarchies impact how corruption unfolds (Bjarnegår et al., 2022). Furthermore, the result adds to the emerging discussion on sexual corruption, where the four dimensions of abuse of entrusted power (Bjarnegård et al., 2024) are used to identify patterns of who takes the initiative and the reason behind the transaction. It is perceived that institutionalized sexual corruption based on an increased need is the most usual form of sexual corruption among women entrepreneurs, which is in line with previous research on sexual corruption in Colombia (Eldén et al. 2020) and research focusing on the distinction between greed and need corruption (Bauhr and Charron, 2022). The results will hence be academically relevant for research of gendered forms of corruption specifically among women entrepreneurs. By adding a qualitative perspective based on individual respondents, rather than quantitative survey data, this study contributes with deeper knowledge on consequences of corruption on both necessity-driven and opportunity-driven women entrepreneurs (Aja-Eke et al., 2024).

Furthermore, by emphasizing on corruption as an informal institution that possibly intersects with the gender capital gap, this study builds on previous research focused on corruption as an obstacle for resources, but expands this perspective from solely the public sector to the business sector. Lastly, the findings connect to the 5M framework of entrepreneurship (Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009), that explains that the possibility for women entrepreneurs is based on opportunity, financial capital, human/organizational capital, but also motherhood and meso/macro environment. The study contributes to empirical examples of how this framework can be visualized in society.

The study has a strong societal relevance interlinking with several of the 17 global goals e.g. 5) gender equality, and 8) decent work and economic growth, by addressing gender biases, equal rights to economic empowerment, gendered forms of corruption, and equal benefits of innovation and entrepreneurship. The overarching emphasis on entrepreneurs and corruption – which influence poverty reduction and development – also relates to 1) no poverty, 9) industry, innovation, and infrastructure, and 16) peace, justice, and strong institutions. Furthermore, research on gendered forms of corruption, with an emphasis on feminist institutionalism, is needed to develop effective and inclusive anti-corruption policies.

The results contribute to an understanding of what possibly impacts the gender capital gap. Future research should continue exploring corruption as a potential factor explaining both the gap in funding among entrepreneurs, as well as why a high start-up rate might coexist with a high exit-rate among women-led businesses. The findings in this study can be used as a foundation to continue the exploration of gendered forms of corruption in the business sector, but with an emphasis on subgroups that are particularly vulnerable, such as the informal sector, migrant workers, necessity-driven entrepreneurs and need corruption, or other groups with low socioeconomic status. Colombia with prominent levels of institutionalized corruption, including sexual corruption, has been an interesting most-likely case to study. Therefore, continued research focused on this region is motivated. Even if the findings in this study highlight that there is a perception of public actors being more corrupt during mechanisms for business funding and support, research should focus on banks or other private actors with authority of power, in order to draw stronger conclusions. Lastly, due to sexual corruption being highly sensitive and complex to study, more research is needed in this area. Primarily, more research with mixed methods that can effectively capture the experiences which are often hard to measure.

8. REFERENCES

Aja-Eke, D., and Gillanders, R. (2024). *Sextortion and Female Entrepreneurship: Trapped in the Web of Corrupt Informal Networks.* [Paper presentation]. In panel "New Insights into the Connection of Gender and Corruption" during ECPR General Conference 2024, University College Dublin, 12-15 Augusti 2024. Accessed 2024-09-26 from: https://ecpr.eu/Events/Event/PaperDetails/76527

Aja-Eke, D., Gillanders, R., Lyons., Ouedraogo, I., and Maiga, E. (2024). Sextortion and Female Entrepreneurship. *SSRN 4702427*. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4702427

Amnesty International. (2016). *Female refugees face physical assault, exploitation and sexual harassment on their journey through Europe.* January 18, 2016. Accessed 2024-11-07 from: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/01/female-refugees-face-physical-assault-exploitation-and-sexual-harassment-on-their-journey-through-europe/

Audretsch, D., Keilbach, M., and Lehmann, E. (2006). *Entrepreneurship and Economic Growth* (online edn.), 1 Jan. 2007. Oxford Academic, New York. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195183511.001.0001

