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Women and Symbolic Violence: Measurement Scale of Gender in Tourism Sustainability and the Case of Ecuador

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Abstract: This study addresses the persistence of patriarchal structures and the reproduction of traditional gender roles in rural settings. In particular, this research explores *agritourism*, an emerging sector of rural tourism that, while providing economic opportunities in rural areas, also ends up perpetuating female subordination. In response to this issue, the manifestation of symbolic gender-based violence in the field of agritourism was analyzed, and a reliable and validated psychometric measurement scale was developed. The instrument identified and quantified the specific dimensions of symbolic gender-based violence in this context. To meet these objectives, the Delphi Method was used asynchronously for the design of the questionnaire, and an exploratory factor analysis was applied with a sample of 299 participants to validate its internal structure. The results indicate the existence of a robust structure made up of six key factors: feminized entrepreneurship, occupational self-segregation, stereotyped roles, limited access to land, glass ceiling, and wage discrimination. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the symbolic mechanisms of gender-based violence in agritourism and offer an analytical tool for future research in the field of gender studies and rural tourism.



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Keywords: feminized entrepreneurship; occupational self-segregation; stereotyped roles; limited access to land; glass ceiling; wage discrimination; sustainable; agrotourism; rural tourism; gender inequality

1. Introduction

Gender violence constitutes a complex and multifaceted phenomenon encompassing a wide range of physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological acts of violence against a person because of social constructions of gender. These acts not only have serious consequences for the health, human rights, and well-being of those who suffer them (García-Moreno et al., 2015; World Bank, 2023) but also include threats, coercion, and arbitrary deprivation of liberty, manifesting themselves in both the public and private spheres (Heise et al., 1994). Furthermore, gender violence is sustained by cultural structures and dynamics that perpetuate inequality, normalizing oppressive practices under symbolic and structural forms of domination (Lombard, 2018). In this context, it comprises an expression of social control systems that reinforce male dominance, legitimizing the subordination of women and other marginalized groups (O'Toole & Schiffman, 1997).

Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of human rights in the world (UN Women, 2023). Data from the Ecuadorian government reveal

that 65% of women have suffered at least one episode of violence throughout their lives (UN Women, 2024). This violence encompasses various forms recognized by Ecuadorian legislation, including symbolic, political, and sexual, among others (National Assembly of the Republic of Ecuador, 2018), and it manifests in different areas of women's lives. According to several studies, structural gender violence limits the professional and personal opportunities of women in all industries, particularly in the tourism sector.

On the other hand, symbolic violence is a concept, developed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2021) who exposed the subtle and invisible forms of social and cultural domination that perpetuate gender inequalities, manifesting in everyday encounters, entrenched social practices, institutional systems, and collective beliefs (Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2019). Symbolic violence is structural and transmitted generationally, supported by male hegemony, naturalizing the sexual division of labor (Benalcázar-Luna & Venegas, 2015; K. Morgan & Björkert, 2006), which is relevant in this study due to cultural dynamics (traditions, customs, beliefs, values, habits, norms, stereotypes and traditional gender expectations) (Chanda Chansa Thelma, 2024; Qiu et al., 2023) that are manifested daily in the rural environment where agritourism is developed.

In this context, UN Tourism (2024) reports that women constitute 54% of the tourism workforce; however, they are predominantly employed in lower-skilled, lower-paid, and oftentimes, informal jobs. Various studies mentioned that in countries with a dominant patriarchal system, and even more so in their rural populations, gender inequality is predominant (Chanda Chansa Thelma, 2024; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations & UN Women, 2010; Ghimire et al., 2024; Hunnicutt, 2009; Kutsmus & Kovalchuk, 2020; Pécot et al., 2024) since the jobs held by women or the ventures in which they participate continue to reproduce traditional gender roles (Abou-Shouk et al., 2021; Kutlu & Ngoasong, 2024), as well as feminized jobs (Carvalho et al., 2014; Eger, 2021), with the characteristics of part-time work, job insecurity, division of labor by gender, stereotyped roles, a glass ceiling, and sticky floor (Calvet et al., 2020; Carrasco-Santos et al., 2024; Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2020; Freund & Hernandez-Maskivker, 2021; Moreno Alarcón, 2018; Moreno Alarcón & Cañada Mullor, 2018; Pickel-Chevalier & Yanthy, 2023; Zhang & Zhang, 2021).

Agritourism as part of rural tourism has become an economic development opportunity in emerging rural economies (Ndhlovu & Dube, 2024; Zvavahera & Chigora, 2023), combining traditional agropecuary with tourism to generate employment and income, especially for women. They participate in agritourism activity, adding value to farms and agricultural products (Olaya-Reyes et al., 2024). In addition, they identify opportunities for entrepreneurship in rural tourism, such as the sale of folk cuisine (Landeta-Bejarano, 2019), as well as weaving and embroidery (Landeta-Bejarano et al., 2018). Thus, women contribute as a workforce or entrepreneurs in family businesses, positively impacting the global economy, the environment, and sustainability (Arroyo et al., 2019; Beedle et al., 2013; Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2022; Filimonau et al., 2022; Lupiá et al., 2017; Nguyen, 2022; Nordbø, 2022). Nonetheless, the social networks of rural communities, as expressions of social capital, play an excluding role for women. According to Putnam (1995; as cited in Urteaga, 2013) social capital is defined as "the characteristics of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit". However, in this context, these networks and social norms are profoundly influenced by patriarchy, structured around the dominance of men and their interests. This patriarchal social capital perpetuates gender barriers and expectations that operate as forms of symbolic violence, hindering women's participation and reinforcing their subordination (Cruz-Coria et al., 2023). Through the reproduction of traditional norms of behavior, these dynamics

restrict women's access to economic and power spheres, excluding strategic networks of influence and perpetuating gender inequalities.

Against this backdrop, the recent focus on sustainable development, which fosters a change in humanity's perspective on its relationship with the world it inhabits (Manioudis & Meramveliotakis, 2022), has rallied tourism industry stakeholders in a permanent process of evaluating and re-evaluating opportunities. Klarin (2018) states that sustainable development must also provide a solution regarding satisfaction of basic human needs, integrating development, protecting the environment and achieving equality. Consequently, social capital is a crucial element for promoting sustainability, as long as it is structured in an inclusive manner and directs its modus operandi towards cooperation and collective well-being. This approach not only encourages the elimination of symbolic violence but also strengthens local capacities, diversifies economic activities, and generates more equitable and resilient tourism models aligned with sustainable development goals.

Research on tourism and gender has increased considerably since the pioneering publication in 1986 and the special issue in 1995, covering topics such as entrepreneurship and empowerment in the tourism sector (Segovia-Pérez & Figueroa-Domecq, 2018). Notwithstanding, a recent publication revealed low levels of research from Africa and Central and South America (Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2022; Kimbu et al., 2024). Despite such progress, the literature shows an alarming omission in the study of gender-based violence in tourism, especially symbolic violence.

