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*ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING BY MOMPREENEURS IN THE PANDEMIC  
CONTEXT<sup>1</sup>*

**APRENDIZAGEM DO EMPREENDEDORISMO POR MÃES  
EMPREENDEDORAS NO CONTEXTO PANDÊMICO**

*Júlia Fernandes Dias dos Anjos<sup>2</sup>*

*Maria Salete Batista Freitag<sup>3</sup>*

*Fernanda Paula Arantes Manso<sup>4</sup>*

**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** To characterize the process of entrepreneurial learning (EL) among mothers who began their entrepreneurial activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Research problem:** To understand how mompreneurs learn to engage in entrepreneurial activities during pandemic times. **Methodology:** this is a single case study of the *Feira de Mães Empreendedoras* (Mother Entrepreneurs' Fair) in Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with seven female vendors who were mothers before the pandemic and started their entrepreneurial ventures during that period, including the founder and manager of the fair. **Main Results:** participants turned to entrepreneurship as a strategy to reconcile family and professional demands, often after being forced to leave the formal labor market due to the pandemic's impacts. Consistent with previous studies, EL was found to occur predominantly through experiential means, driven by practical engagement and the repertoire developed through prior experiences. However, this study highlights an innovative aspect: learning emerged from the need for rapid adaptation to the pandemic context, especially in relation to new technologies and digital learning sources. **Theoretical and methodological contributions:** the study contributes to the advancement of the EL literature in crisis contexts, deepening the understanding of how women build entrepreneurial knowledge. **Relevance and originality:** the research addresses motherhood-driven entrepreneurship during a health and economic crisis, emphasizing how mothers learn while developing

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<sup>2</sup> Universidade Federal de Goiás. [juliaduasufg0@gmail.com](mailto:juliaduasufg0@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> Universidade Federal de Goiás. [msalete@ufg.br](mailto:msalete@ufg.br)

<sup>4</sup> Universidade Federal de Goiás. [arantes.fp@ufg.br](mailto:arantes.fp@ufg.br)



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their businesses and forging new professional paths under adverse conditions. **Social and management contributions:** the findings offer insights for programs supporting entrepreneurship, underscoring the importance of initiatives that integrate motherhood and economic development.

**Keywords:** learning, entrepreneurship, pandemic, women, mothers.

### RESUMO

**Objetivo:** caracterizar o processo de aprendizagem do empreendedorismo (AE) por mães que iniciaram suas atividades empreendedoras durante a pandemia de COVID-19. **Problema de pesquisa:** compreender como as mães empreendedoras aprendem a empreender em momentos pandêmicos. **Método:** estudo de caso único, da Feira de Mães Empreendedoras (Goiânia, Goiás). A coleta de dados ocorreu por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas com sete mulheres feirantes que já eram mães antes da pandemia e passaram a empreender durante esse período, incluindo a fundadora e gestora da feira. **Resultados:** as participantes recorreram ao empreendedorismo como uma estratégia para conciliar as demandas familiares e profissionais, frequentemente após serem compelidas a abandonar o mercado formal de trabalho devido aos impactos da pandemia. Conforme estudos passados, a AE manifesta-se predominantemente de forma experiencial, impulsionada por vivências práticas e pelo repertório adquirido em experiências prévias. No entanto, este estudo destaca um aspecto inovador, a aprendizagem emergente da necessidade de rápida adaptação ao cenário pandêmico, às novas tecnologias e fontes digitais de aprendizagem. **Contribuições teóricas/metodológica:** a pesquisa contribui para o aprofundamento da literatura sobre AE em contextos de crise, ampliando o entendimento sobre a construção do conhecimento empreendedor por mulheres. **Originalidade/Relevância:** o estudo aborda o empreendedorismo por mães em um período de crise sanitária e econômica, destacando como elas aprendem enquanto desenvolvem seus negócios e constroem novos caminhos profissionais em cenários adversos. **Contribuições sociais / para a gestão:** os resultados fornecem insights para programas de apoio ao empreendedorismo por mães, ressaltando a importância de iniciativas que conciliem maternidade e desenvolvimento econômico.

**Palavras-chave:** aprendizagem, empreendedorismo, pandemia, mulheres, mães.



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## INTRODUCTION

Despite women having higher levels of education, they still face difficulties in reaching senior positions in organizations in Brazil (IBGE, 2018). As a consequence of limited prospects for career advancement, women have sought entrepreneurship as an alternative for decades (Machado et al., 2016). This reinforces the findings of Machado et al. (2003), who identified that leadership roles were generally held by men. According to Lavoie (1984, p. 34), a female entrepreneur is defined as “a woman who is the head of a company, who took the initiative to create it, assuming risks, financing, social and administrative responsibilities, and who effectively manages it on a daily basis.”