Bauhr, M. (2017). Need or greed? Conditions for collective action against corruption. *Governance, 30(4),* 561-581. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12232

Bauhr, M., and Charron, N. (2020). Do Men and Women Perceive Corruption Differently? Gender Differences in Perception of Need and Greed Corruption. *Politics and Governance, 8(2*), 92-102. DOI: https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i2.2701

Bauhr, M., Owasanoye, B., and Pethericket A. (2024). *Sexual Corruption: Emerging Directions in Research and Policy* (The Chandler Papers, 9*).* Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford. https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2024-05/The%20Chandler%20Papers%20%E2%80%93%20Sexual%20corruption.pdf

Behuria, R., Bian, J., and Lin, C. (2023). *Women entrepreneurs as driver of business integrity: a practical approach.* United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Bangkok. https://gala.gre.ac.uk/id/eprint/38744/7/38744_BIAN_Women_entrepreneurs_as_driver_of_business_integrity.pdf

Brush, C. G., De Bruin, A., and Welter, F. (2009). A gender-aware framework for women's entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Gender and entrepreneurship, 1(1)*, 8-24. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1108/17566260910942318

Brush, C., Greene, C., Balachandra, L., and Davis, A. (2018). The gender gap in venture capital-progress, problems, and perspectives, *Venture Capital, 20(2),* 115-136. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/13691066.2017.1349266

Bjarnegård, E. (2013). *Gender, Informal Institutions and Political Recruitment: Explaining Male Dominance in Parliamentary Representation*. Gender and Politics. Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9781137296740

Bjarnegård, E. (2018a). Men's Political Representation. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics.* DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.214

Bjarnegård, E. (2018b). Focusing on Masculinity and Male-Dominated Networks in Corruption. In Stensöta, H., and Wängnerud, L. (eds.) *Gender and Corruption: Historical roots and new avenues for research,* 257-273. Political Corruption and Governance. Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-70929-1_13

Bjarnegård, E., Calvo, D., Eldén, Å., Jonsson, S., and Lundgren, S. (2024). Sex instead of money: Conceptualizing sexual corruption. *Governance, 37(4),* 1-19. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12844

Bjarnegård, E., Calvo, D., Eldén, Å., and Lundgren, S. (2022) Sextortion: Corruption Shaped by Gender Norms. In Kubbe, I., and Merkle, O. (eds.) *Norms, Gender and Corruption: Understanding the Nexus,* Chapter 13, 252–267. Edward Elgar Publishing. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802205831.00020

Business Sweden. (n.d.). *Colombia.* Accessed 2024-09-08 from: https://www.business-sweden.com/sv/marknader/nord--och-sydamerika/colombia/

Chappell, L. (2014). Conflicting institutions and the search for gender justice at the international criminal court. *Political Research Quarterly*, *67*(1), 183-196. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912913507633

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-Discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Anti-Racist Politics. *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), Article 8, 139-167. https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf

Corporación Sisma Mujer. (2017). *La luz que nos queda: Documentación de casos de violencia sexual contra mujeres en el marco del conflicto armado en Colombia.* Bogotá. https://www.sismamujer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/La-luz-que-nos-queda.pdf

CPI, Corruption Perceptions Index. (2024). *CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX 2023*. Transparency International, Berlin. https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/CPI-2023-Report.pdf

Dreher, A., and Gassebner, M. (2013). Greasing the wheels? The impact of regulations and corruption on firm entry. *Public Choice, 155,* 413-432. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11127-011-9871-2

Dutta, N., and Sobel, R. (2016). Does corruption ever help entrepreneurship?. *Small Business Economics*, *47*, 179-199. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-016-9728-7

Eldén, Å., Calvo, D., Bjarnegård, E., Lundgren, S., and Jonsson, S. (2020). *Sextortion: Corruption and Gender-Based Violence* (EBA Report 2020:06). Expert Group for Aid Studies (EBA), Sweden. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1609079/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Erikson, J. (2024). *Advancing Feminist Institutionalist Perspectives* [Panel Discussion]. In Kenny, M. (Chair) at ECPR European Conference on Politics and Gender, Ghent University, 8 – 10 July 2024. Accessed 2024-12-19 from: https://ecpr.eu/Events/Event/PanelDetails/14688

Esaiasson, P., Gilljam, M., Oscarsson, H., and Wängnerud,. (2017). *Metodpraktikan: konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad* (4 edn.). Norstedts juridik, Stockholm.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2011). Case study. In Denzin, N. K., and Lincoln, Y. S. (eds.) *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4 edn.), Chapter 17, 301-316. SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks.

