

Peruvian freelancers in the pandemic context

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on freelancers in the cities of Callao and Lima in 2021. This study is exploratory, non-experimental, and quantitative. Sample was composed of 397 participants selected through convenience sampling by using a survey as a technique from October 2021 to December 2021. Results show that the Freelancer's work is unstable and their situation gets worse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although many Peruvian freelancers work in the higher education sector, they do not overcome the average income levels even when female freelancers show their family needs. In contrast, male freelancers do not consider their performance meets their needs or overcome the average income levels. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the perception of the impact of Peruvian freelancers shows a tendency to identify improvements in female freelancers whose incomes were increasing as well as the labor hours for both male and female workers. The impact of the pandemic on Peruvian freelancers was mainly in labor hours, without any conditions of social security, labor stability and social benefits.

Keywords: Freelance, COVID-19, gender, satisfaction, security

Introduction

Work is a fundamental right stated in Article 2 of the Political Constitution of Peru.

It is a right of each individual under the framework of the State for the labor contract. The Peruvian labor standards do not develop an exact definition of the labor contract but the Productivity and Labor Competitiveness Law highlights the execution of an agreement between an employer and employees for their subordinated and paid services in a determined or undetermined period where both parties agree with the duties and benefit of the right of the agreement. Contracts can be verbal (spoken) or written but when a fixed term is established services are only in the written submission. Peru has two types of labor modalities whether formal and informal. Formal employment is in accordance with the legal and juridic dispositions whether in the labor framework or the realization of economic activity imposed by the State. In Peru, formal employment is recognized by the Ministry of Labor and Promotion of Employment through the execution and declaration of an employment contract that is registered. Through this agreement, the employee benefits of a salary, social security, paid vacation, accident or maternity leave, remunerations, payments and bonuses (e.g., night work, extra pay, right to a meal, right to a fund after several years of work) (Weller, 2020). Formal employment, as long as the execution of the agreement, benefits in most cases to employees. This labor agreement specifies the working hours. In Peru, the normal workday is 8 hours and

the normal workweek is 48 hours during 7 days. The legal minimum wage since 2018 is 950 PEN, which is the maximum number of hours according to the labor regulation in the constitution (MINTRA, 2021). The Supreme Decree No. 003-2022-TR of Peru's Executive Branch changed the overview of the legal minimum wage since, on May 1, 2022, it will exceed 1.025 PEN. This will benefit more than 1.4 billion formal employees (El Peruano, 2022).

The labor standards and the economic activity are regulatory bodies developed in Peru that medium-sized enterprises or larger enterprises (more than 100 employees), with large-scale production. These enterprises lead 80% of employment 50 years ago. Now, this tendency has changed due to the precarious, rural and emerging economy. However, large enterprises can provide formal employment. The larger enterprises (50%) with formal employment are located in Metropolitan Lima since their headquarters and public institutions are in this area. The Peruvian geographical areas are considered investment areas, including the city of Lima and are characterized by the greater number of employees in the formal sector (Weller, 2020). All the modalities of formal employment provide benefits to employees. Some of these modalities are fixed-term employment, indefinite employment, part-time employment, temporary contract, and replacement contract, among others. Despite the different labor modalities in Peru, it did not develop on the large scale regarding formal employment, stability, and a good job. The regulation of formal employment can be accomplished by a few enterprises, reducing the formal employment rate to a few employees. Formal employees of the biggest enterprises represent 20% of workers (Weller, 2020). This factor is the origin of informal employment in Peru. Informal employment refers to all activities and labor-economic relationships between an employer and employee under the law and the labor standards of the State. In informal employment, the employee does not benefit from the execution of a labor employment contract, therefore the employer is not required by law to accomplish all the duties of a formal contract.