Due to the wage gap between men and women, about 50.4% of Brazilian women left their jobs during the pandemic to dedicate themselves to domestic responsibilities and childcare, subsequently turning to entrepreneurship as an alternative, according to data from a report published by Gênero e Número and SOF Sempreviva Organização Feminista (2020). In Goiás, a similar pattern can be observed: a study conducted by researchers from the Federal University of Goiás in partnership with the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (Sebrae Goiás) found that, although the average monthly income of female entrepreneurs has grown by 16% over the last five years, male entrepreneurs' average income is still 61% higher, reaching R\$ 4,135 (Cardoso, 2024).

However, women continue to face greater challenges in entrepreneurship due to the double burden, family pressure, limited recognition in decision-making processes, limited experience in business management, and practices of corruption, harassment, and prejudice, among other factors (Lituchy; Reavley, 2004; Mathew, 2010; Winn, 2005). In addition to these factors, structural, social, psychological, and historical conditions require greater efforts from women than from men to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Buaride et al., 2020).



Beyond the already known challenges faced by women in the labor market, those posed by the pandemic aggravated the structural inequalities existing between countries and populations (Matta et al., 2021). At the same time, the global health crisis offered an opportunity to recognize and reduce social and wage inequalities, as well as to redistribute women's unpaid labor (Abukater, 2021).

Given this reality, it is relevant to understand how these women learn to become entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurial learning (EL) is understood as a process that begins before the creation and growth of firms (Cope, 2005) and develops in practice, within a specific context (Cope, 2005). Following this line of reasoning, the knowledge acquired is retained and mobilized when necessary in response to changes, constituting a process of adaptation to new circumstances.

Therefore, in order to understand entrepreneurial learning among women who engaged in entrepreneurial activities during the COVID-19 pandemic - especially mothers - this study presents the following research question: How does entrepreneurial learning occur among mothers during a pandemic period? To answer this question, the following general objective is proposed: to understand the entrepreneurial learning of mothers who engaged in entrepreneurial activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The specific objectives are: (i) to understand the factors that led mothers to engage in entrepreneurial activities in the context of the pandemic; (ii) to analyze how entrepreneurial mothers acquire knowledge and learn to engage in entrepreneurial activities during the pandemic; and (iii) to identify the constraining factors imposed by the pandemic period and how they impact entrepreneurial learning among mothers.

To this end, a literature review on entrepreneurial learning and women's entrepreneurship was conducted, including studies published during the COVID-19 pandemic that relate entrepreneurship to the pandemic context. The following section presents the methodological procedures of the field research and, finally,



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the results and conclusions. For this study, a qualitative approach was adopted, involving the interpretation of material obtained through semi-structured interviews to identify motivations (Gray, 2012).

In addition, it should be noted that the first version of the study was completed within the Undergraduate Research Program at the Federal University of Goiás. The first author of the article received an Undergraduate Research Scholarship, for which the authors express their gratitude. Subsequently, the research was expanded during the writing of the first author's Undergraduate Thesis in Business Administration.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This section presents the theoretical foundation of the study, beginning with entrepreneurial learning (EL) and then addressing women's and mothers' entrepreneurship in the context of the pandemic.

### *Learning about entrepreneurship*

Entrepreneurship has become an object of study to understand how the process of "being" and "becoming" an entrepreneur occurs (Vogt; Bulgacov, 2019). In Brazil, the development of entrepreneurship emerged after the creation of institutions such as the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (Lyrio, 2008). Thus, it may arise when it becomes possible to recognize a good opportunity to initiate a new idea and determine how it will be managed (Politis, 2005).

However, a business does not always begin from an opportunity; it often stems from necessity (Bernardi, 2007). In this sense, necessity-driven entrepreneurship leads individuals to seek a new source of income through their own business (Ardichvili; Cardozo; Souray, 2003). Entrepreneurship initiated by



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necessity can later transform into an opportunity (Nassif et al., 2009), given a series of factors that develop over time (Ardichvili; Cardozo; Souray, 2003).

It is believed that part of entrepreneurial learning (EL) is related to experiencing an entrepreneurial context (Politis, 2005). Thus, experiences in the entrepreneurial market, administrative areas, and specific fields are part of the process of becoming an entrepreneur (Rae, 2005). In addition, previous paid work experience can reduce the chances of failure in entrepreneurship (Taylor, 1999, Politis, 2005, p. 405) and allow the development of many skills necessary to deal with the responsibilities of a new business, such as selling, negotiating, leading, planning, organizing, solving problems, effective communication, and decision-making (Shane et al., 2003).