Galli, E., Mascia, V. D., and Rossi, P. S. (2017). Does Corruption Affect the Access to Bank Credit for Women-Led Firms and Small Enterprises? Evidence from European SMEs. *ADB Institute Working papers.*

GCB, Global Corruption Barometer. (2019). *LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN 2019: CITIZENS' VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF CORRUPTION.* Transparency International, Berlin. https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2019_GCB_LatinAmerica_Caribbean_Full_Report_200409_091428.pdf

Gerring, J. (2007). *Case Study Research. Principles and Practices.* Cambridge University Press, New York.

GEM, Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. (2023). *GEM 2022/23 Women's Entrepreneurship Report: Challenging Bias and Stereotypes.* Global Entrepreneurship Research Association, London Business School. https://www.gemconsortium.org/report/gem-20222023-womens-entrepreneurship-challenging-bias-and-stereotypes-2

George, A. L., and Bennett, A. (2005). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences.* Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, MIT Press, Cambridge.

Gillanders, R. (2024). *Sextortion and Entrepreneurship* [Paper presentation]. Panel "Gender and Corruption: new questions for improving anti-corruption policies" during ECPR General Conference, Charles University, 4-8 September 2023. Accessed 2024-09-26 from: https://ecpr.eu/Events/Event/PaperDetails/67875

Grahn, M. (2024). *Intersectionality and Sociological (Feminist) Institutionalism: The Whats and Hows* [Paper presentation]. Panel "Advancing Feminist Institutionalist Perspectives" during ECPR European Conference on Politics and Gender, Ghent University, 8 – 10 July 2024. Accessed 2024-12-19 from: https://ecpr.eu/Events/Event/PaperDetails/74110

GSE, Global Startup Ecosystem Index. (2024). *Global Startup Ecosystem Index 2024*. StartupBlink. https://www.startupblink.com/startupecosystemreport

Human Rights Watch. (2023). *World report 2023: Events of 2022*. Seven Stories Press, New York. https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2023/01/World_Report_2023_WEBSPREADS_0.pdf

IAWJ. (2012). *Stopping the abuse of power through sexual exploitation: Naming, shaming and ending sextortion.* International Association of Women Judges, Netherlands. https://www.unodc.org/res/ji/import/guide/naming_shaming_ending_sextortion/naming_shaming_ending_sextortion.pdf

Kali Pal, K., Piaget, K., and Zahidi, S. (2024) *Global Gender Gap 2024.* World Economic Forum, Cologny/Geneva. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2024.pdf

Kaufmann, D., and Wei, S. J. (2000). Does "Grease Money" Speed Up the Wheels of Commerce?. *IMF Working Papers, 00(64).*

Kenny, M. (2014). A feminist institutionalist approach. *Politics & Gender*, *10*(4), 679-684. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X14000488

Klapper, L., and Parker, S. (2011). Gender and the Business Environment for New Firm Creation. *World Bank Research Observer, 26(2),* 237-257. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/lkp032

Kvale, S., and Brinkman, S. (2013). *Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun* (2 edn.). Studentlitteratur, Lund.

Liaplina, A., and Sierra-Escalante, K. (2022). *Closing the Gender Finance Gap Through the Use of Blended Finance. International Finance Corporation*. International Finance Corporation, World

Bank Group. https://www.ifc.org/content/dam/ifc/doc/2023-delta/closing-the-gender-finance-gap-through-blended-finance.pdf

Lindberg, H., and Stensöta, H. (2018). Corruption as Exploitation: Feminist Exchange Theories and the Link Between Gender and Corruption. In Stensöta, H., and Wängnerud, L. (eds.) *Gender and corruption: Historical roots and new avenues for research*, 237-256. Political Corruption and Governance. Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-70929-1_12