This research provides practical tools to make visible and address forms of symbolic violence that thwart the economic and social empowerment of women in rural contexts. This study seeks to advance the fulfillment of goal 5.1 of the SDGs: eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and girls, contributing to the emerging field of gender violence studies in rural tourism and agritourism by proposing as a first objective to analyze the manifestation of symbolic gender-based violence against women in the agritourism field, proposing a conceptual framework that identifies two key dimensions: gender barriers and the social expectations that perpetuate these inequalities. This theoretical framework and psychometric scale also aim to serve as a basis for designing interventions that reduce gender inequalities (goal 10.2 of the SDGs) in access to productive assets, leadership, and labor equity. A second objective is to develop a reliable and validated measurement scale, which allows for identifying and quantifying the dimensions of symbolic gender violence specific to the agritourism context, capturing the experiences and challenges faced by women in this sector, highlighting the importance of implementing equal pay policies (goal 8.5) for compliance with the SDGs.

The results of this research will highlight a form of violence that is often invisible in agritourism and rural tourism, laying the foundations for the design of strategies to combat it. It will also contribute to the development of a nearly void theoretical body, contributing to a greater understanding of the rural reality in the tourism sector.

The following section briefly reviews the literature and presents a two-dimensional framework for measuring symbolic gender-based violence in women through agritourism and rural tourism. This framework includes the six main factors for measuring symbolic gender-based violence. The methodology appears in Section 3. The empirical results are in Section 4. The final section lays out the general conclusions and discussion, as well as the managerial implications, theoretical implications, limitations, and future lines of research.

2. Literature Review

Global tourism depends on the structural violence inherent in spatially unequal development (Büscher & Fletcher, 2017, p. 653). Various feminist perspectives analyze this oppression, exploring the interconnectedness between capitalism and patriarchy and its

impact on the sexual division of labor. Fundamental works such as “The Main Enemy” by Christine Delphy (1970), “Against Invisible Work” by Isabel Largaña, and “Le rapport social de sexe” by Danièle Kergoat (2002) reveal multiple dimensions of this subjugation (Bolla & Estermann, 2021). Rural areas oftentimes maintain gender roles with patriarchal structures, exposing women to greater risks of gender-based violence (Chanda Chansa Thelma, 2024). Rural women disproportionately bear the burden of multidimensional poverty and continuously experience gender-based discrimination, harmful social norms, and under-representation in safe and well-paid jobs (Jerumeh, 2024).

Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework and the connection between the dimensions proposed in this study (see Figure 1 for a conceptual map of the dimensions of symbolic violence). The interconnection of the identified factors (feminized entrepreneurship, occupational self-segregation, stereotyped roles, limited access to land, glass ceiling, and wage discrimination) reveals a systemic framework within networks of trust and cooperation in rural communities that reinforces traditional norms. This only serves to legitimize gender violence and inequality in rural tourism contexts and agrotourism.

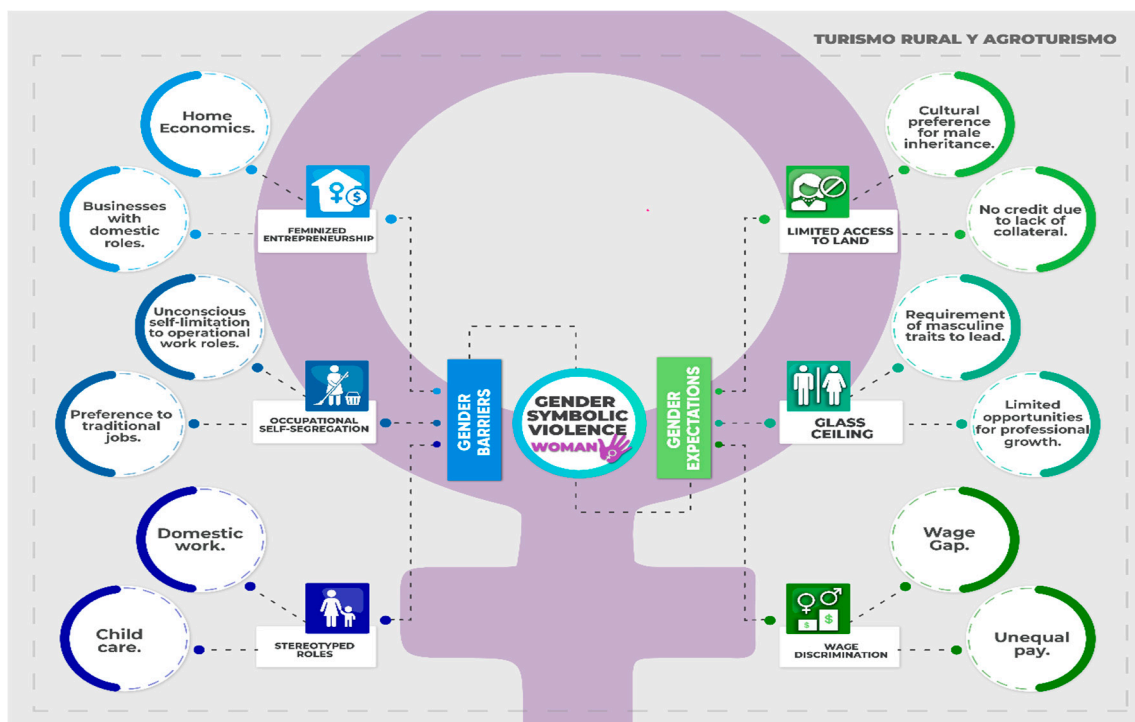


Figure 1. Conceptual map of the dimensions of symbolic violence.

Symbolic violence, a subtle form of domination, operates through these cultural and social structures, normalizing the sexual division of labor and shaping women’s aspirations and opportunities. These six factors identified in this study—from restricted access to productive assets, such as land, to exclusion from leadership and decision-making networks—work together to limit women’s equal participation in this sector. Symbolic violence is reinforced by deeply rooted cultural barriers and gender stereotypes. Occupational self-segregation, influenced by traditional norms, confines women to low-paid roles with limited economic mobility, while glass ceiling and wage discrimination solidify these structural inequalities by perpetuating gaps in power and economic resources.

In this scenario, feminized entrepreneurship becomes an adaptive strategy, although insufficient for overcoming the systemic barriers that women face. This dynamic not only impacts female empowerment but also hinders the sustainability of tourism in rural spaces

by underusing the potential of women as agents of change and development, essential elements to build resilient and inclusive communities.