However, beyond experiences in entrepreneurial careers, the process of entrepreneurship also occurs when external factors - whether social, environmental, cultural, among others - influence decisions, attributing to personal capability the possibility of initiating a new business (Lyrio, 2008).

Whether driven by opportunity or necessity, effective learning in entrepreneurship can be considered an experiential process in which entrepreneurial individuals develop knowledge through four abilities: experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting (Kolb, 1984). Thus, although many of these abilities are learned through education, much of the information necessary for managing and innovating one's own business, recognizing opportunities in the entrepreneurial market, and dealing with responsibilities can only be learned in practice (Lopes; Teixeira, 2022). However, the learning process does not follow a single straight path; it can be complex, as individuals transform experiences into knowledge in different ways (Politis, 2005).

The main idea of entrepreneurial learning is that learning requires a representation or understanding of experience (Kolb, 1984). Therefore, to develop entrepreneurial skills, it is necessary to expand the learning process and



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knowledge through competencies and resources essential for training (Zampier; Takahashi, 2011), in order to transform personal experience into entrepreneurial knowledge, thereby forming the process of entrepreneurial learning (Politis, 2005).

Moreover, entrepreneurial learning is a continuous and unfinished process (Vogt; Bulgacov, 2019), in which individuals progressively develop experiences throughout their professional lives that can be used to initiate the creation and management of a venture (Politis, 2005). Learning facilitates the knowledge necessary to be effective in creating a new business (Politis, 2005). For this reason, it has been presented as an experiential process in which personal and professional experiences are transformed into knowledge that can be used in decision-making (Politis, 2005). Learning plays a fundamental role in developing better competencies in organizational management and enables improved direction and performance in decision-making (Bittencourt, 2005).

According to Politis (2005), the transformation of entrepreneurial learning occurs through the balance of two processes: exploitation and exploration, which mean, respectively, leveraging the knowledge the individual already possesses and seeking knowledge acquired through experiences, innovations, and new discoveries. In addition, an important aspect of entrepreneurial learning is the entrepreneur's past experiences in business events and whether those events resulted in success or failure (Politis, 2005).

### *Entrepreneurship by women and mothers and the COVID-19 pandemic*

In society, women have historically been at a disadvantage compared to men, mainly because they take on multiple roles, which ultimately create conflicts between personal and professional life (Agniothri; Bhattacharya, 2020). However, over the years, women have occupied greater space in the corporate environment, gaining access to opportunities that previously did not exist (Calixto,



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2022). Nevertheless, these advances have not been sufficient to balance the privileges of men in the labor market (Calixto, 2022).

Women constantly need to prove that they are capable and productive enough to perform the roles assigned to them in the labor market (Lima et al., 2013). For this reason, they seek entrepreneurship as a way to obtain better income opportunities, greater participation in the entrepreneurial environment, self-satisfaction, and a sense of life purpose (Calixto, 2022).

Some similar characteristics have been identified in the literature on entrepreneurship among mothers, such as dedication to children and household responsibilities, as well as the challenges they face in organizational environments (Amitha; Sewwandi, 2020). As a result, they often opt for entrepreneurship (Mattos, 2020) and reject professional inequality in the workplace, which has become common in the context of motherhood (Micozzi; Lucarelli, 2016). Thus, reconciling domestic and maternal activities with professional responsibilities creates constraints in the labor market, negatively impacting their professional trajectories (Rodrigues et al., 2021).

Given this reality, women's intensified efforts in the struggle for equal rights at work, equal pay, and economic opportunities become evident (SEBRAE, 2022). Therefore, they view entrepreneurship as offering better conditions than formal employment, since they can choose their area of interest and encounter fewer gender-related prejudices (Micozzi; Lucarelli, 2016).

In this way, the literature identifies some outcomes of mothers' choice of entrepreneurship, such as financial independence, self-confidence, flexible schedules, professional maturation within the entrepreneurial market, and, consequently, increased female participation in entrepreneurship (Mattos, 2020). In addition to the financial independence achieved through entrepreneurship, one of the main objectives of migrating to this field is to offer an alternative for women, who are often limited to choosing between career and family (Abukater, 2021).



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It is known that the pandemic introduced uncertainty and fear into the family environment regarding the labor market (Valic et al, 2020). Motivated by rising unemployment caused by the pandemic, many women turned to necessity-driven entrepreneurship as an alternative to reconcile domestic responsibilities with income generation (Abukater, 2021). Furthermore, even before the global health crisis began, women already bore greater responsibility for domestic tasks and childcare compared to men, and this burden increased considerably during the pandemic, as social isolation led families to spend more time at home (Sebrae, 2022).

