



Research Article

Academic Qualified Female Immigrants: Their Interrupted Careers, Identities Construction and Mental Health - All in the Name of a Love

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Abstract

This article presents the results of scientific research conducted in Germany in 2024, which examines the integration experiences of Latin American women with academic qualifications and professional experience who migrated to Germany due to a marital relationship with a German resident. 205 respondents took part in the online survey, and 10 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. The survey data were analysed statistically with support from the software SPSS. Triangulation techniques were used to compare and validate findings from both quantitative and qualitative data sources, enhancing the reliability of the results. The study aimed to identify patterns of associations between professional status, well-being and mental health, bicultural identity construction, and acculturative stress among immigrant women. The research focused on the mental health and well-being of these women, considering factors such as integration into the German labour market, the construction of identity/intercultural identity, and the role of motherhood in this process. In addition, the importance of motherhood in the lives of the respondents was investigated. The results indicated that, for this group, well-being and mental health are closely linked to the interruption of labour life and, in many cases, there is an impact on the individual's identity. The most salient and worrying fact was the high number of female immigrants with clinical depression indications. The evidence highlights the need to pay greater attention to the well-being and mental health of professionally and academically qualified immigrant women. Such findings can strengthen debate around Germany and other European Union integration policies and practices for the development of strategies-political, economic, social and clinical-focused on the protection of mental health and the strengthening of the welfare of these populations.

Keywords

Female Academic Immigrants, Professional Life, Mental Health, Well-Being

1. Introduction

This article presents the results of scientific research conducted in Germany in 2024, focusing on a very specific group of immigrants: Latin American women with academic qualifications and professional experience who migrated to this country due to a marital relationship with a German resident.

The research focused on the mental health and well-being of these women, considering factors such as integration into the German labour market, the construction of identity/intercultural identity, and the role of motherhood in this process.

The study aimed to investigate whether these women were

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Received: 16 March 2026; Accepted: 7 April 2026; Published: 24 August 2026



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confronted by the difficulty of labour integration and how they reacted to it. It was assumed that at least some of them had experienced dissatisfaction due to this difficulty, making it important to examine whether this experience affected their identity, mental health, and well-being. To deepen this analysis, the study also explored the following complementary questions: (a) the process of building women's identity; (b) the importance of their professions in shaping their identity; (c) the role of motherhood in this process, and (d) the level of personal satisfaction among women whose labour satisfaction cannot be found — or continued — in the receiving country.

1.1. The Migration Phenomenon

Human mobility is a complex and dynamic phenomenon driven by several factors. In recent decades, its pace has accelerated due to technological advances, such as a greater number of transport alternatives, some with reduced costs, the speed of communication between different geographical areas, and transnational relations facilitated by the removal of barriers to movement [21, 30]. This accelerated process has also increased the flow of capital, goods, services, and knowledge (*idem*).

The topic of migration has gained increasing attention in recent decades. Studies on migration with different approaches are crucial to societies. The scale, speed, and diversity of migration are evident in many aspects of daily life across various societies. For example, clearer interest on the issue has increased, the media has been giving more attention to it and the increase in the participation of migrants in the economy, culture and policy of reception societies becomes all the time clearer, according to the German organisation Mediendienst-Integration in 27th of November 2023. In Germany, for instance, in 2021, 11.3% of Bundestag members (German Parliament) had migration background. This represents about three percentage points more than in 2017. In that same year, approximately 8 million adult Germans with a migration background were living in Germany and were entitled to vote in federal elections. This group corresponded to almost 14% (4% more than in 2017) of the voters.

Migration is not a homogeneous process, given that the factors that lead individuals to migrate are different, as is the way each person responds to the migration process [13]. Many people choose to migrate due to pull factors such as the possibility of educational and economic growth and romantic relationships; others are “pushed” out of their countries by negative pressures such as political factors, poverty, terrorism, armed conflict or religious intolerance [1, 4, 19, 22], humanitarian crises and extreme climate change (United Nations, n.d.).

Migration is a complex social process that involves changes in all areas of life [18].

Adapting to a new culture and language and developing strategies to navigate this environment can be a significant challenge [58].

Continuous contact with another culture can trigger conflicts and crises related to the difficulty of adapting to this new environment [21]. The challenges of this process are numerous and the adversities they caused would lead many immigrants to experience different damages of emotional adjustment during their process of adaptation to the new culture [14, 17, 23].