In the Peruvian context, informality employment refers to the different scenarios such as executing a simple contract, the breach of the register legally an enterprise and the implication of public institutions as main actors of the actions of informality. Enterprises and active employees are extent in compliance with tax aspects, economic and labor regulations, municipality and social regulations, provide a legal administration and accounting as well as contribute to the optimization and well-being of the economy of a country. According to the development level of Peru, informality ranges approx. 40%. However, before the COVID-19 pandemic, informality was about 65%. In 2020, informality increase to 75% in the urban areas, meanwhile in rural areas the percentage exceeds 96% regarding the salary of informal and autonomous employees of the street commerce that accrue a legal minimum wage of 800 PEN (INEI, 2021). This fact shows that economic informality in Peru is an added or complementary value in the situation of a population sector but margined socially. The high level of breach of the standards in Peru has different determinants, the most important are as follows: 1.- The historical perspective. More than 40 or 50 years ago, Peru had a rural and agricultural economic (70%). The violence, agrarian reform, and military governance in the 80s and 90s lead to migratory changes from rural to urban areas. Most of them were workers that did not adapt to the dynamic of the economy of the urban areas and will not have economic and social integration by the government policies. This group of workers lives in the metropolitan areas adopting their living, activities and the informal economic relationship to the urban areas where there are no transactions rules and government standards to the city. 2.- Public institutions are composed of many cultural elements of informality. There is a multitude of enterprises that do not comply with the regularization. 3.- The legal framework represents the regulatory system

and is one of the main barriers due to the administrative, bureaucratic and high costs that led enterprises, employees and employers to comply with the legal standards (Weller, 2020).

In Peru, informality covers freelancers, entrepreneurs and informal employers, microenterprise managers, informal producers of cooperatives, informal producers' members of cooperatives, family workers, and informal employees with a remuneration of a formal or informal company and entrepreneurship, street commerce. All of them do not own a legal register, have low-rate jobs, non-social security benefits, low productivity, non-labor contract, and jobs with low technological levels, among others (Grigera & Nava, 2021). In this variety of informal workers emerge a particular group known as freelancers.

Freelancers are a sub-group that work whether formal or informal dynamic but their characteristics are part of informal employment (López & Rodríguez, 2020). Freelancer is defined as independent workers that do not socialize with other people in a co-working space (OECD, 2019). They are their workforce, can be or not a natural person that renders services or sell goods to SUNAT in Peru. Freelancers can work whether verbal or written contracts; however, this leads to no benefits of formal employment. Freelancers only want to work in specific labors, in a place they decide and in their schedule. Freelancers do not enjoy social services, or labor retirement fund since it is required for some functions and some periods during the year, and do not have paid vacation, social security benefits, or accident leave. They are free workers and can obey the rules and labor or tax regulations of the State (International Labour Organisation, 2019; Payoneer (2020)).

Freelancers are not salaried employees since they set their remuneration. Most of them are qualified professionals with significant productivity and high technological level. It is a temporary job that can report high economic benefits than fixed-term employment. They find clients, commercial activities, or economic transactions in the public spaces without being part of the street commerce. Entrepreneurs, employees, and self-employed working with informal labor that can perform within the structure of formal employment (Grigera & Nava, 2021). Freelancers work mostly at home since there are no offices, they do not infer in any aspect or area of the enterprise that renders services. They perform any kind of job on their terms. Freelancers receive and send their works online.

The most frequent platform they used is the business directory, where they can be hired and most of their work is exposed as a portfolio on those online platforms (Berg, et al., 2018). In many countries such as Peru, to avoid the spread and COVID-19 contagious, the security measures changed the working relationship. In the pandemic context, the option of remote work was a viable modality to continue the labor relations and enterprises, institutions and people do not affect the interest and continue their benefits without the presence of an employer in the workspace. There were modalities of remote work, although in Peru there is no high infrastructure for technologies of communication and information (ICTs) and labor active people with the knowledge of the use and their functions, modalities of work such as remote work, and Freelancers already were working and increased during the pandemic (Upwork, 2021).

In contrast with the Freelance modality, both teleworking and remote work are modalities of formal employment. In fact, in Peru, these modalities have their standards. Teleworking is regulated by Law No. 30036 D.S. N°017-2015-TR is a type of subordinate work by an employer that provides tools to the employee to develop their work by using ICT. The employment can only be formal if the employer accepts the conditions of the contract, in this type of formal work is used both in the public and private sectors (Uribe et al., 2021).