Brazil stands out as one of the countries with the greatest gender disparities (Abukater, 2021). Moreover, the pandemic further worsened the situation for women - especially mothers - by increasing their risk of dismissal compared to men (Abukater, 2021). In addition, female participation in the labor market reached its lowest level in the last 30 years (Abukater, 2021). The overload resulting from the accumulation of activities became the most common complaint among female entrepreneurs, surpassing both personal and national economic challenges (Abukater, 2021). The greatest challenge during this period was the increased workload, representing the main barrier to fully dedicating themselves to their businesses.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To characterize EL among entrepreneurial mothers in the pandemic context, a qualitative study was conducted in accordance with the assumptions proposed by Yin (2016). Qualitative research proved more suitable for achieving the stated objectives, as it enables the identification of interpersonal relationships and seeks to understand human experiences (Gray, 2012). Furthermore, to better understand the phenomenon, a single case study was carried out (Yin, 2016) of the Entrepreneurial Mothers' Fair in the city of Goiânia, in the state of Goiás,



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Brazil. The analysis was based on the experiences of seven women who were already mothers before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and who decided to engage in entrepreneurial activities during the pandemic period, all of whom were participants in the fair.

In this way, contact was made with the manager of the Goiânia Entrepreneurial Mothers' Fair, and an interview was conducted. The fair began its activities during the pandemic. The first interview was conducted with the manager because she was responsible for managing the context that generated interest for this study. The aim was to understand the context and processes that impact the learning of the entrepreneurial mothers who are part of the fair. Subsequently, interviews were conducted with the entrepreneurial mothers who participate in the fair, selected according to the following criteria: (a) women who were already mothers before the pandemic period; (b) mothers who began entrepreneurial activities during the pandemic and who currently make up the group of vendors at the Goiânia Entrepreneurial Mothers' Fair.

Therefore, the participants were selected intentionally and by convenience (Neergaard; Ulhøi, 2007), with the purpose of choosing specific cases that best met the objectives of the present study (Yin, 2016). Data collection was carried out with the support of a semi-structured interview guide, with questions guided by their descriptive nature (Yin, 2016). Two interview guides were developed: one for the fair manager and another for the entrepreneurial mothers.

The interviews were conducted in person at the Entrepreneurial Mothers' Fair, according to the participants' availability, in order to enable flexibility in data collection. The organization and analysis of the empirical evidence were conducted sequentially, based on the transcription of the audio recordings, seeking to interpret the shared meanings of the experiences lived by the participants according to the phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2014), in



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order to facilitate the understanding of elements related to the research objectives.

For data analysis, inspiration was drawn from the phenomenological approach, which is concerned with understanding the meaning of the experiences lived by participants from their own perspectives. The interpretation focused on the essential meanings shared regarding the entrepreneurial learning of the mothers who participated in this study, emphasizing their experiences through careful and reflective reading (Creswell, 2014). From this, the phenomenon was understood from the participants' perspectives, respecting their perceptions and feelings (Creswell, 2014).

Finally, it is worth noting that this study is part of a broader project approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Goiás (CEP/UFG), under the coordination of a faculty member from the School of Administration, Accounting, and Economics at the Federal University of Goiás. The project's general objective is to investigate how learning and knowledge creation occur in the context of entrepreneurship, either separately or by considering the two constructs as mutually dependent.

#### Characterization of the interviewees

Chart 1 presents a general description of the entrepreneurial mothers interviewed who participate in the Goiânia Entrepreneurial Mothers' Fair. Interviewee "A" represents the entrepreneur who founded and organized the fair, while interviewees "B," "C," "D," "E," "F," and "G" are the mothers who are stallholders at the fair and who were already mothers before the COVID-19 pandemic and started their entrepreneurial activities during the pandemic period.



**Chart 1 - Profile of the interviewees**

Interviewee	Year the business was started	Start of activities at the Entrepreneurial Mothers Fair	Children	Age	Reasons for starting a business
A	2020	2020	2	34 years	Fear of uncertainty and spending more time with children
B	2021	2021	1	53 years	Need to contribute to household income and spend more time with children
C	2021	2021	3	58 years	Not feeling idle and contributing to household income
D	2020	2021	1	40 years	Spending more time with daughter
E	2021	2023	1	39 years	Bringing educational toys into son's world
F	2021	2023	2	32 years	Spending more time with children and the need to contribute to household income
G	2020	2023	2	52 years	Unemployment and Motherhood

Source: own elaboration, based on research data.