Mackay, F., Monro, S., and Waylen, G. (2009). The Feminist Potential of Sociological Institutionalism. *Politics & Gender, 5(2),* 253-262. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X09000208

Mahtani, N. (2024). *Sexo a cambio de medicinas o educación: uno de cada cinco latinoamericanos conoce la 'sextorsión*. El País. 27 June, 2024. Accessed 2024-10-14 from: https://elpais.com/america-colombia/2024-06-27/sexo-a-cambio-de-medicinas-o-educacion-uno-de-cada-cinco-latinomericanos-conoce-la-sextorsion.html

Martinez Dy, A., and Agwunobi, A.J. (2018). Intersectionality and mixed methods for social context in entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research,* 25(8), 1727-1747, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBR-12-2017-0498

Mat, R. C., Fadzil, A. F. M., Omar, N. A., Husin, S., and Yaacob, M. R. (2022). *Perspective and Theoretical Development of Women's Entrepreneurship.* European Alliance for Innovation, Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Economic and Education, ICON 2021, 14 - 15 December 2021: Padang-West Sumatra, Indonesia

Merkle, O., Reinold, J., and Siegel, M. (2018). *Corruption, gender and migration.* OECD Forum on Global Anti-Corruption & Integrity, Maastricht University.

Murray, R., and Bjarnegård, E. (2023). Bringing men and masculinities into political science. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, *7*(3), 308-325. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1332/251510823X16920325768482

Pavlova, E., and Gvetadze, S. (2023). *Female access to finance: A survey of literature* (No. 2022/87). EIF Working Paper, European Investment Fund, Luxembourg. https://www.eif.org/news_centre/publications/eif_working_paper_2023_87.pdf

Pro Mujer. (n.d.). *Venezuelan migrant women in Colombia: Entrepreneurship and resilience in the midst of challenges*. Opportunities without borders – USAID. Accessed 2024-10-15 from: https://promujer.org/portal/2024/03/13/venezuelan-migrant-women-in-colombia-entrepreneurship-and-resilience-in-the-midst-of-challenges/

Sanders, A. (2022). Elite or grassroots? A feminist institutionalist examination of the role equalities organisations play in delivering representation and participation in a third sector–government partnership. *Voluntary Sector Review*, *13*(1), 53-76. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1332/204080521X16417601413112

Sheriff, E. (2024). *Addressing Three Roadblocks to Women Entrepreneurs Accessing Funding*. KilSah Consulting. March 12, 2024. Accessed 2024-08-13 from: https://kilsahconsulting.com/addressing-three-roadblocks-to-women-entrepreneurs/

Sonneborn, W. C., and Burns, A. (2020). *Venture Capital and the Gender Financing Gap: The Role of Accelerators-Research Snapshot*. International Finance Corporation, World Bank Group. https://www.ifc.org/content/dam/ifc/doc/mgrt/20200216-vc-wefi-research-snapshot.pdf

Stahl, C. (2021). *Sexual corruption in Malawi: Initial insights into sextortion and other gendered corruption affecting female businesswomen.* Basel Institute on Governance, Switzerland. https://edoc.unibas.ch/84036/1/20210719103558_60f5396e56442.pdf

Statnik, J. C., Vu, T., and Weill, L. (2023). Does corruption discourage more female entrepreneurs from applying for credit?. *Comparative Economic Studies, 65(1),* 1-28. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/s41294-022-00184-5

Stensöta, H., and Wängnerud, L. (2018). *Gender and corruption: Historical roots and new avenues for research*. Political Corruption and Governance. Palgrave Macmillan.