Currently, there is a vast scientific literature on the changes and suffering caused by the migration process in different areas of immigrants' lives, such as social, labour and cultural [38, 58, 60, 17]. However, the literature shows a predominance of studies dedicated to economic migrants and refugees, undocumented or illegal immigrants [9, 40, 17, 41, 60]. A search on the academic portal Google Scholar using the terms illegal and immigration resulted in more than 1,200,000 results in English. Also in Portuguese, Spanish and German the results were impressive. The figures reveal the importance of migration today, especially in relation to the most vulnerable migrants. Many articles use the term immigrant as if it referred exclusively to people in vulnerable situations. However, the term is, indeed, a broad umbrella category that includes several subgroups, such as ethnic and religious minorities, economic migrants, political refugees, victims of human trafficking, expatriates and their families, educational migrants, individuals who migrate for family reunification, foreign workers recruited by a host country, and those who migrate for romantic reasons.¹

The migrant population is multifaceted [58]. Within the hypernym immigrant, many differences fade away, such as reasons for migration, gender, social class, economic conditions, ethnicity, level of education, and professionalisation. For example, until the 1970s, studies on immigration often did not take gender or ethnic differences into account, as demonstrated by Assis [1]. Until then, Girona [27] asserted, the classic literature on migration tended to take for granted that the economic and labour migrants were male. This paradigm gradually lost its hegemony at the end of the 20th century. From the 1970s, the gender began to be used as a category of analysis of the migratory process, just as the idea of economic causality was seen as only one of the multiple motivations for migration (*idem*). According to this author, from that moment on, politically motivated migrations, migration of qualified workers, of retired people among others are also discussed. In the academia and politics, people began to talk about the presence of women in migration as well [48].

Peres and Baeninger [52] asserted that feminists were the first to raise awareness about the position of women in the migration phenomenon. The number of migrant women, which notably increased in the end of the 20th century, and the high rate of economic activities carried out by them in host societies fuelled the feminist debate on the social position of these women and of the gender relations in the migration process [27]. Not only did the number of immigrant women grow, but so did the acceptance of the concept of immigrant women, as Miranda [48] supported. Indeed, contemporary migration is becoming an increasingly female phenomenon [22, 27, 48, 58-59].

60, 62] According to the United Nations, in 2020 there were 281 million international migrants in the world (3.6% of the world population), including 135 million women (3.5% of the world's female population). The largest number of migratory flows occur for economic reasons, from the Global South to the North; that is, from less affluent regions to those that offer more and better job opportunities [35, 62]. The Raghuram and Sondhi [61] found out, that, in the European Union, more migrant women have a university education than migrant men. Nonetheless, many of these migrant women do not work in jobs that match their qualifications.

In the specialist literature, there has been a growing number of studies focusing on the migration of unskilled women who leave the South in search of better opportunities in the North [32, 35, 40, 17, 41, 60]. On the other hand, as pointed out by Riaño [62], in her study on female migration in Switzerland, there are many professionally qualified Latin women whose emigration was not motivated by economics, but rather by romantic issues and gender representations. Referring to migrations motivated by the romantic relationship between a native and a foreign individual, the author used the term "marital migration". Just like the character Medea from Euripides' classic play, dating back to 431 BC, these women, in the name of love, renounce their families and cultures to start their lives over in the country of their Jason.ⁱⁱ

1.2. The Research Problem

According to the *Statistisches Bundesamt* (Federal Statistical Office), in December 2019, there were officially 6,013,925 male immigrants and 5,214,370 female immigrants in Germany. These figures are along the lines of the global percentages, which indicate that 56% of immigrants worldwide are men and 44% are women. Among the 175,065 migrants from Central and South America, 102,460 (59%) were women. These figures, in turn, do not exactly reflect the global percentages cited. Information found on social media, social associations and foreigner support groups suggests a plausible explanation for this discrepancy. There is a high number of binational marriages between Germans and Latin Americans in Germany – and the foreign spouse tends to be the woman (see organizations' name in the footnote number 7).

Unfortunately, the official data that could confirm this assumption is unclear and published irregularly. Unfortunately, no more detailed data were found despite the search, for instance, in websites of ministries linked to immigration, embassies and consulates of the countries of origin of the target group and consultation at *Statistisches Bundesamt* (Federal Statistical Office of Germany), etc. Finding information, for instance, about reasons for immigration and level of education of immigrants would have been very enlightening.

According to Lima and Togni [45] matrimonial migration is neither a new phenomenon nor rare. According to the *Bundesministerium Für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend* (Family Ministry, the elderly, women and youth), in 2017,

11.5% of couples legally registered in Germany were binational. This percentage corresponds to about two million couples. Of this total, 6.5% (around one million three hundred thousand) were made up of a foreign woman and a German person. Regrettably, there are no consistent records on the country of origin of immigrants, nor about their degrees of education or vocational training.