Regarding the remote work in Peru, it was regulated by the Emergency Decree No. 026-2020 as a labor practice imposed by the employer as a security measure during the COVID-19 pandemic. The employee cannot avoid it since the purpose is not to affect the labor relations and keep the benefits acquired in the employment contract, the employer can perform from home and comply with the labor function through the tools of ICTs. In remote work, the employee should be to disposition to the employer, online during the established labor hours (Uribe et al., 2021). Freelance work is characterized by the absence of regulation from the government in the development due to the COVID19 pandemic. In the pandemic context, the new modalities of labor and digital relations have led to the precarity of formal employment. In the case of women that work from home, the labor hours increase since the domestic hours with no remuneration and the paid work and not comply with an established schedule generates that overtime hours increase without remuneration. The possibility to suffer domestic violence from working from home had increased since the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the precarity in the spaces of co-working and suffering isolation and quarantine, cognitive disorders, depression and anxiety. From the informality perspective, the performance of freelancers does not provide the rights and labor benefits as well as security and social protection when they do not form part of the labor market. A digital worker does not have a fixed schedule, paid vacations, accidents or maternity leave, or social benefits in a fixed term to perform labor functions and to have a quiet retirement. This means higher rates of labor precarity both in the pandemic and digital labor hours (Scassera, 2021).

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on freelancers located in the cities of Callao and Lima in 2021.

Methodology

This study has a quantitative, non-experimental and exploratory approach. The sample was composed of 397 participants selected through convenience sampling by using a survey as a technique from October 2021 to December 2021. We connect with Freelancers through WhatsApp, Facebook and freelance platforms and sent them surveys by using Google Forms, which was available for 12 weeks from October 2021 to December 2021. The survey was adapted from the survey of Kapteyn et al (2020) in North America. The instrument has 25 questions of multiplechoice and is divided into three sections: demography, general impacts and specific impacts (Table 1).

Table 1. *Questionnaire*

Dimension	Item	Scale	Code
Demography	1. Gender	Man	1
		Woman	2
	2. Age	Under 18 years old	1
		18 – 24 years old	2
		25 – 34 years old	3
		35 – 44 years old	4
		45 – 54 years old	5
		55 – 64 years old	6
		65 years or older	7
	3. Marital status	Prefer not to respond	8
Married		1	
	In a couple (not married)	2	

	In a couple (not living together)	3
	Single	4
	Prefer not to respond	5
	None	1
	1	2
4. How many children under 18 years old live with you?	2	3
	3	4
	More than 3	5
	Prefer not to respond	6
	Elementary Education	1
	Secondary Education	2
	University or Technical Education (incomplete)	3
5. Education level:	University or Technical Education (complete)	4
	Postgraduate University Education	5
	Prefer not to respond	6
	Less than 300 PEN	1
6. Specify the average monthly income of each member of your family:	300-500 PEN	2
	501-700 PEN	3
	More than 701 PEN	4
	Prefer not to respond	5
	Very bad. There is not enough to eat	1
	Bad. Only to eat	2
	Neutral. Enough to eat and basic products	3
7. Specify the current financial situation of your family:	Buena. Enough to eat and additional products	4
	Excellent. We do not have needs	5
	Prefer not to respond	6
	Urban areas	1
8. Specify the area where you live:	Rural areas	2
	Prefer not to respond	3
	Yes. I'm a Freelancer	1
9. Are you a professional freelancer rendering services from remote?	Currently, I'm not a freelancer but I used a period ago / I'm a freelancer at times	2
	Education	1
General	Finances	2
	Advertising	3
10. Which of the following sectors do you work as a freelancer?	Law	4
	Housing	5
	Consulting	6
	Architecture, Design	7
	Writing, poesy, articles	8