Transparency International. (n.d.). *What is Corruption?*. Accessed 2024-09-20 from: https://www.transparency.org/en/what-is-corruption

Towns, A. (2015). Prestige, immunity and diplomats: Understanding sexual corruption. In Dahlström, C., and Wängnerud, L. (eds.) *Elites, institutions and the quality of government*, 49-65. Executive Politics and Governance. Palgrave Macmillan, London. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137556288_4

UNDP-SIWI. (2017). *Women and corruption in the water sector: Theories and experiences from Johannesburg and Bogotá*. Water Governance Facility Report (No. 8). SIWI, Stockholm. https://siwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/wgf-report-no-8_final-web-edited.pdf

UN Women. (2024). *Facts and figures: Economic empowerment.* Accessed 2024-08-13 from: https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures

USAID Private Sector Engagement. (2023). *Colombia: Improving Access to Finance Among Rural Women.* May 10, 2023. Accessed 2024-08-18 from: https://usaid-pse.exposure.co/colombia-improve-access-to-finance-among-rural-women

U4. (n.d.). *Glossary.* U4 Anti-corruption Resource Centre, Chr. Michelsen Institute, Norway. Accessed 2024-09-22 from: https://www.u4.no/terms

Vossenberg, S. (2020). *Gendered Institutions Matter: A middle ground between feminist and gender-blind perspectives on enterprise development*. [Doctoral thesis]. International Institute of Social Science, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam. Accessed 2024-09-04 from: https://repub.eur.nl/pub/127243/thesisvossenberg-embargo-version-july-2020.pdf

Waylen, G. (2009). What can historical institutionalism offer feminist institutionalists?. *Politics & Gender*, *5*(2), 245-253. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X09000191

Zhou, J. Q., and Peng, M. W. (2012). Does bribery help or hurt firm growth around the world?. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, *29*(4), 907-921. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-011-9274-4

9. APPENDIX

9.1. Interview guides

Questions for respondents (English)

This interview is part of my master's thesis in political science, from Uppsala University, Sweden. It will focus on women entrepreneurs' experiences in Colombia, in order to understand the obstacles that women entrepreneurs may face, including corruption. The study is not about reporting specific cases of corruption, and everything you say will be anonymous. If you are referring to other people, please avoid using their names. The interview might cover sensitive topics such as sexual bribes and sextortion, which is why I highlight that you are participating freely and urge you to notify me if you feel uncomfortable. If it is ok with you, I would like to record the interview to help me during the analysis. You can stop the recording at any time, and it will not be shared.

Introduction

1. Tell me briefly about yourself and your company?

Barriers to capital and gender-specific challenges as entrepreneur

2. What do you consider is the hardest part of being a woman entrepreneur?
3. What are the biggest obstacles/challenges you have faced so far?
4. Are there things you believe you cannot do, but that male counterparts can?
5. Have there been any challenges for you to access funding (*e.g. venture capital funds, bank loans and financial institutions, governmental agencies*)?

Corrupt practices encountered and coping mechanisms

6. Have you (or other women entrepreneurs you know) ever been asked to pay a bribe to receive funding?
7. If yes, how did you/them handle it? If no, what would you do if you ever came across corruption when trying to access funding?
8. What would happen if you say no?
9. Have you (or other women entrepreneurs you know) ever felt obligated to offer a bribe in order to receive funding?

Scenarios

10. ***Direct request of sex in exchange for fair treatment (Explicitly extorting sex)***
    A woman entrepreneur is struggling to find funding for her business. She has a meeting at a bank to discuss her application for a loan. She fulfills all the requirements. The bank officer tells her that he will not approve the application unless she goes on a date with him – Do you recognize this situation or something similar? Could you tell me more about this?

11. ***Requests sex in exchange for unfair advantages (Requesting sexual bribe)***
    A woman entrepreneur is struggling to find funding for her business. She has a meeting at a bank to discuss her application for an investment. She fulfills the

requirements for a certain amount, but she needs way more than that. The bank officer tells her that he will approve the application for the highest amount if she gives sexual favors to him – Do you recognize this situation or something similar? Could you tell me more about this?

12. ***Accepts sex in exchange for fair treatment (Implicitly extorting sex)***
    A woman entrepreneur is struggling to find funding for her business. She has a meeting at a government agency to discuss her application to be part of a program to get financing. She fulfills all the requirements. But she has heard that the only way to get approval is to "be nice" (maybe to have sex?) with the official in charge. She really needs her application to be approved so she decides to dress up and sexy for the meeting (thinking that maybe she will need to go on a date or have sex) with the official to get the approval. – Do you recognize this situation or something similar? Could you tell me more about this?