2.1. Symbolic Gender Violence in Women (SGBV)

Symbolic violence is a hidden mechanism of power without resorting to physical coercion, acting as a tacit extortion that guides the behavior of the victims, voluntarily or involuntarily (Benalcázar-Luna & Venegas, 2015, p. 144). This type of violence is disguised as neutrality, taking advantage of a social order that legitimizes it and makes it seem inevitable. Ingrained in everyday and accepted practices, it becomes difficult to question, as it is perceived as a natural part of social functioning (Carrasco-Santos et al., 2024), in which invisible structural violence and the interdependence between gender-based violence and social control mechanisms define the moral boundaries that contribute to the silencing of violent acts; Eger (2021) points out that violence manifests itself through the psychic integration of our beliefs and emotions into internal dialogue and personal negotiations (p. 8).

2.2. Gender Expectations of Women

Gender expectations shape behavior according to biological sex, being descriptive and prescriptive (Diekman & Alice, 2008; Heilman, 2012). Prescriptive norms require community behavior in women and agency behavior in men (Eagly & Wood, 1991 as cited in Hanek & Garcia, 2022). Thus, patriarchal culture and social expectations reinforce gender stereotypes, influencing women's career choices and self-perception, studies show that women internalize these norms, resulting in reduced self-confidence and doubts about their ability in leadership roles (Carrasco-Santos et al., 2024). Research by Aghazamani et al. (2020) in Ramsar concluded that women considered performing household chores and supporting the husband as the "head of the family" as signs of empowerment. Thus, it is observed that gender expectations direct women towards certain sectors and occupations, influencing their self-perception and their interaction with the opposite sex, conditioned by internal factors shaped socially and culturally. An example is the study by Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014) highlights that women are perceived as less effective leaders compared to men.

2.3. Feminized Entrepreneurship

Historical gender roles have significantly affected women's employment and entrepreneurship decisions (Ferguson, 2011; Ferguson & Alarcón, 2015), one of the characteristics of female entrepreneurship is that the business units and their domestic unit are one and the same. In practice, this means that their commercial relationships are made from domesticity and through domesticity (Cruz et al., 2020; Cruz-Coria et al., 2023; Naranjo, 2014). Feminized entrepreneurship builds its foundation on this type of entrepreneurship, in which women tend to start businesses in areas traditionally associated with feminine roles, making their businesses compatible with household schedules, mixing traditional reproductive roles with those of managing their businesses (Alonso-Almeida & Rodríguez-Antón, 2011; Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2015; Segovia-Pérez & Figueroa-Domecq, 2018). In Indonesia, a study showed that women's role in tourism involved businesses aligned with traditional roles (Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995 cited in Beedle et al., 2013, p. 177). Other research mentions that "women are not only functional to a flexible labor market, [...] but also assume in a single body, the possibility of simultaneously upholding a productive and a reproductive role" (Morini, 2014 cited in Moreno Alarcón & Cañada Mullor, 2018, p. 15). As a result, tourism businesses in rural areas run by women are often family enterprises related to domestic roles (Morgan & Winkler, 2020; Nordbø, 2022; Pécot et al., 2024).

2.4. Occupational Segregation

The occupational self-segregation of women in tasks related to domestic work results from a deep gender socialization that from an early age assigns differentiated roles and expectations to men and women. Such socialization, reinforced by cultural norms and stereotypes, conditions women's professional choices, steering them towards activities considered feminine. Studies indicate that cultural values influence the occupations that women consider appropriate (Bolukoglu & Gozukucuk, 2023; Hutchings et al., 2020; Lladós-Masllorens & Ruiz-Dotras, 2022). An example is when women limit their working hours or do not move due to family commitments, affecting their professional development, especially during child-rearing years (Boone et al., 2013 cited in Hutchings et al., 2020, p. 3).

2.5. Stereotypical Roles

Gender stereotypes are simplified and generalized perceptions of each gender, without considering individual qualities. This has promoted a division of labor by sex: men work outside, and women take care of domestic chores and childcare (Wienclaw Ruth & Salem Press, 2016). In other words, gender behaviors and preferences are imposed by socio-psychological processes that are often mutually supportive (Hanek & Garcia, 2022). A study by Mkhize and Cele (2017) in KwaZulu-Natal established that cultural and traditional practices of South African tourism relegate women to low-skilled jobs and childcare. In Ghana, for example, differentiated gender roles persist: "women are expected to marry, have children, take care of the home and be sexually available to their husbands, while men must work and support their families" (Sikweyiya et al., 2020).

2.6. Gender Barriers in Women

Gender barriers are obstacles imposed onto women by persistent socio-economic structures (Carrasco-Santos et al., 2024; Ghimire et al., 2024; Timothy, 2001). These barriers can be both conscious and unconscious. A fitting example is discrimination in hiring, where recruiters may include or exclude employees based solely on their gender, as they adhere to gender constructs of "who constitutes a risk" (Costa et al., 2017b, p. 66). Consequently, the demands of unspecified time availability in the tourism sector, as well as the existence of a masculine culture in organizations, constitute a form of indirect prejudice against women (Mooney & Ryan, 2009 as cited in Costa et al., 2017b, p. 66). In Jordan, research revealed that, despite women's interest in working as tour guides, they encounter several obstacles that prevent them from doing so (Alrwajfah et al., 2020, p. 3). These gender-based barriers arise from a complex intersection of external factors that restrict women's development in the professional, social, educational, and personal spheres.

2.7. Limited Access to and Ownership of Land

Limited access to and ownership of land is a gender barrier aggravated by social, cultural and ethnic conditioning, further restricting rural women's economic opportunities and productive resources. Although women represent almost half of the world's population, they own less than 20% of the land, evidencing a gap between legal and practical provisions (Ghimire et al., 2024, p. 2). A study by the Ecuadorian government confirms that most rural women live in inequality, with little access to land and productive resources, and overwork (household chores and workload), limiting their opportunities. Only 36% of rural women heads of household have land titles, increasing their vulnerability to poverty (Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of Ecuador, 2021). The lack of land ownership prevents them from accessing credit because they do not possess traditional collateral (Inter-American Commission of Women, 2022).

Women's land rights, which include rights to housing, land, and property, are set out in the global human rights and development agendas (Ho et al., 2023, p. 1). The UN, in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), seeks gender equality and women's empowerment (fifth SDG), establishing the need for reforms that grant women equal rights to economic resources, access to property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, in accordance with national laws (UN, 2020). For example, Ghimire et al. (2024), in their research in Nepal, showed that women's socio-economic performance improves with shared land ownership, contributing to the empowerment of rural women, reaffirming that access to land is key to improving women's quality of life in a sustainable way (Moreno Alarcón, 2018).

