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Boredom syndrome in touristic familiar restaurant owners. A mixed-method study in Juárez, Mexico

 Carlos Jesús González Macías¹,  Diego Adiel Sandoval Chávez^{2*},  Luis Adrián Lozoya Muñoz³,  Jesús Alberto Urrutia de la Garza⁴

^{1,3,4}*Department of Administrative Sciences, Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.*

²*Tecnológico Nacional de México/Instituto Tecnológico de Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.*

Corresponding author: Diego Adiel Sandoval Chávez (Email: diego.sc@cdjuarez.tecnm.mx)

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study the profile of boredom syndrome (BoSy) in a group of tourist restaurant owners in Juárez, Mexico. The methodological approach combined quantitative and qualitative methods. With the advice of a panel of experts and a thorough literature review, a 17-item Likert scale questionnaire and an interview guide were developed from a business perspective. Both instruments incorporated boredom indicators as identified in the field of Psychology and showed high content validity. The results suggested that both the location of the economic entity and the age of the manager significantly influence BoSy levels. The relational analysis showed that, in general, the incidence of BoSy is consistent with theoretical expectations. From a practical perspective, the differences between generations and geographical locations may indicate the need to implement preventive strategies to prevent the actual low levels of BoSy from evolving into greater disinterest and demotivation in the future. In addition, this research identifies how generational and geographical factors influence BoSy levels, revealing that younger family members tend to prefer challenging tasks and are less affected by failure, while older members opt for simpler tasks and seek to avoid failure and its consequences.

Keywords: Boredom, familiar businesses, Mexico-U.S. border, mixed-method approach, touristic restaurants.

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1. Introduction

The course of life unfolds through routine activities derived from family or work duties that are combined with desires and needs. Since these activities constitute a large part of daily life, it is expected that they have an impact on people's overall

life satisfaction and emotional well-being [1-5]. One of the negative impacts is boredom at work, also referred as to Boredom Syndrome (BoSy), which is a recurring issue in the business environment that negatively affects the management decision-making process [6-10]. This vague and elusive syndrome induces a state of low arousal, a sense of displeasure and dissatisfaction arising from low stimulation associated with monotony and meaninglessness at work. It begins as a transitory affective situation but then develops into an affective state characterized by a pervasive human experience and a feeling of failure when participating in certain activities and contexts. Individuals perceive a kind of failure that decreases self-esteem and performance at work [11-13].

Boredom experienced by small business owners can negatively affect business performance and their mental health. Moreover, the effects may extend to family members who work and interact with the owner daily [14]. The boredom-work relationship has an incipient empirical correlate; it is a topic that has not been sufficiently understood [15, 16]. Studies on boredom from an organizational perspective have been conducted mainly in the field of medical and political sciences [17, 18]. No study involving small business owners could be identified. With this framework, this article aims to study the profile of BoSy in a group of tourist restaurant owners in Juárez, Mexico, to reveal how these businesspersons face the diverse manifestations of boredom.

2. Literature Review

BoSy in organizations or workplaces has been defined as being tired or restless due to a lack of interest in business issues [19, 20]. Boredom is the negative feeling of disengaging from an enthusiastic business activity and being stuck in an endless, unsatisfying and monotonous exercise [21, 22]. The psychological explanation for this syndrome is related to the degree of high or low internal arousal of an individual when performing monotonous work tasks, which hinders performance [13]. After being an almost neglected topic, boredom has regained momentum and has become a topic of interest for conducting research in the field of organizational psychology management [23, 24].

Understanding the phenomenon of boredom and the cognitive processes it triggers is a premise for addressing the negative effects that threaten the psychological well-being of family entrepreneurs [25, 26]. Boredom is a multichannel sensation that occurs at times of high work demand. Individuals impose themselves with integrity amid unstimulating experiences derived from monotony that, in addition, restrict autonomy [27]. Boredom is associated with dispositional factors that evidence the lack of internal and external stimuli. In this sense, the range of stimuli needed to maintain an optimal level of arousal differs for everyone [28, 29].