	Prefer not to respond	99		
	Video calls	Low	Moderate	High
15. Regarding the use of the methods of communication with clients and partners, what of the following methods did you frequently use?	Audio calls	1	2	3
	Message in email	1	2	3
	Messages in social media	1	2	3
	Audio messages in social media	1	2	3
	Meetings	1	2	3
	Very Negative		1	
16. In general terms, how do you feel or what is your opinion about freelancers?	Negative		2	
	Neutral		3	
	Positive		4	
	Very positive		5	
	Prefer not to respond		99	
17. Has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced in a certain way the situation of freelancers?	Extremely influential (worse)		1	
	Very influential		2	
	Neutral		3	
	Slightly influential		4	
	Not all influential (better)		5	
18. Has the percentage of freelancers changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic?	Prefer not to respond		99	
	Significantly decrease		1	
	Decrease		2	
	Not changed		3	
	Increase		4	
19. From March to December 2021, my income as a freelancer...	Significantly increased		5	
	Prefer not to respond		99	
	Significantly decrease		1	
	Decrease		2	
	Not changed		3	
20. From March to December 2020, the time spent in my services as a freelancer...	Increase		4	
	Significantly increase		5	
	Prefer not to respond		99	
	Significantly decrease		1	
	Decrease		2	
21. From March to December 2020, the demand for my services as a freelancer.	Not changed		3	
	Increase		4	
	Significantly increase		5	
	Prefer not to respond		99	
	Significantly decrease		1	
22. In your opinion, what are the advantages of working as a freelancer?	Decrease		2	
	Not changed		3	
	Increase		4	
	Significantly increase		5	
	Prefer not to respond		99	
Social	There are no advantages		1	
	Work from home		2	
	Self-schedule		3	
	Location independence		4	
	Own client and services		5	

	High incomes	6
	No uniform	7
	More labour activities	8
	No income limits	9
	I do not have a boss	10
	There are no disadvantages	1
	Negative working environment	2
	Difficulties in the self-organization	3
	Many distractions	4
23. In your opinion, what are the disadvantages of working as a freelancer?	Unstable incomes	5
	Misunderstanding by family, neighbourhoods and clients	6
	Long sessions at home	7
	No social benefits	8
	Depending on the number of clients	9
	No free time	10
24. Do you know the tax income applied to freelancers?	Yes	1
	No	2
25. Are you officially registered as freelancer?	Yes	1
	No	2

Source: Adapted from Kapteyn et al (2020)

The data analysis was performed through the descriptive statistics analysis using the Jasp 0.16 software and MS Excel. A total of 417 participants respond to the survey, of which 397 surveys were valid.

Results

We used 3 sections to analyze the descriptive statistics: Demography, General Impact, and Economic Impact. The following results are according to the different sections:

Demography

A total of 68.01% of the respondents were women and 31.99% were men that live in Lima and Callao. 90.9% of participants live in an urban area and 9.1% in a rural area. A total of 76.3% are officially registered as a freelancer in an organism or enterprise in contrast to 23.7%. The percentage of the survey respondents according to the marital status was as follows: married (49.9%), in couple but not married (23.7%), single (19.9%) and in couple but not living together (6.5%). A total of 88.4% consider themselves active freelancers and 11.6% are considered occasionally freelancers. According to the age distribution, the 66.5% correspond to 25 to 34 years old, the 15.1% ranged from 35 to 44 years old, the 10.6% were 45 or older and the 6% were under 24 years old.

At the education level, the distribution corresponds to the following percentages: a total of 52.1% of participants have university or technician education (incomplete), 36.8% have postgraduate education, 4.6% correspond to elementary or secondary education, 6.5% have

university or technician education (complete). The evaluation of the financial situation of the family is considered by the 22.2% of men as the average level, which is enough to eat and for basic products. Meanwhile, women perceive this item with an average level of 50.4%. A total of 6.5% of men and 11.3% of women considered a good familiar situation in terms of food and additional goods. Regarding the freelance work, 10.6% of men and 16.1% considered temporary work and formal employment (enterprises and organizations), 9.6% of men and 21.9% of women consider to continue to work as freelancers and their current job, and 11.8% of men and 30% of women consider to continue working only as freelancers. From the point of view of the co-workers' spaces, the sample of survey respondents is distributed as follows: redaction, articles and re-elaboration

(58.2%), multimedia (10.3%), education (6.8%), advertising (3.3%) and translation (2.8%). The jobs of the survey respondents simultaneously with the freelancer jobs: 37.3% are only freelance, 14.9% are specialists in some areas, 8.8% are housewives, 6% are teachers, 5.3% are managers, 3% are entrepreneurs, 2.3% are retired and 2.0% work in the public services.