## RESULTS

This section presents the research findings. Initially, it provides context for the Entrepreneurial Mothers' Fair. Following this, it presents the accounts of women who were already mothers before the COVID-19 pandemic and who decided to engage in entrepreneurial activities during the pandemic, becoming stallholders at the fair.

### *Entrepreneurial Mothers Fair*

The Entrepreneurial Mothers' Fair of Goiânia began at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, with a small number of women, through sales carried out exclusively in digital environments. It became a place of opportunity



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for mothers who turned to entrepreneurship as a way to maintain a balance between personal and professional life.

The fair project initially aimed to support mothers who had lost their source of income due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and who lacked a support network to help care for their children. With young and dependent children staying at home full time and needing to find a new source of income to ensure their families' livelihoods, they found a solution in the fair. Thus, at the beginning of 2020, sales were conducted through WhatsApp and Instagram groups, via a more informal type of commerce. Only later, at the end of 2021, did the Entrepreneurial Mothers' Fair inaugurate a physical space, following the easing of health restrictions.

By the end of 2021, the fair began to take place in person, allowing the participation of mothers with diverse profiles, whose motivations for entrepreneurship were no longer limited to childcare responsibilities.

### *Mothers starting businesses (and learning) during the pandemic*

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the lives of many mothers, leading them to seek entrepreneurship as an alternative for income generation and for balancing personal and professional life. The Entrepreneurial Mothers' Fair emerged in this context, conceived and managed by Interviewee A, who, although trained in Law, chose not to work in the field in order to dedicate herself to her family. Faced with unemployment and financial instability, she recognized the need for a space where mothers could sell products online and strengthen their support networks.

However, balancing professional and personal life remains a challenge for these women, who face pressure and external overload due to the lack of shared family responsibilities, social stereotypes that excessively demand maternal dedication, and the devaluation of their work as entrepreneurs. The



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search for training to manage their businesses was constant, although the need for immediate income made it difficult to participate in training courses. Interviewee A, in partnership with Sebrae Goiás, organized training initiatives, but low participation rates revealed the difficulty entrepreneurs faced in reconciling learning and work.

[...] In these years since 2020, I've seen that many mothers have given up entrepreneurship because of this routine, since sometimes they have no one to leave their children with, or their child gets sick. Sometimes, even within the family, there are toxic people who don't allow the mother to grow, who don't allow her to be an entrepreneur and grow professionally [...] Sometimes even families say: "But you're not making money from this. How can you be working on this and leaving the children at home sick?" [...] But we have to focus on what we want [...] At the beginning of the project, we offered several courses to help them move into entrepreneurship, but few have the time [...] to set aside two hours a day to pursue these courses. So I focused on the fair, because I saw that at the fair we earn immediate income, and many don't have the patience for that process of: first let's specialize, I'll do this and then I'll earn money [...] (Interviewee A).

Among the fair's participants, learning trajectories vary. Some already had experience in sales, such as Interviewee B, who balanced a formal job while starting her own business, encouraged by friends and family. During the pandemic, she sought online courses to improve her knowledge and recognized the importance of continuous learning for entrepreneurial success.

I also work in real estate, so I build and rent properties. So, in fact, I understand both sides, right? Both entrepreneurship and real estate. And this entrepreneurial side of mine has improved, you know. And I'm always studying; I don't stop. Studying makes all the difference, knowledge makes all the difference. (Interviewee B).

She reports that being a mother affects the entrepreneurial process, as it requires time and dedication to reconcile multiple roles, especially in adverse situations such as the pandemic. According to her, social and internal pressures to perform well as both a mother and an entrepreneur are also difficulties faced by many women.

Even though people talk about empowerment and things like that... I'll tell you something: we still face many difficulties, even professionally.



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Sometimes people doubt your ability, you know? And the fact that you're a mother means that you're judged a lot, even by yourself. So you want to perform both roles 100%, right? And then there comes a moment when you have to understand that you're also human and that you can make mistakes. (Interviewee B).

On the internet, I took courses with those instructors. Those courses available nowadays [...] I thought: wow, taking a course at home, that's great, right? It made things easier because I didn't have to leave home; I could do it whenever I wanted. And that made learning much easier. (Interviewee C).

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The pandemic also motivated unexpected professional changes. Interviewee D, an accountant with an MBA in Business Management, lost her job and decided to start a digital business in order to spend more time with her four-year-old daughter and reconcile motherhood with income generation. Despite her academic background, she faced difficulties with logistics and technology.