BoSy refers to the degree to which an individual connects with the changing conditions of the work environment and how the individual develops the ability to adapt and realize competencies [30-32]. Boredom is conceived as a negative and subjective state that promotes low arousal and dissatisfaction resulting from an inadequate stimulus context [10, 33]. It is an experience indicating exhaustion in the context of an apparent insecure stillness [34]. Boredom can be assessed by knowing how repetitive a task or job is, establishing the propensity to experience the emotion of feeling bored, or probing whether the emotion is present [35].

The highest level of boredom occurs when an individual must maintain mental alertness and is required to perform at high levels in the context of a monotonous activity [36-38]. Similarly, forced attention is present when high-arousal boredom is experienced [39, 40]. The literature is reiterative in establishing that boredom can be conceptualized objectively by referring to the feeling of mindless repetitiveness in a work activity [13]. From a broader perspective, boredom comprises the lack of internal stimulation towards business management activities, i.e., the ability to maintain interest in what needs to be done. It is a negative affective state of generalized disinterest in business management activity [36].

The study of boredom should focus on two aspects: the contextual situations of the task in the organizational context and the subjective appraisal experienced by the individual. It is desirable to reveal the relationship of these aspects to standardized measures of the individual's sense of relief and depression. Boredom is a universal human experience that arises in diverse healthcare settings [41]. Both a lack of stimuli and challenging work seem to be the factors underlying the prevalence of BoSy. However, it has also been found that some individuals prefer repetitive tasks in the workplace [13] state boredom can be appreciated from four perspectives: a) psychodynamic: referring to boredom associated to under or overstimulation of the work activities; b) arousal: when boredom takes place due to the repression of determining what is desired, because there is a threaten perceived in the desire; c) attention: boredom is consequence of non-optimal arousal that occurs when there is a mismatch between an individual's need for arousal and the availability of environmental stimuli; and, d) existential: here boredom appears due to life meaningless, individuals become alienated or overwhelmed if the conditions allowing to harmonize activities with values are not present.

The effects of boredom syndrome are present in the work environment and have been partially documented [42]. From the discipline of psychology, there has been a great deal of research focused on the causes of overstimulation at work, specifically [13]. However, there is a perceived opportunity to expand knowledge on the effects of under-stimulation at work, i.e., the incidence of boredom, particularly in small business owners, which plays a major role in the performance of these entities. Thus, it is relevant to study how boredom prevails in business owners who no longer perceive relevant challenges at work to discover how it affects mental health, and which factors are associated with it [25] confirmed that frustration in business owners leads to boredom, which limits seeking new work and business experiences that also entail more complexity. Boredom undermines the willingness to take new risks, business activities are perceived as unchallenging, monotonous and repetitive [13].

Small business owners are also prone to BoSy when there is a gap between routine tasks and those that are perceived as stimulating and require more challenge in their execution. If the difference is pronounced, BoSy may set in. This depends on factors such as the age and personality of the individual. There are differences in the personalities of family members. Young

people tend to be more expressive than adults and not to repress or hide their emotions [43]. Younger generations show different patterns of engagement in the same entrepreneurial activities as their older relatives. Similarly, young family members who disengage from entrepreneurial learning activities may require specific and different responses from older members [44, 45]. Having a more adventurous spirit, younger members face difficult tasks without worrying about the negative emotions derived from failure. On the other hand, older family members prefer to do easier tasks and try to avoid failure and negative effects, such as boredom [46, 47].

The presence of boredom is a function of the desired activity, intensity, type, variety and novelty of the perceived stimulus [12]. Owners gradually become familiar with the disappointments and frustrations of business activities until they surrender to an inevitable routine, incompatible with their desires. Thus, entrepreneurial activities gradually lose their meaning, enthusiasm, and spirit slowly degrade, leading to a sense of purposelessness at work, an unwanted state of feeling trapped and restless [48]. The effect of BoSy business owners transcends the work environment. In fact, the satisfaction experienced by the owner in different aspects of life is related to satisfaction in the firm [49]. Thus, when the owner is bored, tends to become uncaring, and loses the ability to face new challenges, strength diminishes amidst an environment of little or no creative inspiration [27]. Boredom is accompanied by negative emotions, such as loneliness, anger, sadness, and worry [23]. In a state of boredom, owners lose sight of the importance of focusing on satisfying customers. Instead, they engage in irrelevant tasks, such as filling out forms and writing reports. These tasks, while important, are an indication that owners are not making the most of their capabilities [13].