The reasons that survey respondents work as freelance were distributed as follows: a total of 16.1% did not want to work in an enterprise, 15.9% shared domestic chores, 14.9% as a hobby, 12.1% performs simultaneously with their studies, 11.8% of worker want additional incomes and 11.1% of workers due to the loss of their job or fired, 9.8% were unemployed and 4.3% were retired. Regarding the average monthly income of the survey respondents, the freelancer shows that 43.6% have a high monthly income of 701 PEN, 23.9% less than 300 PEN and 19.4% between 300 to 500 PEN.

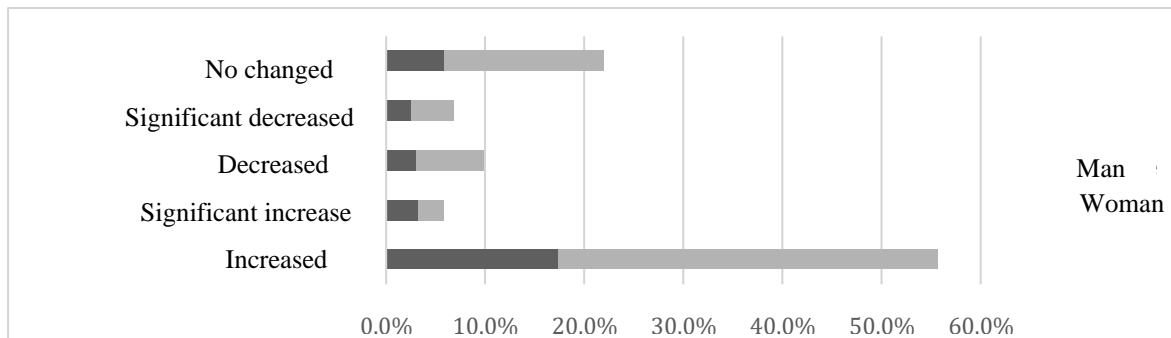
General Impact

In this section, there were a variety of responses on the general impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding the evaluation of the COVID-19 pandemic and the work situation, a total of 36.8% reported that their job situation was influenced, 26.7% of participants did not respond to the question, 13.9% of participants considered that their situation slightly improved, 9.8% reported that their situation gets worse, 8.8% indicated that their situation gets worse and 4% of participants reported that their situation. The evaluation of the dynamic regarding the influence of the pandemic is based on the methods and the ways of communication at work. A total of 52.1% did not respond to the question, 33.2% considered it the worst situation ever, 11.3% get worse and 4.3% states that there was no influence. Regarding the perception of the number of people that work as a freelancer, 55.7% consider that it increased, 18.9% did not answer the question, 12.1% perceived a significant increase, 11.3% considered that there was no variation and 1.3% has significant decrease and 0.8% has decreased.