2.8. Glass Ceiling

The "glass ceiling", which prevents women from accessing leadership positions, is evident in many rural communities where tourism leaders are predominantly male, and female voices are under-represented in local associations and tourism management committees. A study carried out in 2015 in the hotel sector on gender and managerial characteristics concluded that "masculine traits are valued more than feminine traits to become a successful middle manager, regardless of skill" (Cuadrado et al., 2015, p. 242). Another study conducted in Portugal, which examines how tourism managers' perceptions of management discourse are influenced by gender, reveals the following findings: hegemonic masculinity within managerial discourse is evidenced in participants' descriptions of managers' appearance. The study also presented narratives from participants indicating that managerial discourse favors the masculine norm, men are perceived (more naturally) as managers than women, power is associated with masculinity (Costa et al., 2017a, p. 154).

The concepts of "glass ceiling" and "sticky floor" showcase a vertically segregated work structure (Beedle et al., 2013; Gentry, 2007; Hutchings et al., 2020). In contrast to the situation of men, who are offered faster promotions than skilled women, benefiting from invisible factors that facilitate their career advancement, this phenomenon is known as the "glass elevator" (Hutchings et al., 2020, p. 2). This power imbalance perpetuates the marginalization of women to leadership positions by making it easier for their needs, interests, and perspectives to be neglected in the planning and development of tourism within a community.

2.9. Pay Discrimination

Wage discrimination for women who, despite doing the same job or work of equal value, often receive lower salaries than their male colleagues is a phenomenon that perpetuates economic inequalities. Research mentions that women hold precarious and seasonal jobs and that there is a decrease in their salaries compared to those of men (Carvalho et al., 2019; Hutchings et al., 2020; Pickel-Chevalier & Yanthy, 2023). A study in Portugal concludes that women workers in all industries consistently receive lower wages than men, regardless of their education or qualifications (Carvalho et al., 2014, p. 423). In addition, several authors assert that the wage gap is a persistent problem in tourism, where women, despite having the same job characteristics, earn less than men (Aghazamani et al., 2020; Carrasco-Santos et al., 2024; Zhang & Zhang, 2021).

3. Materials and Methods

The findings presented in this study constitute a significant contribution to the first phase of the research, development and innovation Project entitled 'Agritourism with a gender approach', supported by the Technical University of Babahoyo. This project is

directly aligned with the ongoing doctoral research at the University of Malaga, led by the first author of this article and director of the project.

3.1. Phase 1. Validation of the Survey Instrument (Measurement Indicators)

The survey instrument was submitted for validation by experts in the tourism and gender research area and/or postgraduate studies in gender. The group of selected academic experts, a total of eight people, were geographically dispersed from universities in Spain, the Netherlands, Mexico, India, and Ecuador; for this reason, the Delphi Method was applied asynchronously. The method had a round of questionnaire review, each expert provided opinions, observations or evaluations of each item proposed as an indicator by means of a binary scale, with 0 meaning they did not agree with the survey question or 1 meaning the question was positively validated. In the case of 0, the expert mentioned the reason why the question was invalidated. At the end of the first round, the analysis of the degree of dispersion or consensus was carried out, leaving a questionnaire that, in the second round, reached close positions, obtaining a higher degree of consensus in each indicator of the scale proposed to measure symbolic violence in agritourism (See Table 1).

Table 1. Scale for the measurement of symbolic gender violence in agritourism.

Construct	Dimension	Factor	Indicator
Symbolic Gender based Violence	Gender Expectations	Feminized Entrepreneurship	FE1: I want to start a business in the production and marketing of traditional desserts and beverages
			FE2: I want to start a business in production and marketing of handicrafts
			FE3: I want to start a business in the production and marketing of traditional foods
			FE4: I want to start a business in production and marketing of seams, embroidery and textiles
			FE5: I want to start marketing natural products and cosmetics (agri-artisanal)
		Occupational Self-segregation	O-SS1: I am looking for work related to food preparation (kitchen helpers) because I consider that I have more opportunities for employment related to cooking
			O-SS2: I am looking for a job related to cleaning service because I have more opportunities to be hired.
			O-SS3: I am looking for a job related to operational tasks such as customer service, I consider I have more employment opportunities in this area.
		Stereotyped Roles	SR1: I agree that in my community and family, women are dedicated to taking care of children, people with disabilities or dependent people.
			SR2: I agree that in my community and family women are dedicated to the care of fathers, mothers, grandmothers, and grandfathers.
			SR3: I agree that in my community and family women do domestic chores/domestic care work/domestic work.
			SR4: I agree that in my community and family, women prioritize raising children over their profession or work.
			SR5: I agree that in my community and family women are dedicated to the care of in-laws.

Table 1. Cont.

Construct	Dimension	Factor	Indicator
Symbolic Gender based Violence	Gender Barriers	Limited access to and ownership of the Land	LATAOTL1: Society frequently questions women's ability to manage land ownership.
			LATAOTL 2: It is more difficult for women to own or buy land, farms, or rural properties than it is for men.
			LATAOTL 3: In my community and family, men are favored to inherit land
			LATAOTL: It is uncommon for women to own land, farms or rural properties.
			LATAOTL 5: I have difficulty accessing bank loans to finance land purchases.
	Gender Barriers	Glass Ceiling	GC1: In my community, women occupy middle management positions in associations and guilds of agritourism farms/ranches
			GC2: In my community, the associations and guilds of agritourism farms/ranches are led by women.
			GC3: In my community, women influence group executive decisions in a job.
			GC4: In my community, the highest position in a job is held by women.
			GC5: In my community, the managers in the agritourism farms of Los Ríos are women.
	Gender Barriers	Wage Discrimination	WD1: In my community, in family agritourism enterprises, women are rarely adequately remunerated.
			WD2: In my community, there is better pay for men compared to women.
			WD3: In my community, there are better employment opportunities for men compared to women.
			WD4: In my community, women's pay is generally lower in similar jobs held by men.

3.2. Phase 2. Data Collection and Reliability

The survey was carried out in the Los Ríos Province, in the Babahoyo, Baba, Vinces, Ventanas, Montalvo, Palenque, Pueblo Viejo, and Urdaneta counties.

The sample was collected by the non-probabilistic method for convenience, taken in the sites on holidays and/or weekends where there is greater movement of leisure and recreation activities related to agritourism and rural tourism in each of the chosen sites. The participants had to meet the requirement of being women and being related to tourism in the rural areas of the Los Ríos Province. Face-to-face surveys were used to ensure the quality and integrity of the responses, allowing real-time doubts to be clarified, inconsistencies to be minimized, and the application environment to be controlled. This method favored a high response rate and data accuracy by applying standardized questionnaires by a team trained under a structured protocol. In order to ensure the quality and reliability of the data, an exhaustive cleanup of the database was carried out. Initially, participant questionnaires containing a high proportion of missing data were removed, as these could affect the validity of subsequent analyses. Subsequently, outliers were identified and discarded through preliminary statistical analyses, with the aim of minimizing the impact of possible biases. As a result of this process, 299 valid questionnaires were obtained out of the 320 initially received, representing a retention rate of 93.44%. The excluded questionnaires

showed incomplete response patterns or presented data that deviated significantly from the expected values, compromising the integrity of the analysis.