It was not possible to determine the exact size of the target group. However, data from several sources suggest that the figures are substantial. For example, the *Deutsches Zentrum für Integrations- und Migrationsforschung* (DeZIM) estimates that between 540,000 and 880,000 people have followed their partners to Germany, more than 30% of whom are highly skilled, and 70% of this group are women.ⁱⁱⁱ According to the organisation's projections, between 540,000 and 880,000 people followed their partners to Germany, with more than 30% being highly skilled. 70% of these 30% are women. Just over 55% of the people who followed their partners to Germany are employed, with women making up the minority. Another source, o *Statistisches Bundesamt*, published in 2018 the list *Top 10 Partnerwahl*. It lists the most popular nationalities among Germans when choosing foreign partners. Unfortunately, the list only presents data related to heterosexual and officially married couples, which certainly corresponds only partially to the reality. In any case, the list shows that 643 Brazilian women formed the tenth largest group of foreign women who married German men in 2017. This data suggests that if the list refers only to the year 2017 and if a single Latin American nationality already corresponds to a three-digit number, the actual total number that includes unofficial stable relationships – homosexual or heterosexual – with Germans must reach very significant figures. Data from institutions such as *Kofiza*, in *Via e Verband für Binationale Familien und Partnerschaften*, *Migropolis*, whose target audience is foreign women and/or binational couples, corroborate this hypothesis.^{iv}

It is important to emphasize that the women in the target group are protagonists in their migration project and bring with them considerable social, professional and cultural capital, which might unfold many possibilities for them, even beyond the borders of their countries of origin.

"Women now account for an increased proportion of highly skilled migrants but there are still few analyses of their economic participation. Immigration selection and occupational entry policies are crucial for an understanding of the gendered experiences of migration for skilled migrants" [35].

The question "Who am I?" accompanies the individual throughout their life and, paradoxically, always receives different answers [25]. There are many typical life events in middle adulthood that can influence one's identity, such as: career changes, moving house, returning to education, divorce, remarriage and the death of loved ones [75].

It is well known that career interruption can impact anyone's well-being and mental health, e.g. [16, 44, 66]. In the case of women in the target group, this life event occurs within

a highly complex and interconnected context, as conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari's [28] notion of the rhizome. In addition to the identity development experienced by any individual, these women have also undergone intercultural adaptation, perhaps even developing a 'bi- or multicultural identity' – a term used by Berry, e.g. [10, 11] and Benet-Martínez, e.g. [7] – or an 'intercultural personhood,' a term chosen by Kim, e.g. [38, 39]. Maintaining immigrants' sense of identity involves a process of identity expansion (broadening of the self), due to the necessary adaptation to the host culture, Dantas *et al.* [21] advocated. The construction of intercultural personality is, therefore, an expansion of the self. The constant redefinition of identity, as postulated by Bauman [6], is also an expansion of the self. For the author, an individual spends their entire life redefining their identity in the face of changing lifestyles at each stage and in each context. Migration, motherhood, and the interruption of working life are life events that certainly prompted the participants to reformulate their identity over and over again.

Migration has become one of the greatest social and political challenges of our time, requiring coordinated responses from civil society, international organizations, and governments. The term immigrant should be understood as an umbrella category that includes subgroups such as refugees, economic migrants, expatriates, and students, each with specific needs that require targeted attention from scholars, health professionals, policymakers, and legislators. As Berry *et al.* [12] emphasized, studies on migration and acculturation must consider the cultural context in which these phenomena occur. Policies and strategies focused on migrants should be sensitive to cultural diversity and the individual's background [13, 22, 29]. Accordingly, this study focuses on professionally qualified immigrant women.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. The Target Group

The target group of the study was Latin American women with university degrees who decided to migrate to Germany for marital reasons, *i.e.*, to join their partners who were born and live in that country. The group had several idiosyncrasies. The participants had completed university degrees, many with master's and/or doctoral degrees, and had already established professional lives in their countries before emigrating. It was assumed that German labour legislation, as well as the German language, constituted a professional barrier for many of them. Another important aspect is that their status in the host country had already been legalized, and, after a few legal procedures, they could have (almost) the same rights as a citizen born in the country. They could, for example, receive benefits from the government assistance system, participate in the health system, legally enter the labour market, etc. However, this does not mean that, in practice, life in the host country works the same for these immigrants as it does for natives.

Foreigners often must comply with specific laws, for example, regarding entry into the labour market, language proficiency levels required to obtain certain rights – such as residency, for example – potential xenophobia and racialisation, etc. In general, women, not only in Germany, face greater problems than men to (re)insert in the work market [34]. The gender pay gap, for instance, is a persistent issue to women in general, as well as responsibilities such as childcare that keeps constraining women possibilities. Migrant women frequently face a "double penalty" in the labour market, both for being women and for being foreign-born. They encounter these disadvantages when it comes to finding work that is adequately paid and matches their qualifications, as found out in several studies, see, for instance [60, 49, 50, 75].

Recruitment was carried out using two strategies. The first was broad random dissemination, carried out through advertising on social media (Facebook, LinkedIn, Xing, Instagram, InterNations), contact with NGOs, cultural and religious institutions linked to Latin countries, embassies and consulates, Latin product stores, hairdressers specialized in ethnic hair, language schools, international schools, and intercultural psychology clinics. The aim was therefore to achieve a balanced sample by selecting from a long and varied list of Facebook groups and other media to increase diversity. The second strategy was to expand the universe through contacts referred by participants, *i.e.*, snowball – sampling technique often used in hidden populations to reach more participants who meet the eligibility criteria.