I lost my job during the pandemic, and that gave me the push to pursue my desire to become an entrepreneur. I had planned to spend two years taking care of my daughter, but I didn't expect my mother's death. That's where my difficulties began - I lost her to COVID. Then there were the challenges with digital tools, since I didn't have much knowledge, and that's when I started studying, taking courses, and talking to clients through WhatsApp. That was my difficulty during the pandemic... and delivery too. There was a whole delivery process that I didn't know much about, which also made things harder. So my difficulties were losing my mother to COVID and the delivery process. (Interviewee D).

Another challenge was dealing with the emotional impact of losing her mother, who died of COVID-19.

My mother was an inspiration to me. She wasn't an entrepreneur-she had a formal job-but she always taught us to chase our dreams. One way she talked about this was through entrepreneurship. It was easier to achieve things through our own work. So, in my view, work itself is already a form of entrepreneurship, a way of building financial independence. For me, it started with her as an inspiration. (Interviewee D).



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She also reports that in her last job she provided many training sessions on entrepreneurship and management, so she took many courses in order to be able to share her knowledge.

[...] I used to deliver training, and to do that at the last company I worked for, you have to learn first. So I studied entrepreneurship a lot - it was something I liked. I took in-person courses, I took online courses. I also took a sales course on sales techniques, and I applied this training at the company where I worked, for both salespeople and managers [...] (Interviewee D).

Interviewee G, a single mother, also found entrepreneurship to be a way to support her family after losing her job at the restaurant where she worked. Despite financial difficulties, she values the autonomy she has gained.

Since I started, I didn't know it would be this good to work for yourself, because I had always worked for others. For me, entrepreneurship has been the best thing I've ever done in my life-I can't work for others anymore. It's been something fantastic [...] I've become more independent, and I love it. Working for yourself is a different life. I love working for myself-money isn't much, but it's more fulfilling. (Interviewee G).

She learned to produce her products through family experience and practice at the fair but has difficulties with financial management and sometimes relies on others for support.

In fact, my family has always worked in the food sector, so I've always liked it. Since I was young, I helped my grandmother make things [...] I developed a taste for it very early, and for me, the best thing I do is work with food - I love everything about it! I just struggle with the financial side, solving things on my own; sometimes I need help from others [...]. But in terms of sales, for example, I learned at the fair. Every day we keep learning [...], but financially, I still have difficulties. (Interviewee G).

Other mothers had to abandon their formal careers to dedicate themselves to home and childcare. Interviewee F, for example, had to reconcile working from home with caring for her daughter, which she found unfeasible.

[...] I stayed at home, working and taking care of my first daughter, but it wasn't working very well because I was doing everything halfway. I couldn't take proper care of her or work properly, so I resigned [...] (Interviewee F).



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She chose to leave her job and, with family support, started her own business. She sought to learn about entrepreneurship online, although the lack of time made it difficult to complete courses.

[...] I even bought a marketing course, but it expired, and I couldn't finish it because I don't have time. (Interviewee F).

Since starting her venture, she has tried to increase her client base and turned to the Entrepreneurial Mothers' Fair as an alternative. Academic experiences also helped some mothers, such as Interviewee E, who holds a degree in Physical Education and saw toy-making as a way to support her child's motor development and later turn it into a business.

[...] During the pandemic, right? The need to bring different toys into his world, to entertain him and support his motor development milestones, and the impossibility of going out to look for them. It was an alternative I found-making the toys for him. (Interviewee E).

Despite her technical knowledge, she realized the need to better structure her business and sought additional training.

[...] I have a degree in Physical Education and felt the need to study more about motor skills and children's movement within this field and to deepen my studies regarding the idea of creating a company. [...] Organizing working hours, cash flow... these issues changed a lot because it stopped being just an idea - it could no longer be treated as a hobby [...], but rather within an entrepreneurial and business logic. So first I turned to the studies I had done at university [...]. I also took an online course [...], which provided basic training on how to structure the business. (Interviewee E).

She explains that there is subtle social pressure associated with being a mother who works or runs a business. However, she has had family support since the beginning of her venture and considers it essential.

Just not receiving criticism is already support, right? [...] Receiving criticism for the time you dedicate to something, especially for us mothers, instead of giving full attention to our children. So, not having that criticism directly aimed at us-even if it's subtle-is already something positive. And I do have support from my mother, my sister-in-law, who is here with me at the fair, my husband, and my son, who is my main



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product tester. These are supports I consider very important. (Interviewee E).

This is also the case for Interviewee C, who felt idle during the pandemic and decided to start a business. Although she had previously worked in sales before starting a family and later helped her husband in his business, she reports feeling insecure about managing the venture and needing her partner's support.