Economic and Social Impact

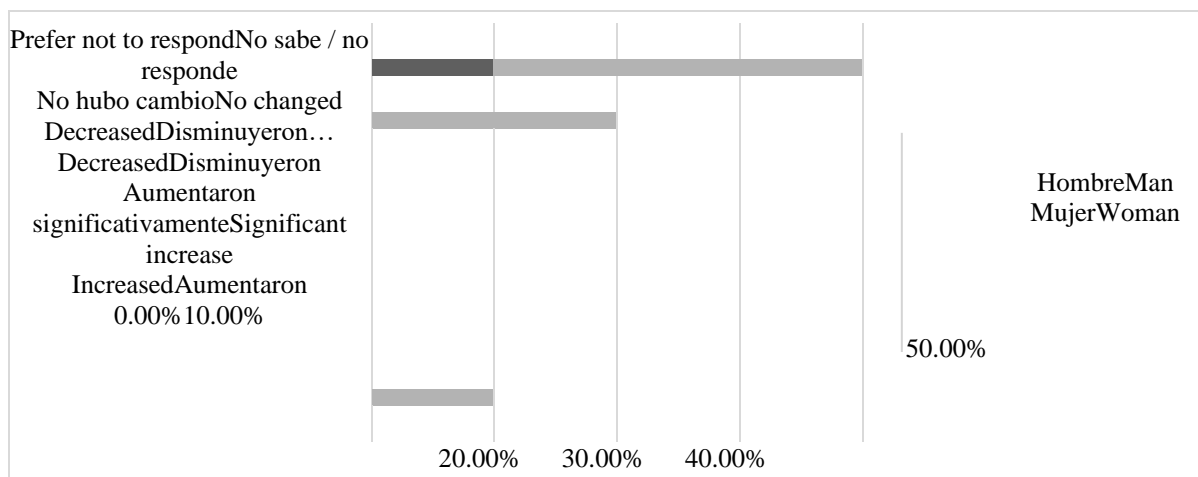
In this section, we evaluated the economic aspects influenced by the COVID19 pandemic. Regarding the estimation of the variation of the income from March to December in 2021, a total of 55.7% considered that increases, 21.9% consider that there were no changes, 9.8% stated that there was an income reduction and 5.8% considered that there was a significant increase. Graphic 1 shows the distribution of the percentages according to gender. There is a difference in income since women (38.3%) reported a higher percentage of their incomes than men (17.4%). Regarding the reduction of income, women represent a higher percentage (6.8%)

than men (3%). A similar difference is observed concerning the income: women (16.1%) and men (5.8%).



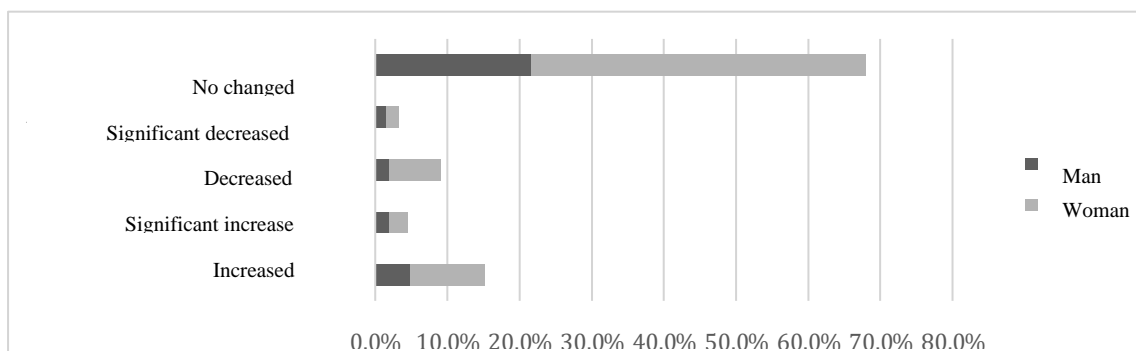
Graphic 1. *Income variation as freelancers from March to December in 2021 according to the gender*

Concerning the results of the variation in working time of the freelancer, 39.8% did not answer the question, 25.94% considered that there were no changes, 17.13% estimated an increase in the working time, 6.55% increased significantly and 3.02% considered that it decreases significantly. Graphic 2 shows the results according to the gender



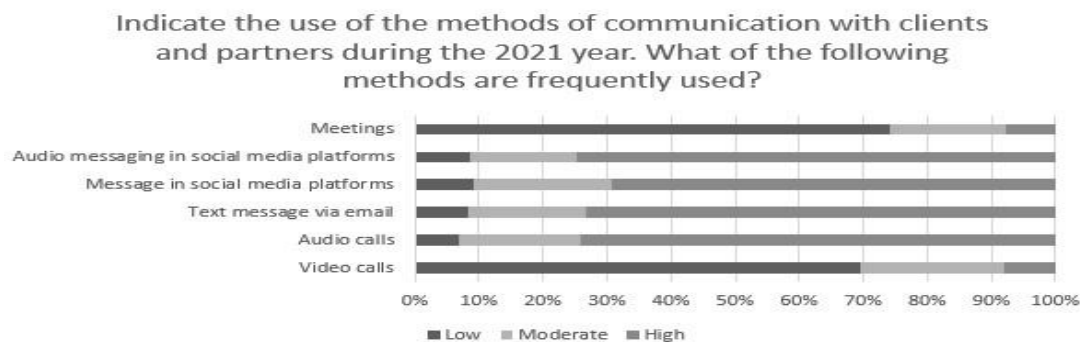
Graphic 2. *Income variation of the time spent according to the gender*