13. ***Accepts sex in exchange for unfair advantages (Accepting sexual bribe)***
    A woman entrepreneur is struggling to find funding for her business. She has a meeting at an organization to discuss her application to be part of a program to get financing. She does not fulfill all the requirements to get into this program. She really needs this funding, so she decides to offer sex to the official/person in charge to get the approval. – Do you recognize this situation or something similar? Could you tell me more about this?

Closing

14. How do you see yourself expanding your business in the future?
15. Is there anything you would like to add or clarify?

Preguntas para las entrevistadas (Español)

Esta entrevista es parte de mi tesis de maestría en ciencia política de la Universidad de Uppsala, Suecia. Se centrará en experiencias de mujeres emprendedoras en Colombia, con el fin de comprender los obstáculos que las mujeres emprendedoras enfrentan, incluyendo la corrupción. El estudio no busca reportar casos específicos de corrupción, y todo lo que usted diga será anónimo. Si se refiere a otras personas, no necesita usar nombres. La entrevista podría abordar temas sensibles, como sobornos/coimas sexuales y sextorsión, por lo que destaco que está participando de manera libre y le pido que me diga si se siente incómoda en algún momento. Si está de acuerdo, me gustaría grabar la entrevista para ayudarme durante el análisis. Puede interrumpir la grabación en cualquier momento y no será compartida.

Introducción

1. Cuénteme brevemente sobre usted y su empresa/emprendimiento.

Barreras al capital y desafíos específicos de género como emprendedora

2. ¿Qué considera que es la parte más difícil de ser una mujer emprendedora?
3. ¿Cuáles son los mayores obstáculos/desafíos que ha enfrentado hasta ahora?

4. ¿Hay cosas que cree que usted no puede hacer, pero que hombres empresarios/emprendedores sí pueden?
5. ¿Ha encontrado obstáculos para acceder a financiamiento (*de p. ej., fondos de capital de riesgo, préstamos bancarios e instituciones financieras, agencias gubernamentales*)?

Prácticas corruptas encontradas y mecanismos de para afrontarlas

6. ¿Alguna vez le han pedido a usted (o a otras mujeres emprendedoras que conoce) que pague un soborno para recibir financiamiento?
7. Si es así, ¿cómo lo manejó usted/ellas? Si no, ¿qué haría si alguna vez se encontrara con corrupción al intentar acceder a financiamiento?
8. ¿Qué sucedería si usted dice no?
9. ¿Alguna vez usted (u otras mujeres emprendedoras que conoce) se ha sentido obligada a ofrecer un soborno para recibir financiamiento?

Escenarios

10. ***Solicitud directa de sexo a cambio de un trato justo (sextorsión / extorción sexual explícita)***
    Una mujer emprendedora tiene dificultades para encontrar financiamiento para su negocio. Tiene una reunión en un banco para discutir su solicitud de préstamo. Cumple con todos los requisitos. El funcionario bancario le dice que no aprobará la solicitud a menos que salga en una cita romántica con él. ¿Reconoce esta situación o alguna similar? ¿Y qué paso entonces?

11. ***Solicitar sexo a cambio de ventajas o tratamientos preferenciales (solicitar soborno/coima sexual)***
    Una mujer emprendedora tiene dificultades para encontrar financiamiento para su negocio. Tiene una reunión en un banco para discutir su solicitud de inversión. Cumple con los requisitos para cierta cantidad, pero necesita mucho más. El funcionario bancario le dice que aprobará la solicitud por la cantidad más alta si ella le da favores sexuales. ¿Reconoce esta situación o alguna similar? ¿Y qué paso entonces?

12. ***Aceptar sexo a cambio de un trato justo (extorción sexual implícita)***
    Una mujer emprendedora tiene dificultades para encontrar financiamiento para su negocio. Tiene una reunión en una agencia gubernamental para discutir su solicitud para participar en un programa de financiamiento/ayuda para emprendedoras. Cumple con todos los requisitos. Sin embargo, ha escuchado que la única forma de obtener la aprobación es "ser buena" (tal vez tener relaciones sexuales) con el funcionario a cargo. Ella realmente necesita que su solicitud sea aprobada, por lo que decide vestirse de manera sexy para la reunión (pensando que tal vez tendrá que irse a una cita o tener relaciones sexuales) con el funcionario para obtener la aprobación. ¿Reconoce esta situación o alguna similar? ¿Y qué paso entonces?