Participants were eligible if they met the following criteria: (a) Latin American, (b) female, (c) aged 25 years or older, (d) university graduate or postgraduate, (e) in a marital relationship with a person born and residing in Germany, (f) migrated specifically due to this relationship, (g) had lived in Germany for at least 2 years, (h) were not fluent in German prior to migration, and (i) did not have secured employment in Germany prior to migration.

2.2. Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis and Triangulation

This study aimed to identify patterns of associations between professional status, well-being and mental health, bicultural identity construction, and acculturative stress among immigrant women. In addition, the importance of motherhood in the lives of the respondents was investigated. Other themes such as racism, domestic psychological violence, and difficulty in contacting Germans emerged from the interviews and were also analysed. However, given the scope of the article, not all results of the analysis can be here presented.

Data were collected in two stages (surveys and interviews) and analysed in three. The study combined: (a) a statistical analysis of the online survey (N = 205), (b) a content analysis of the in-depth interviews (N = 10) based on Bardin's method [4], and (c) a triangulation procedure to compare the findings from both sources.

The preparation of both the online questionnaire and the semi-structured interview guide was based on scientific literature and the researcher's extensive professional experience in intercultural psychotherapy in several countries [74]. Triangulation, which followed K. W. Creswell's convergent model, performed well in its role of cross-validation. According to Creswell [20], in line with Lalande [43] and Gómez [63], triangulation is the most widely used mixed-methods analysis technique. By offering the maximum degree of integration between the quantitative and qualitative approaches, it allows for a better approximation of the same social aspect [67]. It revealed convergent evidence and relevant and robust results particularly regarding working life, motherhood, and mental health.

2.3. The Quantitative Analysis

SoGo software was used to build and deploy the survey, which remained online for four months. The survey had a total of 40 items divided into two parts — sociodemographic and biographical data, and information on mental health, well-being, and acculturation. The second part consisted of psychometric instruments *Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale* [71] and *Riverside Acculturation Stress Inventory* [8, 47].

Statistical analysis has the particularity of enabling the validation of generalisations [20] as well as seeking to promote independence between the researcher and the research object, leading to more reliable and valid results [51]. The data collected in the online survey were analysed using Jamovi and SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). These data are, in fact, a non-probabilistic sample (convenience sample), given the impossibility of accessing the entire study population due to the dispersion of the group. Therefore, it is imperative to keep in mind that the use of this technique limits the possibility of making general statements with statistical rigour about the population, as warned by Field [24]. For this reason, to seek greater methodological rigour and depth, analysis through data triangulation proved to be the best alternative.

A limitation of the inquiry was that the psychometric instruments used to measure well-being and mental health (WEMWBS) and that to measure acculturative stress (Riverside Acculturation Stress inventory) have a very short temporal range. Both consider only the events and feelings of the last weeks prior to the test.

2.4. The Descriptive Quantitative Analysis

In making the descriptive analysis of the data collected, these four aspects stood out:

- a) Approximately 40% of female immigrants never applied for recognition of their university degrees, while 44% of those who did obtain full or nearly full recognition. Graduates in the social sciences, exact sciences, and engineering appear to have benefited the most from degree recognition over the past decade. No relationship

between the place of origin of the woman and job reinsertion was found. In addition, overall, there has been a slight improvement in the general level of employment among immigrants in recent years. This could partly result from the *Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz* (Skilled Act for Skilled Worker Immigration).

Diploma recognition that does not allow the immediately entrance in the market was more common among women with academic degrees in the biological and health sciences. One potential rationale for this may be the constraints established by the *Verordnung zur Regelung der Zuständigkeiten nach Rechtsvorschriften für Heilberufe*. Sometimes, even people whose degrees are from a German university must undergo a specific training and/or state examination to be allowed to enter the market as a professional.

- b) Twelve of the eighty women who had children in Germany never attempted to have their degrees recognised in the country and, at the same time, belong to the subgroup of those who stated that their professional life had become less important to their identity after migration. Six of these twelve participants openly stated that they had stopped working when they had children because they no longer considered professional life a priority for their identity. This data would point to the centrality of motherhood in the lives of some of the participants.
- c) The age of respondents who do not yet have children (n=29, 19.6%) but wish to have them ranges from 25 to 37, with 50% of them aged 34 or older. Presumably, these women have chosen so-called 'late motherhood,' an option that has become common in recent decades in various regions of the world. In Germany, for example, as reported in 2022 by the Federal Statistical Office, in 2020, the average age of women at the birth of their first child was 30.2 years, with 2.9% of them already aged 40 or older – a figure clearly different from that collected ten years earlier.
- d) 23 (11.2%) women did not stop working when they had children because of the high importance of working life to their identities. Adding to these the 16 (7.8%) who had to stop just because they were unable to combine working life and motherhood in Germany, the number of women who prioritized motherhood over working life was 39 (19%). On the other hand, 18 (8.8%) interrupted their working lives when they have a child because they no longer attributed high value to professional activities for their emotional lives. Other 5 (2.4%) would like to do the same, but they could not because they were financially dependent on their work. Both groups together represent only 11.2% of the respondents — in contrast to the 19% mentioned previously.