Regarding the demand for services of a freelancer, 68% considered that there were no changes, 15.1% the demand for services increased, 4.5% increased significantly and 3.3% considered that decreased significantly. Graphic 3 shows the results according to the gender:



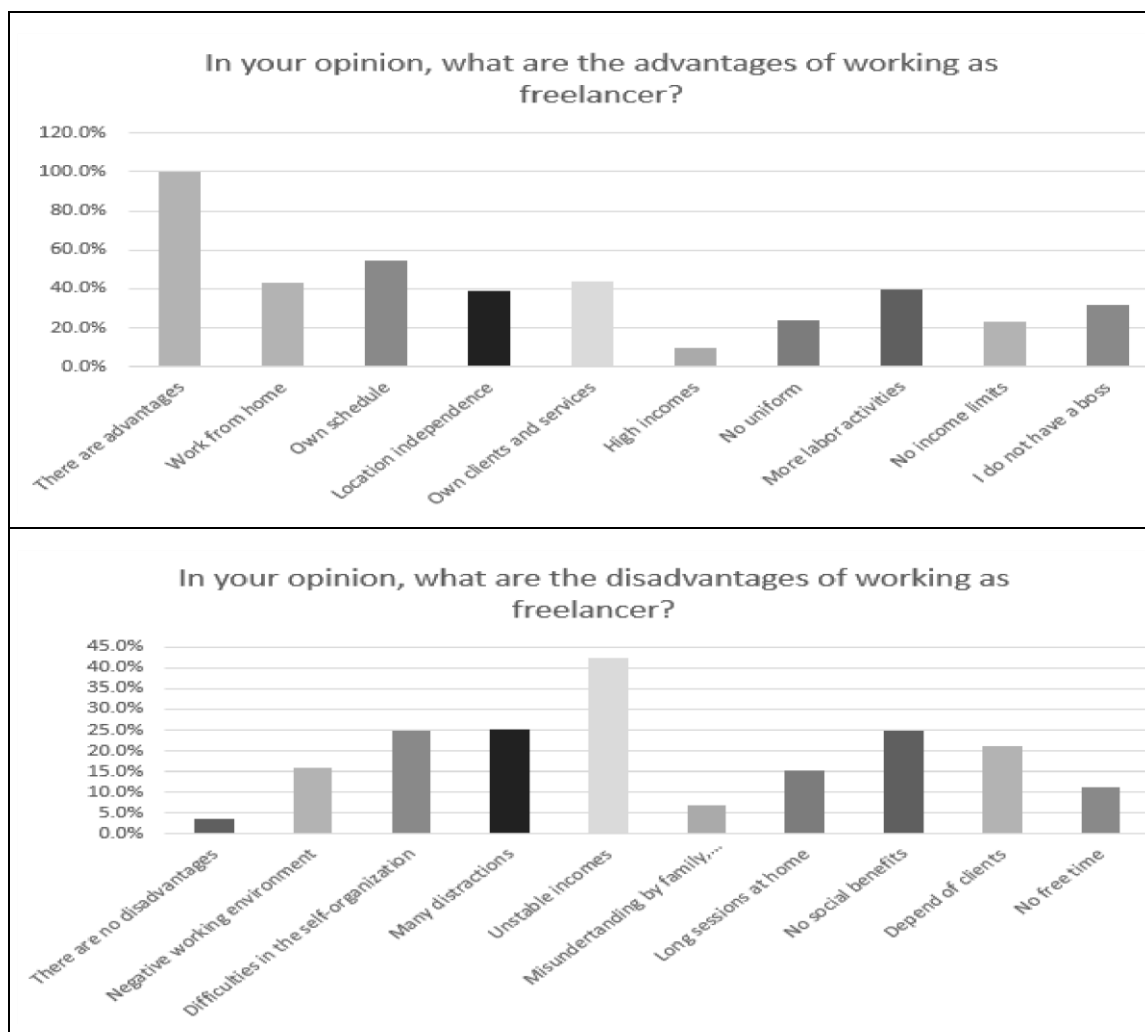
Graphic 3. *The demand for services as freelancers according to the gender*