Affected by boredom, small family business owners exhibit harmful and unpleasant behaviors that spill over to family members and employees. Owners may purposefully take inappropriate actions, engage in absenteeism and tardiness, and sometimes destroy the physical work environment. These behaviors exacerbate the negative feelings described above [50]. A work climate that is not enriched with meaningful symbols hinders creative performance and fails to identify opportunities. Precisely, this scenario is what an owner faces when suffering from the negative effects of boredom [51]. Many owners are unable to make the connection between satisfying work and setting new goals. It is not until they realize they are bored that they start a way out of that state of blindness [48].

Boredom is associated with different impairments, such as: inability to sustain attention, cognitive errors, hyperactivity and mental wandering [52, 53]. Cognitive difficulties also ensue negative affective feelings [25] that are associated with persistent disengagement from one's environment, as well as feelings of sadness, helplessness, and in more extreme cases, depressive episodes [54]. Feelings of dissatisfaction, frustration, and anger, as well as various forms of aggression, are also experienced [55].

Table 1.
Boredom Syndrome indicators.

1	Poor sustained attention	Carriere, et al. [52] and Cheyne, et al. [53]
2	Increased attentional lapses	Carriere, et al. [52] and Cheyne, et al. [53]
3	Attention-related cognitive errors	Carriere, et al. [52] and Cheyne, et al. [53]
4	Mind wandering	Carriere, et al. [52] and Cheyne, et al. [53]
5	Inattention	Gerritsen, et al. [59]
6	Hyperactivity	Gerritsen, et al. [59]
7	Executive dysfunction	Gerritsen, et al. [59]
8	Dysregulation of attentional control	Eastwood, et al. [11]
9	Sadness	Smallwood, et al. [54]
10	Helplessness	Smallwood, et al. [54]
11	Depressive episodes	Smallwood, et al. [54]
12	Dissatisfaction	Fahlman, et al. [22] and Goldberg, et al. [55]
13	Frustration	Fahlman, et al. [22] and Goldberg, et al. [55]
14	Anger	Fahlman, et al. [22] and Goldberg, et al. [55]
15	Verbal aggression	Fahlman, et al. [22]
16	Physical aggression	Fahlman, et al. [22]
17	Hostility	Fahlman, et al. [22]

3. Research Methods

The methodological approach takes a dual route, i.e., it adopts quantitative and qualitative introspective methods rather than clinical symptoms of boredom, such as pupillary dilation or heart rate [56]. With the advice of a panel of experts and from an extensive literature review, an ad hoc 17-item Likert-scale questionnaire and an in-depth interview guide were developed from a business perspective by incorporating the indicators and domains of boredom so far identified in the discipline of Psychology [57]. The content validity of both instruments reached a good level of agreement (Friedman's ANOVA $p < 0.228$). Likewise, the questionnaire showed adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha 0.848) [58]. The indicators related to BoSy are summarized in Table 1. Thus, the design of this research begins with a review of the literature, followed by an exhaustive analysis of the object of study and, subsequently, the design and validation of the data collection instruments. In other words, a case study research design is established.

Three eligibility criteria were established to define the study group of small business owners: a) the owner had control over business decisions; b) the business was wholly owned by the family; and c) the operating capital came exclusively from

the family. These criteria, as well as common sense and discretion, led to the identification of 40 tourist restaurant owners in Juarez, Mexico. These entities had the potential to extend the theory and explain the applicable concepts [60, 61]. A mixed approach allowed for contrasting the quantitative results of the survey and the qualitative semantic meaning of the in-depth interviews. The ad hoc questionnaires and in-depth interviews were conducted under the assumption that the owner had an active role and extensive knowledge of the company.

Table 2.
Sociodemographic results.