These results are consonant to the ones from Garcia-Lorenzo *et al.* [26] worldwide research. Their findings present that, depending on distinct cultural, historical, and social contexts, the combination of motherhood and professional life is

seen as a 'liminoid' experience—a term that refers to experiences that are transitional and ambiguous, requiring individuals to continually negotiate their sense of self.

2.5. Well-being and Mental Health

According to the World Health Organization (2017), depression is the most prevalent mental health problem in the general population. About 4.4% of the global population is affected by depression, with women being disproportionately affected more than men being more common among women.^v The scale used in the study to measure psychological well-being (and risk of depression), the WEMWBS, revealed some very salient details about the group of responders [68]. This scale was not designed to identify individuals with exceptionally high or exceptionally low mental health, so the authors did not develop any cut-off point. They only indicated a calculation method that allows the researcher to divide the study population into subgroups, namely, 'risk of clinical depression', 'indicative of mild depression' and 'no indication of depression'. For the calculation, the average score of the study population is taken and the standard deviation is added to it, considering 95% confidence level. The results should be interpreted in comparison with results from other populations [69].

The descriptive analysis revealed that 110 of the respondents (54%) were at risk of depression, either 'clinical' or 'mild.' This proportion is notably higher than figures reported in the literature and by the World Health Organization (2017), for instance. Not only is the number of women at risk of depression concerning, but also the group's average score. Applying the indicated formula, the points to separate the group into three categories are 44.4 and 49.1, with an average of 46.75. In different articles on the validation and application of WEMWBS, the averages were very close to or even above 50. For example, in the Argentine validation had an average of 49.1 (Serrani-Azcurra, 2014). In England, where the scale has been included in the National Health Survey since 2010, the averages have since varied between 50.9 and 52.4 [71]. An average score as low as that of the target group in this study was found only in the French validation carried out by Trousselard *et al.* [72] — with a group of hospitalised psychiatric patients — whose average score was 44.86.

One striking finding from these results is that among the 81 respondents with probable clinical depression, 41 considered work highly or very highly important to their identity in Germany. Exactly these women are currently either unemployed, underemployed or had returned to a university for a new or a complementary diploma. For sure, there is no single and plain explanation for this worrying phenomenon. Moreover, the many factors that may be considered causes of the increased risk of depression – family history, stress, anxiety, medication, related mental disorders, hormonal dysfunction, menopause, physical or psychological trauma, various life events – it should be remembered that both the survey and the interviews

were conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. The special circumstances during the pandemic represented a life event and a (long-lasting) stressor for many people [70]. The onset/intensification of psychological distress and symptoms such as anxiety, depression, somatisation, and stress have been observed by several researchers around the world, e.g. [13, 53, 70, 46]. In addition, consequences of the pandemic such as social isolation and financial crisis can be very detrimental to mental health [54].

The causes of poor mental health and well-being among immigrants appear to be multifactorial and could only be determined on an individual basis, which was beyond the scope of this investigation.

2.6. Correlations Between the Statistical Variables

2.6.1. Professional Life and Diploma Recognition

The Pearson test performed with SPSS revealed a significant correlation between these variables ($p=0.000$). The following information can be extracted from these results: (a) among women employed in positions corresponding to their academic degree, 40.98% obtained full recognition; (b) among self-employed individuals working in activities corresponding to their academic background, 36.36% had to undergo additional studies or take tests in order to enter the market — in the same way as a professional trained in the country; (c) among self-employed individuals working with activities below their academic level, 33.3% did not obtain recognition of their degrees; (d) among participants who never applied for degree recognition, 60% are unemployed/seeking employment, 40% are employed below their academic level, and 29.4% have returned to university or undergone further professional training in Germany.

2.6.2. Professional Life and Identity

The correlation between the perceived importance of professional life for identity in the country of origin and in Germany showed a significant p -value (0.001). As explained by Vieira [73], in line with Santos [65], work is one of the main structuring forces of female identity in modernity. It is the way to achieve female independence, as it can only be achieved by economic power. Thus, professional life can be seen as a form of empowerment.

The percentage of respondents who considered working life important to their identity in their home country (80.5%) did not remain the same. In Germany, it fell to 69.8%. One possible explanation for this decrease is that some of the women who had children in the host country preferred to stop working to care for their children, which, as previously suggested, would point to the centrality of motherhood. In addition, the benefits offered to families by the German state are generally higher than those offered by Latin countries, which makes it easier for one of the parents to stay at home, as some of the

interviewees explained later.

2.6.3. Mental Health and Motherhood

Pearson's test revealed a significant correlation between mental health and maternity. Considering the women who had children, indifferent whether in Germany or previously, there is a clear significant correlation ($p = 0.000$). In addition, about 62% of women without children were at risk of clinical depression. On the other hand, 57.72% of women with children had a high level of mental well-being, *i.e.*, no indication of risk of depression.