Results of the use of methods of communication with clients and partners were evaluated. Graphic 4 shows the most frequent methods of communication during the pandemic were messages and calls: Audio messaging in social media (39%), Messages in social media (38%), Text messages in emails (38%), Video calls (38%) and audio calls (38%), while the less frequent methods are personal meetings (39%) and video calls (37%).



Graphic 4. *Dynamic in the use of methods of communication with clients and partners*

The last two items in the survey refer to the estimation of the advantages and disadvantages.



Graphic 5. *Evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of freelancers*

Survey respondents (99.5%) considered that there were advantages to being freelance during the pandemic. The distribution of the 5 main items was as follows: own schedule (54.2%), work from home (43.3%), own client and services (43.8%), more labor activities (39.5%), location independence (38.5%) and the item with a lower percentage of responses is related to “high incomes” (9.8%). Regarding the disadvantages, we found the 5 main items related to the highest percentages: unstable incomes (42.6%), many distractions (25.2%), no social benefits (24.9%), and difficulties in self-organization (24.7%). The 3.5% of survey respondents consider that there are no disadvantages of working as a freelance. Survey respondents perceive a difference in the income level, 68.1% of women have a higher income. The item with a higher percentage of disadvantage is the difference in income by gender men (12.09%) and women (30.48%).

Discussion

This study provides exploratory and descriptive information about the types of new jobs of the respondents in the city of Lima and Callao in Peru. From the demographical point of view, results show a reduction of the female gender and a different perception by genre regarding the impact of the pandemic and to continue working as a freelancer. The educative level of freelance participants in this study up to 86.9%, who reached a finished and in-term university education level (36%) with postgraduate studies. We can infer freelancers require specific competencies that allow application in this sector. In the field of the financial benefits of the freelance’s performance show the differences regarding the meets of their needs. Female freelance perceives those economic conditions are good as it is related to this labor modality. These findings coincide with the results of Scasserra & Partenio (2021), who found that remote and freelance work corresponds to an alternative for women who find precarious labor conditions in the formal market and do not allow a remunerated **domestic** labor so the tendency was positive.

Two third of the participants did not perceive the increasing their services as a freelance and just the 20% experienced the demand for their services. However, there were some variabilities in the freelancer’s income. The survey respondents state the benefits of freelance are related to the benefits of the flexibility of the job, schedule, relocation and the labor performance during the pandemic context. In the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants perceive a positive influence of the pandemic on the labor situation, leading to the tendency that consider that there were improvements for women who increase their incomes. However, regarding the time spent at work, more than two-thirds of survey respondents express that do no significant change. Meanwhile, the rest varies between a significant increase and a reduction in the work hours. This result coincides with the results of Arteaga, Cabezas, & Ramírez (2021). The authors identify those Chilean women who work as freelancers and in remote during the COVID-19 pandemic face challenges such as time management, domestic and telecommuting and workload.

Conclusions

Results show that work as a freelancer is characterized by precarity. This situation was frequent during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although some of the freelance workers have a higher education level do not overcome the average income levels even if the women workers show satisfaction with the family needs. This differs from the statement of men workers who do not consider the performance as freelance to meet their needs or overcome the average income levels. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the perception of the impact on Peruvian

freelancers shows a tendency to identify improvements to increase women's incomes by increasing the labor hours for both genders. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Peruvian freelancers was perceived in the extension of working hours without variations in the conditions such as social security, labor stability and social benefits.

There are limitations in the results, the sample recollected has a high women's participation; thus, it may be a bias in the results. A high percentage of workers are transcript or writing tasks, this shows further research in the area.

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