13. ***Aceptar sexo a cambio de ventajas o tratamientos preferenciales (aceptar soborno/coima sexual)***
    Una mujer emprendedora tiene dificultades para encontrar financiamiento para su negocio. Tiene una reunión en una organización para discutir su solicitud para

participar en un programa de financiamiento/ayuda para emprendedoras. No cumple con todos los requisitos para ingresar a este programa. Ella realmente necesita este financiamiento, por lo que decide ofrecer sexo al funcionario a cargo para obtener la aprobación. ¿Reconoce esta situación o alguna similar? ¿Y qué paso entonces?

Cierre

14. ¿Cómo se ve a sí misma expandiendo su negocio en el futuro?
15. ¿Hay algo que le gustaría agregar o aclarar?

Questions for informants (English)

This interview is part of my master's thesis in political science, from Uppsala University, Sweden. It will focus on the hindrances for women entrepreneurs in Colombia, especially if and how corruption serves as an obstacle for accessing funding. An emphasis will also be put on how women experience corruption differently compared to men. All participants will be kept anonymous. If you are referring to other people, please avoid using their names. If it is ok with you, I would like to record the interview to help me during the analysis. You can stop the recording at any time and it will not be shared.

Introduction

1. Tell me briefly about your organization and your role?

Challenges and barriers

2. What do you think are the most important obstacles/hinders that women entrepreneurs face? Do these experiences differ for women compared to men?

3. Can you name relevant actors when it comes to providing funding to women entrepreneurs? (*governmental agencies: e.g. Bancóldex, Innpulsa Colombia, Fondo Nacional de Garantías (FNG), ProColombia, Fondo Emprender (SENA), Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo. Banks and financial institutions e.g. Bancolombia, Banco Davivienda, Banco Caja Social, Fundación WWB Colombia, Promigas, Banco Agrario de Colombia. Venture Capital Funds: e.g. SoftBank Latin America Fund, Velum Venture. NGOs e.g., Acumen, Fundación Bavaria)*

4. What would you consider is the biggest potential challenge for women entrepreneurs when accessing funding (*e.g. venture capital funds/firms, bank loans and financial institutions, governmental agencies and NGOs*)?

Corruption and strategies

5. Have you ever heard of people being asked for/or felt obligated to give bribes in exchange for business funding?
6. Have you ever heard of people being asked for/or felt obligated to give sexual favors in exchange for business funding?
7. Could you tell me about the cases you have heard of/come across in your own work? (you do not need to give me any specific information about cases)

8. Do you think women use any particular coping mechanism or strategy to handle these kinds of situations?

Gender-specific and awareness

9. Do you believe men and women might experience corruption differently in Colombia?
10. Would you say that there is public awareness of sexual corruption in Colombia?
11. Do you think there is a stigma around this issue?

Closing

12. What would you consider being the best way forward to tackle the challenges for women entrepreneurs when accessing capital?
13. Is there anything you would like to add or clarify?

Preguntas para los informantes (Español)

Esta entrevista es parte de mi tesis de maestría en ciencia política de la Universidad de Uppsala, Suecia. Se enfocará en los obstáculos que enfrentan las mujeres emprendedoras en Colombia, especialmente si la corrupción actúa como un obstáculo para acceder a financiamiento y de qué manera. También se hará énfasis en cómo las mujeres experimentan la corrupción de manera diferente en comparación con los hombres. Todos los participantes serán mantenidos en el anonimato. Si se refiere a otras personas, no hace falta usar sus nombres. Si está de acuerdo, me gustaría grabar la entrevista para ayudarme durante el análisis. Puede interrumpir la grabación en cualquier momento y no será compartida.

Introducción

1. Cuénteme brevemente sobre su organización y su rol.

Desafíos y barreras

2. ¿Cuáles cree que son los obstáculos más importantes que enfrentan las mujeres emprendedoras? ¿Estas experiencias difieren para las mujeres en comparación con los hombres?