3.3. Data Analysis and Model Validity Testing

To explore the underlying structure of the study variables, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed using the Jamovi software (version 2.3.28). The minimal residue extraction method was used, which is suitable for data that may not meet the assumption of multivariate normality. An oblique Oblimin rotation was applied, which allows correlation between factors and facilitates interpretation in complex structures. The number of factors to be retained was determined by a parallel analysis based on FA. This approach compares the eigenvalues generated from the observed data with the eigenvalues of matrices simulated using the factor model, identifying the number of factors that best represent the latent structure in the data without relying on direct comparisons with random values or simply on a threshold of eigenvalues.

Before executing the EFA, the adequacy of the sample was verified, the Bartlett sphericity test and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin sample adequacy index (KMO) were used, confirming that the data met the necessary requirements for the EFA. The internal reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha and McDonald’s omega coefficients. Cronbach’s alpha was used to estimate the overall internal consistency of the scales, while the omega coefficient offered an additional measure of reliability that incorporates factorial loads and item-specific errors. The use of both coefficients ensured the consistency and accuracy of the measurements made.

4. Results

This study presents a detailed characterization of the population in terms of age, educational level, marital status, income, cultural identity, and relationship with agritourism activities. The data provide a comprehensive view of the different dimensions that influence the life and work of the population under study.

4.1. Socio-Demographic Information

Table 2 shows age distribution: most participants are in the range of 22 to 37 years (38.8%), followed by the range of 38 to 52 years (38.1%). The 18–21 and 53–71 age ranges represent 9.4% and 12%, respectively, while the group of those over 71 years of age represents only 1.7%. The predominant educational level is higher education (42.1%), followed by secondary education (38.1%). However, there is a small percentage that has received only primary education (10.4%) and has no formal education (4%). Most of the respondents are married (28.1%) or in a common law marriage (29.4%). A significant number are also single (23.7%), and 7.7% are separated. The most representative income range is between USD 201 and USD 400 (37.8%). They are followed by those with incomes of less than USD 200 (27.8%) and those with incomes between USD 401 and USD 600 (21.7%). The highest incomes of USD 601 to USD 800 account for 7.4% and only 5.4% have incomes above USD 800.

Table 2. Socio-demographic aspects.

Characteristics	Distribution	Frequency	%
Age	18–21	28	9.4
	22–37	116	38.8
	38–52	114	38.1
	53–71	35	12
		5	1.7

Table 2. Cont.

Characteristics	Distribution	Frequency	%
Education Level	No formal education	12	4
	Primary education	31	10.4
	Secondary education	114	38.1
	Higher education	126	42.1
	Master's degree/Doctorate	16	5.4
Marital Status	Married	84	28.1
	Common law marriage	88	29.4
	Others	33	11
	Single	71	23.7
	Separated/estranged	23	7.7
Income	<USD 200	83	27.8
	USD 201–USD 400	113	37.8
	USD 401–USD 600	65	21.7
	USD 601–USD 800	22	7.4
	>USD 800	16	5.4
Identity	Montuvia	167	55.9
	Indígenas	25	8.4
	Afroecuadorian	17	5.7
	Mestiza	86	28.8
	Other	4	1.3
Relación Agro	Student	35	11.7
	Entrepreneurship	113	37.8
	Work in tourism	83	27.8
	Tourism-related	53	17.7
	Tourism Management	15	5.0

In terms of interculturality, the predominant group is the Montuvia culture, which represents 55.9% of the population. It is followed by mestizo identity (28.8%), and a smaller number belong to Indigenous (8.4%), Afro-Ecuadorian (5.7%), and other (1.3%) identity. Most of the participants are involved in tourism ventures (37.8%) and with jobs in rural tourism and/or agritourism represent (27.8%). A significant number is also related to training activities in the area (17.7%), as well as female students doing internships or community service in agritourism or rural tourism (11.7%). However, those who work managing tourism activities are (5.0%). These results provide a comprehensive picture of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics that influence the life and work of the community studied and suggest diversification in terms of cultural identity, income, and participation in agritourism activities (See Table 2).

4.2. Measurement Model

The analysis of the factorability of the data was essential to validate the questionnaire before proceeding with the exploratory factor analysis (EFA). To assess the sampling adequacy of the data, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) index was used, which measures the suitability of the sample size for analysis. The KMO value obtained was 0.874, significantly higher than the minimum recommended threshold of 0.6 (Hair et al., 2010), which indicates that the sample is suitable for the extraction of underlying factors. Additionally, the Bartlett Sphericity Test was carried out to verify the sphericity of the correlation matrix of the variables (Hair et al., 2010). The result was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 3866$; $df = 325$; $p < 0.001$), which implies that the variances are not equal and, therefore, allows the performance of the EFA based on these data. Together, these indicators support the applicability and robustness of exploratory factor analysis, confirming that the sample and dataset are adequately representative for the extraction and analysis of underlying factors. An exploratory factor analysis (AFE) with oblique rotation (Oblimin) was carried out on a set of 27 indicators designed to measure symbolic gender-based violence in the context

of agritourism and rural tourism. Oblique rotation was selected due to the expectation of correlation between the factors. Subsequently, a parallel analysis was carried out to determine the appropriate number of factors to be extracted. This approach revealed a six-factor model that collectively explains 55.9% of the total variance. To guarantee the validity of the model, rigorous criteria were applied, considering only those factor loads equal to or greater than 0.3 as significant. As a result of this process, an indicator “I agree that in my community and family women are dedicated to the care of mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law” who did not meet the established criteria was eliminated.

The elimination of this indicator allowed the consolidation of 26 indicators that demonstrated substantial factor loads and were coherently grouped into six different constructs: feminized entrepreneurship, occupational self-segregation, stereotyped roles, limited access to land, glass ceiling, and wage discrimination. These six factors represent clear and differentiated dimensions of symbolic gender-based violence in agritourism and rural tourism. The psychometric properties of these constructs were evaluated and demonstrated their relevance and applicability in the context of this study. The resulting factor structure reflects both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, providing a holistic understanding of the motivations and dynamics underlying symbolic gender-based violence in this specific domain. The robustness of the constructs is confirmed through high coefficients of internal consistency and a clear demarcation of the latent dimensions. In our study, the overall value of Cronbach’s Alpha was 0.903 and McDonald’s Omega 0.906, indicating satisfactory reliability. Therefore, the factors demonstrate both univariate normality and reliability. Overall, these results underline the solidity and relevance of the factorial model developed, providing a solid empirical basis for future research and interventions on the subject of symbolic gender-based violence in rural tourism (See Table 3).

Table 3. Factorial loads and reliability of the model for measuring symbolic gender violence in agritourism.