Encouragement in gaining knowledge, dealing with people, getting to know people, managing a business-these are things I still feel a bit afraid of. I rely on my husband sometimes... I feel a certain insecurity, you know? Dealing with people, dealing with money. But I know it's a barrier I've been overcoming. And I like it-it has made me feel better. Of course, I don't have much availability to grow that much because I'm already quite tired [...] (Interviewee C).

## **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS**

The study identified that childcare by mothers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic presents particularities. Considering the rapid changes imposed by the pandemic and the need to adapt within a short period of time, (re)learning became a reality for mothers.

Chart 2 presents the analysis of the most evident elements extracted from the interviews, relating them to the literature. Thus, it is possible to note that the pandemic brought even more evident challenges for women, especially mothers, mainly impacting childcare, as reported by Interviewee "D" in relation to digital technology.



**Chart 2 - Analysis of the most evident elements**

Objective	Statements from the Interviewees	Empirical Evidence	Interpretation	Reference
i	The need to bring [...] different toys, right?! [...] To build the toys. (Interviewee E).	Meeting a market need.	The need to place a product on the market when developing it, considering the imposed restrictions.	(Calixto, 2022)
i	My mother was an inspiration to me. (Interviewee D). [...] dealing with a business, right? [...] I don't really like it, I lean on my husband. (Interviewee C)	Family encouragement and support	Family support and encouragement proved to be present in the initiative and continuity of entrepreneurship.	(Arshad et al., 2021)
ii	Regarding sales, for example, I learned at the fair. (Interviewee G) I also looked for an online course. (Interviewee E)	Practical and online.	Entrepreneurial mothers learn mainly through practice and in the online environment.	(Cope, 2005).
iii	I became unemployed during the pandemic, and that was a boost to my desire to start my own business. And the difficulty with digital technology [...] (Interviewee D)	Unemployment and EL	The pandemic led mothers to unemployment, causing them to become entrepreneurs as an alternative. In addition, the difficulty with technology became a source of discomfort.	(Abukater, 2021)

Source: own elaboration, based on research data.

According to the reports collected, the need for immediate income led women to seek entrepreneurship as a way to balance personal and professional life, corroborating the findings of Agnihotri and Bhattacharya (2020). In this sense, it becomes clear from Interviewee B's account that motherhood impacts the entrepreneurial process, since both roles require time and dedication, reinforcing the data from the report by GÊNERO E NÚMERO; SOF – SEMPREVIVA ORGANIZAÇÃO FEMINISTA (2020).

In addition, most of the knowledge acquired by the mothers came through practice, supporting Cope's (2011) assertion. Complementarily, they sought training courses - often offered through digital platforms - as a way to understand



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and learn about entrepreneurship and the technical aspects of their own businesses and products. As reported by Interviewee B, who states:

[...] I'm always studying; I never stop, you know? Studying makes all the difference; knowledge makes all the difference.

And Interviewee C states:

[...] I also looked for an online course run by a professor from São Paulo, a physiotherapist [...]. So, in the course she also provided us with that basic training on how to structure the business.

This aligns with Politis (2005), who argues that learning facilitates the knowledge necessary to be effective in creating a new business.

From this perspective, it is observed that the EL process among entrepreneurial mothers, according to the research results, also aligns with Kolb's (1984) arguments, which emphasize that entrepreneurial individuals develop knowledge through experimentation, reflection, thinking, and action.

Furthermore, due to the acceleration of the digital era - a consequence imposed by the pandemic - it was observed that the interviewed women sought online training to develop themselves. In this sense, the EL process often occurred informally and digitally, in addition to strengthening the autonomy of entrepreneurial mothers in managing their own businesses.

Interviewee "G" reports that the acquisition of knowledge for creating her products came from experience passed down from generation to generation and through practice at the fair itself, corroborating Politis (2005), who states that the process of transforming entrepreneurial learning occurs through the balance of two processes - exploitation and exploration - meaning, respectively, leveraging the knowledge the individual already possesses and exploring newly acquired knowledge through experiences, innovations, and new discoveries. Moreover, the entrepreneurial learning process consists of the entrepreneur's own experiences and the confrontation of responsibilities (Politis, 2005).



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In this sense, the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation reinforces that, in entrepreneurial learning among entrepreneurial mothers, family influence is present in ways of thinking and acting (Arshad et al., 2021). Thus, the words family and woman are interconnected, even when it comes to entrepreneurship, as there is a strong relationship between female entrepreneurship and the sociocultural system existing in Brazil (Bui; Kuan; Chu, 2018). Therefore, the discussion of entrepreneurial learning among entrepreneurial mothers in pandemic contexts enriches the literature on entrepreneurial learning and maternal entrepreneurship.