3. ¿Puede nombrar actores relevantes cuando se trata de proporcionar financiamiento a mujeres emprendedoras? (*Agencias gubernamentales: p. ej., Bancóldex, Innpulsa Colombia, Fondo Nacional de Garantías (FNG), ProColombia, Fondo Emprender (SENA), Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo. Bancos e instituciones financieras: p. ej., Bancolombia, Banco Davivienda, Banco Caja Social, Fundación WWB Colombia, Promigas, Banco Agrario de Colombia. Fondos de capital de riesgo: p. ej., SoftBank Latin America Fund, Velum Venture. ONGs: p. ej., Acumen, Fundación Bavaria*.)

4. ¿Cuál consideraría que es el mayor potencial desafío para las mujeres emprendedoras al acceder a financiamiento (de *p. ej., fondos/firmas de capital de*

riesgo, préstamos bancarios e instituciones financieras, agencias gubernamentales y ONGs)?

Corrupción y estrategias

5. ¿Alguna vez ha escuchado de personas a las que se les ha pedido o se han sentido obligadas a dar sobornos a cambio de financiamiento para sus empresas o emprendimientos?
6. ¿Alguna vez ha escuchado de personas a las que se les ha pedido o se han sentido obligadas a dar favores sexuales a cambio de financiamiento para sus empresas o emprendimientos?
7. ¿Podría contarme sobre los casos que ha escuchado o con los que se ha encontrado en su propio trabajo? (No necesita darme nombres o datos específicos)
8. ¿Crees que las mujeres utilizan alguna estrategia o algún mecanismo en particular para afrontar estos tipos de situaciones?

Género y conciencia

9. ¿Cree que hombres y mujeres experimentan la corrupción de manera diferente en Colombia?
10. ¿Diría que hay una conciencia pública sobre la corrupción sexual en Colombia?
11. ¿Considera que existe un estigma en torno a este tema?

Cierre

12. ¿Cuál cree que es la mejor manera de abordar los desafíos que tienen las mujeres emprendedoras para acceder al capital?
13. ¿Hay algo que le gustaría agregar o aclarar?

9.2. List of respondents

Respondent	Location	Sector	Type of entrepreneur	Experience
Participant 1	Bogotá	Hospitality	Necessity-driven	Successful
Participant 2	Bogotá	Technology	Necessity-driven	Successful
Participant 3	Bogotá	Marketing	Opportunity-driven	Successful
Participant 4	Medellín	Textile	Opportunity-driven	Aspiring
Participant 5	Medellín	Textile	Opportunity-driven	Aspiring
Participant 6	Medellín	Technology	Opportunity-driven	Successful
Participant 7	Medellín	Hospitality	Necessity-driven	Successful
Participant 8	Medellín	Marketing	Opportunity-driven	Aspiring
Participant 9	Medellín	Food and beverage	Necessity-driven	Aspiring
Participant 10	Medellín	Education	Necessity-driven	Successful
Participant 11	Medellín	Textile	Necessity-driven	Aspiring
Participant 12	Medellín	Food and beverage	Necessity-driven	Successful
Participant 13	Medellín	Beauty services	Necessity-driven	Successful
Participant 14	Medellín	Retail sales	Necessity-driven	Aspiring
Participant 15	Medellín	Retail sales	Necessity-driven	Successful
Participant 16	Medellín	Food and beverage	Opportunity-driven	Aspiring
Participant 17	Medellín	Beauty services	Necessity-driven	Successful
Participant 18	Barranquilla	Retail sales	Necessity-driven	Successful
Participant 19	Barranquilla	Retail sales	Opportunity-driven	Aspiring
Participant 20	Santa Marta	Textile	Opportunity-driven	Aspiring

9.3. List of key informants

Informant	Organization	Thematic expertise
Participant 1	United Nations	Gender equality, sexual violence, economic empowerment and intersectionality
Participant 2	Transparency International	Gendered forms of corruption
Participant 3	Transparency International	Corruption in the private sector
Participant 4	Fondo Mujer[21]	Hindrances for women entrepreneurs and available support systems, with emphasis on informal sector

[21] A Colombian government program that implements public policies focused on promoting sustainable economic autonomy for women.