Constructs and Association Between Items	Loading	Media	SD	Uniqueness
Gender Expectations				
Feminized Entrepreneurship.				
Variance = 11.54%; SC Loading = 3.00; $\alpha = 0.867$; $\omega = 0.869$				
FE1	0.867	3.94	1.04	0.253
FE2	0.803	3.87	1.09	0.306
FE3	0.691	4.20	0.939	0.475
FE4	0.679	4.31	0.941	0.473
FE5	0.612	4.26	0.908	0.568
Occupational self-segregation				
Variance = 6.08%; SC Loading = 1.58; $\alpha = 0.718$; $\omega = 0.732$				
O-SS1	0.772	3.80	1.52	0.411
O-SS 2	0.732	3.90	1.49	0.411
O-SS 3	0.432	4.05	1.26	0.711
Stereotyped Roles				
Variance = 7.84%; SC Loading = 2.04; $\alpha = 0.792$; $\omega = 0.799$				
SR1	0.841	3.91	1.19	0.259
SR2	0.634	4.07	1.10	0.435
SR3	0.532	4.30	0.910	0.549
SR4	0.374	4.34	1.11	0.600

Table 3. Cont.

Constructs and Association Between Items	Loading	Media	SD	Uniqueness
Gender Barriers				
Limited Access to and Ownership of Land				
Variance = 11.47%; SC Loading = 2.98; $\alpha = 0.853$; $\omega = 0.866$				
LATAOL1	0.847	4.79	0.573	0.316
LATAOL 2	0.813	4.66	0.684	0.299
LATAOL 3	0.770	4.57	0.718	0.373
LATAOL 4	0.662	4.65	0.715	0.496
LATAOL 5	0.592	4.42	0.869	0.578
Glass Ceiling				
Variance = 11.22%; SC Loading = 2.92; $\alpha = 0.861$; $\omega = 0.862$				
GC1	0.766	3.89	0.917	0.431
GC 2	0.755	4.00	0.884	0.445
GC 3	0.719	4.13	0.847	0.452
GC 4	0.676	4.27	0.830	0.343
GC 5	0.669	4.27	0.820	0.457
Wage Discrimination				
Variance = 7.74%; SC Loading = 2.01; $\alpha = 0.800$; $\omega = 0.804$				
WD1	0.884	3.37	1.39	0.211
WD 2	0.637	3.61	1.41	0.414
WD 3	0.570	3.47	1.52	0.514
WD 4	0.359	3.48	1.49	0.687
Bartlett's Test				
Measures of sampling suitability				
Model Test:				
$\chi^2 = 3866$; $df = 325$; $p < 0.001$				
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Test = 0.874				
$\chi^2 = 486$; $df = 184$; $p < 0.001$				

Note: SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha; ω = McDonald's omega coefficient.

Feminized entrepreneurship highlights an important dimension of entrepreneurial aspirations that, although reflecting activities traditionally associated with feminine roles, if not approached with a critical perspective, could be counterproductive by perpetuating gender stereotypes. Activities such as the production and marketing of desserts, crafts, traditional foods, textiles, and natural products should not be limited exclusively to women, as their connection with gender could reinforce dynamics of inequality by associating them with traditional expectations. The variability in factor burdens shows that certain activities, such as the production of traditional desserts and drinks, have greater weight in this construct than others, such as the marketing of agro-artisan products. This may suggest an implicit hierarchy in preferences or perceptions about which activities are most feasible or desirable within the framework of these aspirations.

The occupational self-segregation factor shows how individual perceptions of available job opportunities are influenced by gender norms and social expectations, leading to a preference for occupations traditionally associated with feminine roles. The indicators reflect that women tend to seek employment in sectors such as food preparation, cleaning services, or operational tasks related to customer service since they consider that these areas offer them greater hiring possibilities. This behavior may be linked to the internalization of gender stereotypes that limit job aspirations to roles perceived as "appropriate" or "more accessible" to them.

The factor of stereotyped roles accentuates the persistence of traditional gender norms that assign women the main responsibility for caregiving tasks and domestic work, relegating other aspirations, such as professional development. The indicators reflect significant agreement with the idea that women in certain communities and families take care of children, dependent people, and elderly relatives, in addition to prioritizing parenting over career development. This pattern reinforces the gender-based division of roles, where unpaid work is naturalized as an extension of female capabilities, limiting women's opportunities to participate equally in public and professional spheres.

The construct of limited access and ownership of land reflects how gender norms restrict women's ability to acquire, inherit, and manage rural property, perpetuating economic and social inequalities. Cultural barriers, such as the preference for bequeathing land to men, and structural barriers, such as difficulties in accessing loans, limit women's economic autonomy and their equitable participation in key productive sectors.

The glass ceiling construct showcases the invisible barriers that women face in accessing leadership positions in agritourism farm associations and unions. The indicators reflect a scenario in which women are present in intermediate roles and participate in group decisions, but their rise to executive or managerial positions remains limited. This disparity underscores the persistence of gender norms that restrict their access to the highest levels of authority, perpetuating inequalities in representation and decision-making.

The construct of salary discrimination highlights the persistent economic inequalities that women face in agritourism contexts, especially in family businesses. The results reflect how women, despite playing roles similar to those of men, receive lower pay, face fewer employment opportunities, and lack an equitable appreciation of their work. This wage disparity not only limits their economic autonomy but also perpetuates the gender gap in terms of access to resources and decision-making within their communities.

Table 4 shows the correlations between the six factors extracted from an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) applied to the variables that measure symbolic gender violence in agritourism and rural tourism. Correlations between factors are critical to understanding the underlying structure of the data and the nature of the latent dimensions. The correlations between the factors are all positive and vary from moderate (the values of the correlations range from 0.165 to 0.410). These results suggest a certain interdependence between these factors, which could reflect shared aspects in their underlying constructs. In general, correlations do not exceed values of 0.500, suggesting adequate discrimination between factors, supporting their factorial validity (See Table 4).

Table 4. Correlation between factors.

Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Feminized Entrepreneurship	-	0.165	0.264	0.303	0.235	0.293
2. Occupational Self-Segregation		-	0.363	0.345	0.291	0.340
3. Stereotyped Roles			-	0.391	0.391	0.344
4. Limited Access to Land				-	0.410	0.266
5. Glass Ceiling					-	0.221
6. Wage Discrimination						-

The sedimentation graph shows the eigenvalues of the factors extracted during an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), compared with the simulated eigenvalues obtained through a parallel analysis. This type of analysis is crucial to determine the optimal number of factors to retain in the model. In parallel analysis, factors are retained only if the observed eigenvalues are greater than the simulated eigenvalues. In the graph, it can be seen that the observed eigenvalues are greater than those simulated up to the fourth factor, indicating that these four factors explain a significant variance compared to random noise (see Figure 2).