The seven interviewees, including the fair manager, found in entrepreneurship an alternative that allowed them to dedicate themselves to their homes and children while, at the same time, generating income and achieving personal and professional goals. This is supported by Interviewee F's account, who stated that she chose to leave her job and, with family support, started her own business. This account echoes the results found by Agnihotri and Bhattacharya (2020), who identified that as women become mothers, encouragement to transition into entrepreneurship tends to increase.

The main motivating factors for mothers to move into entrepreneurship identified in this study during the COVID-19 pandemic were: (i) contributing income to the household; and (ii) spending more time with their children. As the pandemic limited access to schools, children spent more time at home. In this sense, according to Interviewee D's account, after losing her job during the COVID-19 pandemic, she decided to start a business in order to spend more time with her daughter and reconcile motherhood with income generation. This account contributes to the findings of Abukater (2021), who states that, motivated by rising unemployment during the pandemic, many women turned to entrepreneurship as an alternative to balance domestic activities and income generation.



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In addition to the professional uncertainty created by the pandemic - affecting, among others, the interviewed entrepreneurs and leading them to undertake entrepreneurial activities and create the Entrepreneurial Mothers' Fair - the main hindering factors identified by the research were new technologies and the need for learning and adaptation within a short period of time.

The pandemic accelerated digital processes, requiring entrepreneurs to adapt. However, some of the interviewed entrepreneurs reported difficulty in understanding the new digital communication environment, which had become the primary one. Furthermore, the pandemic itself represented a major emotional and entrepreneurial challenge. Some interviewees lost close family members and friends who could often have served as a support network enabling them to work. Similar arguments are also presented by Arshad et al. (2021), who state that the family strongly influences individuals in their ways of thinking and acting; therefore, family support is essential for decision-making, especially when it comes to entrepreneurship among mothers.

Overall, the analysis of the results reveals that the experience of entrepreneurial mothers during the pandemic was marked by a constant tension between autonomy and overload. Motherhood, while driving income-generating initiatives, also limited business expansion due to intensified domestic work and gender barriers faced in the market. Entrepreneurial learning proved to be predominantly practical, grounded in everyday experiences and complemented by the use of digital technologies, although unevenly among participants. These findings indicate that maternal entrepreneurship cannot be reduced to individual survival strategies but must be understood in its social, relational, and structural dimensions, highlighting the need for specific policies and support networks that enhance these women's autonomy.



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## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This study aimed to understand the entrepreneurial learning of mothers who started their businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, it sought to: (i) identify the factors that led these women to engage in entrepreneurship in the pandemic context; (ii) analyze the ways in which they acquired knowledge and learned to engage in entrepreneurial activities amid restrictions; and (iii) recognize the hindering factors imposed by the period and their impacts on EL. Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews with seven entrepreneurs linked to the Entrepreneurial Mothers' Fair in Goiânia, including the event manager, whose accounts supported the discussion of the results.

The findings show that the pandemic intensified pre-existing vulnerabilities, leading many mothers to turn to entrepreneurship as an alternative source of income and autonomy. Participants' responses were marked by adaptive strategies, especially the use of social media and migration to e-commerce. It was observed that EL occurred primarily through practice and experimentation, reinforcing the centrality of "learning by doing." Previous experiences, everyday life situations, and, to a lesser extent, training courses - particularly in online formats - complemented this process.

It was also found that many women needed to interrupt or make their formal professional trajectories more flexible in order to dedicate themselves to motherhood, facing social and family pressures to simultaneously perform the roles of mother and entrepreneur. This overlap of roles, far from being merely an individual challenge, reveals structural barriers that reinforce gender inequalities. During the pandemic period, some interviewees even sought creative ways to contribute to their children's development, such as making toys and organizing domestic activities, demonstrating how motherhood and entrepreneurship intertwine in their practices.



As a contribution, this study reinforces that the phenomenon of entrepreneurial learning among entrepreneurial mothers remains underexplored in the literature but is highly relevant to the fields of learning and entrepreneurship. It is noteworthy that, despite limitations in digital technology skills, the interviewees relied on the internet as their main source of knowledge and updates, which points to the need for policies and support programs that provide appropriate guidance in this digital search process.

Among the study's limitations are the small number of interviews and the delimitation of the empirical field to the Entrepreneurial Mothers' Fair in Goiânia, which currently hosts diverse profiles of entrepreneurs, not only mothers. For future studies, expanding the sample and conducting a comparative analysis between mothers who started businesses during the pandemic and those who were already active before it are suggested, in order to more comprehensively understand the impacts of this period on maternal entrepreneurial learning.

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