Among immigrants who had children in Germany, 62.5% reported high levels of mental well-being and no risk of depression, a higher proportion than among mothers in the overall sample. Among those who did not have children in Germany, the majority, 53.6%, had poor mental well-being, *i.e.*, risk of clinical depression, which endorses the 62% percentage previously presented.

2.6.4. Mental Health and Importance of Professional Life in Germany

Comparing the data, it is notable that respondents who scored ≤ 3 for the importance of professional life in Germany and who are not at risk of depression are employed. On the other hand, among the 65 respondents who scored 5 for the importance of professional life to their identity (highest score), 41 show possible clinical depression. All 65 are currently either unemployed or in professional activities below their academic level or have returned to being students. These data reveal the risk to mental health posed by professional unfulfillment for those for whom working life is very significant for their identity and/or financially.

It is imperative to note that none of the eighteen women who decided to stop working after having children, as they were neither financially nor emotionally dependent on a job, showed signs of depression. This result suggests that being able to choose between prioritising motherhood or professional life, which not all women have, is a protective factor against the risk of depression.

2.6.5. Mental Health and Level of Acculturative Stress

The correlation analysis between these two variables was significant ($p=0.025$). The respondents with risk of clinical depression were those who, at the time of the survey, had experienced higher levels of acculturative stress. Based on the data, it can be assumed that the target group confirmed the probability pointed out by the literature, namely, that high Riverside scores are positively associated with depression and anxiety and, therefore, with the risk of depression.

2.6.6. Result of Statistical Analysis Using Regression Models

Logistic regression

Exactly like the χ^2 test and contingency table, logistic regression can be used to analyse dichotomous results with two mutually exclusive levels. This regression, widely used in health research [33], not only allows the use of continuous predictors, but also offers the possibility of adjusting for multiple predictors. For the analysis of this regression, mental well-being was considered as the response variable. The choice of predictor variables was based on the results of the χ^2 test, which had pointed out the association between independent samples:

For a more advanced analysis, a first model (model I) of multicategorical logistic regression was proposed, assuming mental well-being as a dependent variable (or response) at its ordinal levels: (a) no indication of depression, (b) evidence of mild depression, and (c) risk of clinical depression. The predictor variables were those that showed a significant association by the X^2 test ($p < 0.10$). McFadden's Pseudo R^2 for model I was 0.123, and the coefficient estimates were significant.

Table 1. *gl – Degrees of Freedom / Source: Prepared by the author.*

Predictor	χ^2	gl	p-value
Age	6,21	1	0,013*
Work vs. Identity in Germany	9,72	4	0,045*
Having children in Germany	7,46	1	0,006*
Immigration before/after 2012	0,05	1	0,815
Having children	0,88	1	0,347
Acculturation	4,88	2	0,087*

*Significant coefficients at the 10% probability level ($p < 0.10$) by maximum likelihood estimation.

Asterisk-marked P-values are considered significant. This means that, according to Wald's test, age, importance of employment for identity after immigration, having had children in Germany and acculturation level have an impact on the mental well-being of the target group.

2.6.7. Interpretation of Odd Ratio, Reason for Probabilities

With regard to the probable risk of clinical depression, OR < 1 provided information about the likelihood that the following factors are protective in the case of the group of responders: (a) women who have had children in Germany are at lower risk of clinical depression (0.348 times); (b) older participants are at lower risk of clinical depression (0.954 times); (c) the greater the score the participants gave to the importance to the importance of their work/employment situation for their identity in Germany, the greater the risk of clinical depression.

Considering the three categories of acculturation stress (low, medium and high degree), evidently, the higher the stress, the

greater the chances of participants to have indications of clinical depression.

2.6.8. Linear Model -with Riverside as a Response Variable

Given the importance of the result on the correlation between high acculturation stress and greater indication of risk of clinical depression provided by the logistic regression model, this correlation was verified once again. To this end, a linear model was designed using the Riverside variable, from the measurement of acculturation stress, as a predictor or response variable. In addition to the variable “well-being and mental health,” also the dependent variables “importance of your job/self-employment for your identity in Germany,” “employment status,” and “having children before or after immigration” were used. The latter three variables were chosen based on slight variations in the results of the dual analyses of potential correlations.

The linear model was valid ($p = 0.0007$) with an explanation capacity of 9.18%. The results showed that the variable “employment situation” has no influence on the result in Riverside ($p > 0.05$). There was only one exception, namely, the self-employed working in a position corresponding to the academic level ($p = 0.031$), which had a reduced score compared to the unemployed. However, having children revealed a reduction in Riverside scores ($p = 0.048$), i.e., a reduction in acculturation stress. Most importantly, however, the linear model revealed that women with average “well-being and mental health” (indicating mild depression) generally have higher acculturation stress than respondents with high mental well-being. This result corroborates the result of the logistic model on the correlation between higher signs of risk of clinical depression and high acculturation stress, which is in line with the literature, e.g. [8, 47].