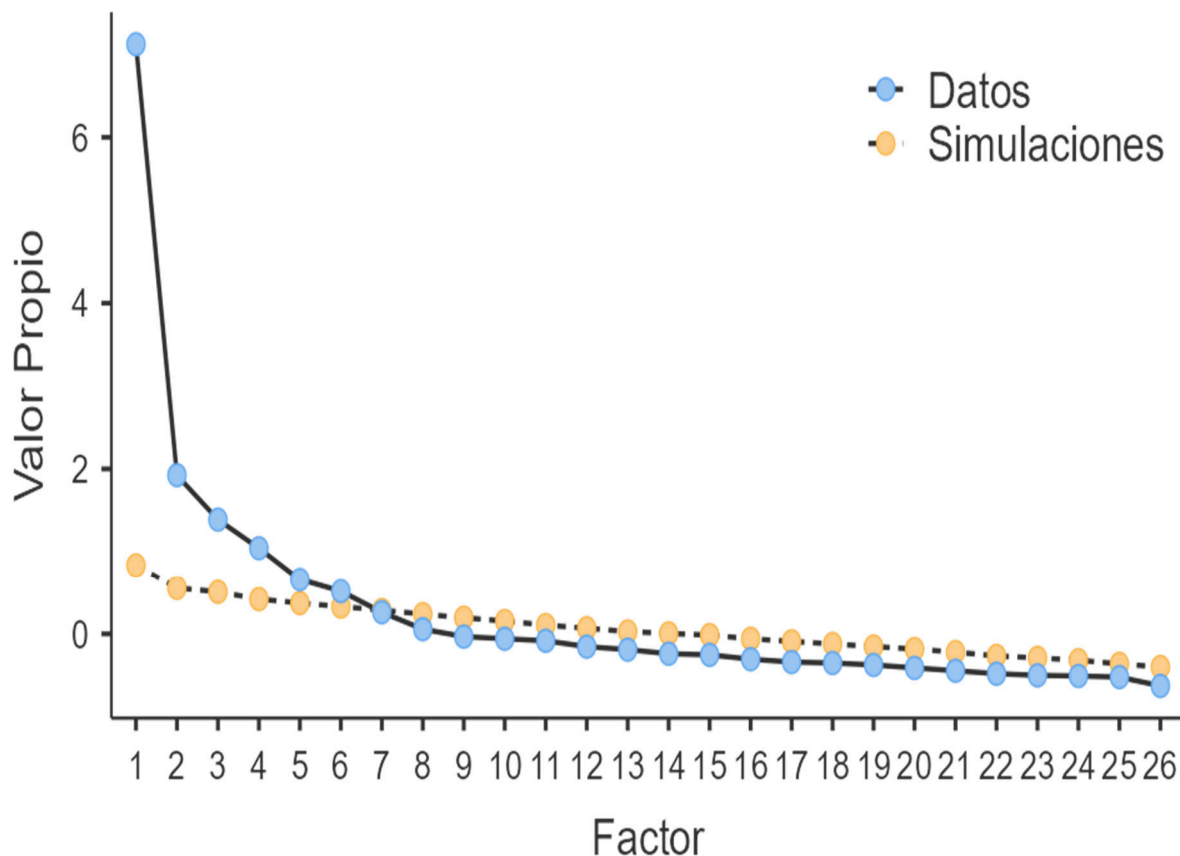


Figure 2. Sedimentation graph.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1. General Conclusions

The main objective of this study was achieved through an in-depth analysis of the manifestation of symbolic gender-based violence in the context of tourism in rural areas. Regarding the second proposed objective, a rigorous and validated measurement tool was developed that allows for identifying and quantifying experiences of symbolic gender-based violence specific to the context of agritourism and rural tourism. Therefore, this study provides evidence on symbolic gender-based violence by framing it as a two-dimensional construct composed of the dimensions of gender expectations and gender barriers. The former encompasses factors such as feminized entrepreneurship, occupational self-segregation, and stereotyped roles, while the latter is defined by limited access to land, the glass ceiling, and wage discrimination.

The identification of the FE factor feminized entrepreneurship in this research demonstrates how the distribution of gender roles has historically limited entrepreneurship options for women in rural tourism, directing them to specific sectors that perpetuate domestic roles, being consistent with previous studies (Nordbø, 2022; Pécot et al., 2024). Women's preference for entrepreneurship in sectors traditionally associated with the female role can be explained, in part, by the functionality of these ventures within a context of a flexible market and domestic economy, as suggested by preliminary studies (Figuroa-Domecq et al., 2020; Segovia-Pérez & Figuroa-Domecq, 2018). The concentration of women in these enterprises indicates the need for programs that diversify women's entrepreneurship in rural areas, promoting training in non-traditional sectors.

The second factor within the scale model with high significance is O-SS, which represents occupational self-segregation. This phenomenon demonstrates symbolic gender-

based violence, where women unconsciously limit themselves to stereotypical female work roles learned from childhood. These findings align with recent studies (Bolukoglu & Gozukucuk, 2023; Hutchings et al., 2020; Lladós-Masllorens & Ruiz-Dotras, 2022) that suggest that this type of symbolic violence is deeply rooted in the rural context, where gender constructions are even more rigid. In short, this type of violence perpetuates inequality and affects the sustainable development of rural tourism and agritourism. For an inclusive and equitable tourism sector, it is essential to make visible and dismantle self-segregation, promote policies that challenge gender stereotypes, and implement awareness programs for women and men in the sector, focused on questioning and denaturalizing such stereotypes.

The factor of stereotyped roles (SR) underscores the enduring nature of gender-based norms that predominantly assign women domestic care and responsibilities. This finding aligns with previous research, including the work of Wienclaw Ruth and Salem Press (2016) which emphasizes the role of gender stereotypes in shaping social expectations and behaviors for each gender. In our study, the gender-based division of labor, whereby men are expected to work outside the home and women are expected to take on care work, is clearly reflected in the elements that make up this factor. Factor loads demonstrate a strong inclination toward childcare, care of dependents and the elderly, and the execution of household chores. This observation corroborates previous studies suggesting that women tend to prioritize their domestic and family care roles (Mkhize & Cele, 2017; Sikweyiya et al., 2020).

In this context, it is clear that traditional gender norms continue to significantly shape the life trajectories of women in rural tourism and restrict their participation in more competitive economic spheres. Consequently, there is a pressing need for state intervention that questions and dismantles these gender stereotypes through public policies. The results on the limited access to and ownership of land (LATAOL) factor reflect a structural reality of gender inequality in rural contexts, especially in emerging destinations such as Ecuador. The data show that women face significant barriers to accessing land ownership, from restrictions on access to bank loans to a cultural preference for inheriting land to men to the detriment of women. This phenomenon coincides with previous research (Ghimire et al., 2024; Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of Ecuador, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to promote reforms that ensure equal rights over productive resources in order to guarantee economic stability and autonomy, as well as facilitate land ownership for women.