2.7. The Qualitative Analysis

Based on the objectives proposed for this study, a semi-structured interview script was developed to assist and lead the interviewees in their narratives and reflections and, at the same time, collect material to investigate whether there is a relationship among professionally qualified migrants between career interruption, diminished sense of identity, and mental health. The aim was to analyse the degree of importance of the profession in the construction of the identity of these professionally qualified immigrant women and whether the interviewees faced difficulties in integrating into the labour market.

The ten interviews were analysed using the content analysis technique proposed by Bardin [4], which was conducted with the support of MAXQDA software. This method of analysis was chosen because it fits well with quantitative statistical analysis, since it is based on a mathematical approach. Content analysis focuses on the relevance, logic, and consistency of responses, seeking the most frequent response trends, pat-

terns, coincidences, and divergences to establish typical patterns of representations.

It was remarkable that all interviewees emphasised the importance of their studies and their profession, both in their home countries and in Germany. Eight of the ten interviewees experienced great difficulties in finding paid work at their academic level in the host country. The only two who were quickly successful, i.e., found, in a short time, jobs at their level of professional training, work in English in a constantly expanding scientific field in the country — biomedicine — and arrived in Germany in the last decade, the time of preparation and publication of the *Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz*.

It was also noteworthy that immigrants who were unable to adequately enter the labour market spoke of how they distanced themselves from the professional fields they had chosen in their countries of origin, as well as from their dreams during their studies. The Peruvian lawyer, for example, reported how, frustration after frustration, she realised that it was impossible to practise her profession in Germany and said her goodbyes to part of herself, of her identity. It was also clear that career failure has an impact on the health and mental well-being of these women, which is in line with the results of the quantitative analysis. The simple fact that women feel that, due to immigration, they have lost something important to their identity, such as their career, can already be considered a risk factor for their mental health and well-being.

In addition, the fact that their studies and professional experience were not recognised in their new country led, in some cases, to feelings of worthlessness, negative self-image, low self-esteem, low morale, social isolation, depression, feeling of being a helpless victim of circumstances, problems with their German spouses, and dissatisfaction with life in general. As Santos [66] warned, the loss of a certain social identity, such as professional identity, has a strong impact on the conception of the Self and Others. The individual is forced to rebuild their life history and social relationships, which has a strong influence on their identity, explained the author. However, there are other factors that represents risk to mental health and well-being, such as confrontation with prejudice, othering, stereotyping and discrimination, which many also have experienced in Germany.

All the interviewed immigrants experienced acculturation stress. Much of this stress was due to the challenge of learning the German language, and some was due to the German way of life. Although only for a specific period, some women questioned their decision to migrate to Germany. In all cases, this was due to career/professional issues.

3. Results

The triangulation - dialogue between quantitative and qualitative data - was the strategy chosen to present, compare, and merge the results of the online survey and the interviews. It functioned as cross-validation, which promotes the reliability of an investigation, to generalise the initial hypotheses and

theories provided by the literature. Its design was convergent. First, the quantitative analysis of the survey was carried out, followed by a qualitative analysis of the interviews. Subsequently, the results were integrated and analysed again in a comparative, triangulated manner. Multi-methodological procedures are a valuable strategy for elucidating a phenomenon in its extent and meaning [42]. They make possible to broaden and deepen the understanding of the phenomenon studied, thus increasing the accuracy of the study. They also seek to reduce the dichotomy between objectivity and, in social sciences, the segmentation between qualitative and quantitative research – associated with the ever-present demands for reliability, credibility, transferability and confirmability of research [2].

Although the interviewee group was small ($n = 10$, 4.9% of the survey group), triangulation showed that the qualitative results clearly reflected many of the results and tendencies of the online survey group ($n = 205$).

Regarding professional life, for example, triangulation confirmed several results: (a) the outstanding correlation between the importance of working life for immigrants' identity and mental health; (b) the centrality of the negative correlation between the importance of working life for immigrants' identity and well-being and mental health. (c) the positive correlation, already pointed out by several previous studies, between mental well-being and acculturative stress, see, *e.g.* [12, 14]; (d) the fact that literacy in German is not always essential for finding a (good) job in Germany; (e) a high number of — temporarily or permanently — underemployed immigrants with academic degree.

With regard to the topic of motherhood, triangulation clearly showed how the results of quantitative and qualitative analysis mirrored and reiterated each other on (a) the difficulty of balancing motherhood and working life in Germany, (b) migration as a family strategy to benefit children, and (c) the conscious choice of some women to remain childfree, which has been growing around the world in recent years, see, *e.g.*, [3, 45, 36, 31].

Regarding mental well-being, in addition to negative correlation with labour life, the results confirmed a positive correlation already pointed out by several previous studies between mental health and acculturative stress [12, 14]. The most salient and worrying fact among all the corroborated ones, however, seems to be the high number of female immigrants with clinical depression indications.

There are also non-convergent results, that is, found in quantitative or qualitative analyses that did not mirror each other in the triangulation.

Firstly, statistical analysis indicated a strong positive correlation between the variables of motherhood and well-being and mental health, showing that, in the target group, motherhood acted as a protective factor against depression. This data was not found to be significant among the interviewees. The two interviewees who presented a risk of clinical depression are mothers who are satisfied with this role. However, there

are other aspects in which they are very similar, and which might be at the root of their poor mental health and well-being: (a) a very high degree of frustration with their professional life in Germany. Both have lived in the country for over twenty years and have never had a job commensurate with their academic background. In addition, they reported situations in which their professional knowledge and experience were questioned because they had been acquired in non-European countries. (b) A high degree of acculturative stress for a period of more than 20 years. (c) Negative experiences of othering and racism.

Other aspects that were not ratified by triangulation were: (a) the choice for late maternity. 50% of online inquiry participants who want to have children but still consider themselves young people to do so, are 34 years old or older. Among the interviewees, those who had children did so around 27 years old. (b) the decrease in the importance of professional life after migration to Germany. In contrast, among the interviewees this decrease did not occur. During the interviews, they all devoted significant part of their narratives to academic and work life. It can be assumed, however, that, due to the time and energy necessary to participate in this part of the study, that these immigrants who set out to be interviewed are people for whom the work issue, identity and migratory process, topics of this study, have a high degree of importance.^{vi}

The correlations between the variables could not be ratified by triangulation, since the methodological nature of qualitative analysis does not allow it. The search for correlations is a possibility only offered by statistical analysis. Similarly, there were results of qualitative analysis not replicated by the quantitative analysis. It is, again, a technical question. The semi-structured interview opens possibilities that quantitative analysis cannot offer.

4. Conclusion

The evidence brought by this study, that is part of a Psychology and Intercultural Relations' doctorate research, highlights the need to pay greater attention to the well-being and mental health of professionally and academically qualified immigrant women. The results indicated that, for this group, well-being and mental health are closely linked to the interruption of labour life and, in many cases, there is an impact on the individual's identity.

As Bauman [5] and Keupp [37] argued, individuals need a sense of belonging and security. Professional identity often constitutes a core element of this sense of belonging, contributing both to social recognition [66] and to the construction of individual and collective identities [16, 44]. Especially for women, professional life is a key means of self-fulfilment and identity development [15]. Thus, the interruption of professional life can negatively impact both well-being and mental health [16, 44, 66]. The negative indicators observed in this study are therefore unsurprising, given that

many participants have been unable to rebuild their professional lives in the German labour market—a pattern evidenced in both the survey and the interviews.

Although the target group is small compared to overall immigrant population in Germany, it has idiosyncrasies and specific needs that may be relevant to understanding the impact of professional satisfaction on mental health and professionally qualified immigrants, especially women. Current efforts by German Government, such as, the *Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz*, are still insufficient to address these needs. It should be kept in mind that not only for these individuals and the people around them. The waste of the specialized workforce brought by these women has a great negative impact for the whole German society.

Immigration plays a key role in addressing the shortage of skilled workers, a demographic challenge that threatens economic growth and the sustainability of social security systems.^{vii} In 2023/2024, the Skilled Workers Immigration Act (*Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz*) was finally comprehensively reformed by the Federal Ministry of the Interior (*Bundesministerium des Innern*)^{viii}, to facilitate access to the labour market for workers from third countries.

The results of this investigation provide clear evidence of the challenges faced by highly qualified women and point to concrete pathways for social transformations. Such findings can strengthen debate around Germany and other European Union integration policies and practices, while offering solid foundations for the development of strategies-political, economic, social and clinical-focused on the protection of mental health and the strengthening of the welfare of these populations as many other studies had pointed out [29, 55-60]. It is a local and, in parallel, total and scientific-social knowledge that aspires to constitute common sense, as exhorted by Santos [64].

Author Contributions

Gláucia Maria de Queiroz: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Biography



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i In the corporate environment, expatriates are the term that designates professionals transferred to work for the same company or corporation in another country.
 ii This comparison was created by Gil (2006) apud [45].
 iii <https://www.dezim-institut.de/>
 iv <https://www.invia-bayern.de/angebote/migration-integration/in-via-kofiza.html>, <https://www.verband-binationaler.de/>, <https://migrapolis.de/>
 v <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/254610/WHO-MSD-MER-2017.2-eng.pdf>

vi These thematic axes of the study were repeatedly emphasized, from the recruitment advertisements to the online form through which participants could volunteer for the interview
 vii <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/2248702-2248702>, <https://www.make-it-in-germany.com/en/working-in-germany/professions-in-demand>, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-needs-288000-foreign-workers-annually-until-2040-study/a-70885279>
 viii <https://www.bmi.bund.de>