Another important factor that allows us to measure symbolic gender violence is the GC glass ceiling (TE, its acronym responds to the Spanish language); the presented evidence points to the existence of a persistent glass ceiling in the tourism sector in a conclusive way, and this invisible barrier limits the rise of women to leadership positions (Cuadrado et al., 2015). Research demonstrated that characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity are disproportionately valued in leadership roles, placing women at a structural disadvantage (Costa et al., 2017a). This situation is exacerbated in rural areas, where cultural factors assign women the responsibility for family and domestic care. In addition, rural women face additional barriers, such as less access to professional networks and strategic contacts, essential elements that facilitate their advancement and promotion in the workplace. Therefore, the creation of support and mentoring networks for women in the rural tourism sector is essential as a strategy to promote their professional and personal growth (Chang et al., 2023; Singh & Vanka, 2020). These networks allow rural women to access resources, knowledge, and connections essential to their growth. Mentoring initiatives, already consolidated in other sectors, have shown that collaborative and supportive work between women opens up a range of opportunities to advance both personally and professionally, reinforcing resilience and empowerment in challenging contexts.

The last component of the proposed scale model is wage discrimination (WD). Recognizing gender pay discrimination in rural tourism is crucial to developing a fairer, more equitable and sustainable industry (Carrasco-Santos et al., 2024; Carvalho et al., 2014). It is crucial to establish tax incentives for tourism companies that implement equal pay and to carry out regular salary audits to correct any gender gaps. The findings of this study emphasize the critical importance of adopting a gender approach when examining rural tourism and agritourism. The research provides valuable information for the development of public policies and intervention strategies, including gender considerations, in the analysis of the rural and agricultural tourism sectors.

Furthermore, the results of this study are intrinsically linked to the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly regarding the promotion of gender equality (SDG 5), decent work (SDG 8), and the reduction in inequalities (SDG 10). The barriers identified as the “glass ceiling” and wage discrimination represent critical challenges that must be addressed to ensure the economic inclusion of women in rural contexts. Agritourism and rural tourism within the framework of inclusive social capital would contribute to the sustainable development of communities, promoting solidaric and responsible value chains.

5.2. Managerial Implications

The managerial implications deriving from these findings are crucial to advance toward an agritourism model that is both inclusive and sustainable. Addressing symbolic gender violence is key in order to create a safe and attractive workplace environment for female talent. First, it is essential that companies implement policies geared toward eradicating wage discrimination and “the glass ceiling”. For example, agritourism companies could establish gender equity committees to oversee the development of equal pay audits, mentoring programs aimed at empowering women to take on leadership roles, and the implementation of flexible work schedules to accommodate family responsibilities. These efforts could be evaluated through employee satisfaction surveys or gender equality performance metrics to ensure that these interventions truly address symbolic gender violence, directly contributing to SDG 5 and SDG 10.

This will not only foster an environment of organizational equity; it will also improve work satisfaction, reduce staff turnover, and boost the sector’s reputation as an industry committed with responsible tourism. The result will consolidate it as possessing an equitable organizational culture, promoting greater cohesion of its internal teams and improving its corporate image in a market that demands ethics and sustainability.

Furthermore, it is recommended that public and private decision-makers in tourism launch training related to gender within rural communities involved with agritourism and rural tourism. The objective of those training sessions will be to challenge stereotyped occupational roles and to foster diversity of the workforce. Examples include unconscious bias workshops, gender equity training for managers, and community sensitivity programs that challenge traditional gender roles, particularly in rural areas. Agritourism companies could collaborate with NGOs or universities in Ecuador to design and implement these programs. Local community participation can be strengthened through gender equality workshops aimed at rural women to empower them and help them challenge the stereotypical roles prevalent in tourism-related occupations, thus propelling the fulfillment of SDGs 5, 8, and 10.

Businesses participating in these initiatives would not only be contributing to the Objectives of Sustainable Development (OSD) but would also strengthen their positioning with a customer base ever more conscious of issues of equity and inclusion. An essential aspect of sustainability is the economic empowerment of women, especially on access

to productive resources and land ownership. Tourism management could even collaborate with the banking sector to create inclusive financing programs geared toward rural women entrepreneurs.

5.3. Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literature by breaking down symbolic gender-based violence into different measurable constructs, such as “gender expectations” and “gender barriers.” The identification of subdimensions such as “feminized entrepreneurship” and “glass ceiling” reinforce the applicability of these concepts in the specific context of agritourism and rural tourism, expanding their relevance in the academic field of gender studies and sociology. Therefore, by developing a measurement scale in measurable and quantifiable variables, it allows symbolic violence, a generally abstract concept, to be operationalized. The theoretical advance materialized in the identification of six key subdimensions: feminized entrepreneurship (FE), occupational self-segregation (O-SS), stereotyped roles (SR), limited access and land ownership (LATAOL), glass ceiling (GC), and wage discrimination (WD) (the authors value the importance of keeping the acronyms in Spanish due to the relevance of the geographical area of study). These factors, through their respective indicators, allow a systematic evaluation of their impact, offering a solid empirical reference base for future comparative studies in other work environments. This is relevant to explore how symbolic gender-based violence can vary in different economic and cultural sectors, thus facilitating a more holistic and contextualized analysis of this issue.

5.4. Limitations and Future Lines of Research

This study has some limitations to consider when interpreting the results. First, participants may not have been completely candid about sensitive issues such as gender-based violence, introducing biases into the results. Another limitation is that the research is based on data from a specific geographical and cultural context, which could limit the generalization of the findings to other rural tourism and agritourism environments with different sociocultural and economic characteristics. In addition, although the constructed constructs identified allow for a broad assessment of symbolic gender-based violence, there could be other dimensions or factors not contemplated that would enrich the understanding of the phenomenon in diverse contexts.

It is suggested to replicate this study in different geographical and cultural contexts at the national or international level to compare, validate, and adapt the model to different realities in the field of agritourism and rural tourism. This would make it possible to detect whether the measurement instrument can be extrapolated and to identify general trends and patterns. It would also be valuable to incorporate longitudinal variables to analyze how perceptions of symbolic gender-based violence change over time, observing trends and factors that influence their evolution. Further exploration could also expand the scope of symbolic gender-based violence by considering additional socio-economic, educational, and technological factors that may influence the phenomenon. For example, how does women’s access to education or technology impact their vulnerability to gender-based violence in rural settings? In addition, it is recommended to investigate the effect of the constructs detected on the development of agritourism as a dependent variable. Finally, the study of gender-based violence should broaden its focus to include other types of violence such as physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence (including harassment), among others, which affect women in tourism, and, consequently, design effective strategies that guarantee safety and well-being in rural tourism and agritourism, promoting a fairer and more egalitarian field of tourism.

An important area for future research would be the integration of participatory approaches in the design of public policies related to agritourism, particularly those that seek to mitigate symbolic gender violence.

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