Owner	Type	No. of employees	Location	Gender	Age	Education	Years in business	Generations working	Daily hours dedicated
1	Restaurant	<10	North	M	>50	Superior	42	2	10
2	Restaurant	<10	North	M	<30	Basic	2	1	12
3	Restaurant	>10	North	M	30-50	Superior	14	1	10
4	Restaurant	>10	North	M	30-50	Superior	7	1	9
5	Restaurant-Bar	>10	North	M	30-50	Basic	11	1	12
6	Restaurant-Bar	<10	North	F	>50	Basic	38	2	8
7	Restaurant-Bar	>10	North	M	30-50	Superior	42	3	6
8	Restaurant	>10	North	M	30-50	Superior	12	2	8
9	Restaurant	<10	North	M	30-50	Basic	23	2	10
10	Restaurant	<10	North	M	30-50	Superior	24	1	10
11	Restaurant	>10	Northwest	M	<30	Basic	3	1	8
12	Restaurant-Bar	<10	Northwest	M	>50	Basic	30	2	8
13	Restaurant	>10	Northwest	F	>50	Superior	25	2	9
14	Restaurant-Bar	<10	Northwest	F	>50	Basic	14	2	12
15	Restaurant	>10	Downtown	M	>50	Basic	50	2	8
16	Restaurant-Bar	<10	Downtown	M	30-50	Superior	34	3	12
17	Restaurant	<10	Downtown	M	<30	Superior	26	1	8
18	Restaurant	<10	Downtown	F	30-50	Basic	28	2	10
19	Restaurant	<10	Downtown	M	>50	Basic	19	2	8
20	Restaurant-Bar	>10	Downtown	M	>50	Basic	33	2	8
21	Restaurant	>10	West	M	<30	Superior	5	1	10
22	Restaurant	<10	West	M	30-50	Superior	9	1	12
23	Restaurant-Bar	>10	West	M	>50	Basic	18	2	8
24	Restaurant	>10	East	M	<30	Basic	7	1	12
25	Restaurant	<10	East	M	30-50	Basic	11	1	12
26	Restaurant-Bar	>10	East	F	>50	Superior	15	2	6
27	Restaurant	>10	East	M	30-50	Basic	20	2	8
28	Restaurant	<10	East	M	30-50	Superior	12	2	8
29	Restaurant-Bar	>10	East	M	>50	Basic	22	2	10
30	Restaurant-Bar	>10	East	F	30-50	Basic	31	2	8
31	Restaurant	<10	East	M	<30	Basic	4	1	10
32	Restaurant	<10	East	M	30-50	Basic	11	2	10
33	Restaurant	>10	Southeast	F	>50	Basic	20	2	8
34	Restaurant	>10	Southeast	F	>50	Basic	34	2	10
35	Restaurant-Bar	>10	Southeast	M	<30	Superior	2	1	10
36	Restaurant-Bar	<10	Southeast	M	>50	Basic	36	3	8
37	Restaurant-Bar	>10	Southeast	M	30-50	Basic	12	1	10
38	Restaurant	<10	South	M	30-50	Basic	17	2	10
39	Restaurant	>10	South	M	>50	Basic	23	2	8
40	Restaurant-Bar	<10	South	M	<30	Superior	1	1	12

4. Findings

Findings are presented in two sections: the first outlines the quantitative findings, and the second focuses on the qualitative ones. Table 2 shows the sociodemographic data of the surveyed businesses, highlighting that 62.5% belong to the restaurant sector, while the remaining ones operate as restaurant-bars. Additionally, 53% of the organizations have more than 10 employees, 48% are in the north and east of the city, and 80% are led by men.

Regarding the age of the leaders, 43% are between 30 and 50 years old. Concerning business longevity, 70% have been operating for 1 to 25 years. In terms of generational succession, 55% are led by the second generation, 38% by the first, and 7% by the third. Finally, 95% of business owners dedicate between 8 and 12 hours per day to managing their businesses.

4.1. Quantitative Approach

Spearman-Rho test was adopted to determine the correlation among the indicators due to non-normal item scores ($p < 0.000$) (see Table 3).

Table 3.

Correlation among BoSy indicators and scores' mean.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	17	Item
1	0.56	0.74	0.85	0.82	-0.49	0.64	0.43	0.53	0.41	ns	0.68	0.47	ns	ns	ns	1
	1	0.69	0.62	0.59	-0.40	0.40	ns	0.32	ns	ns	0.50	0.32	ns	ns	ns	2
		1	0.77	0.76	-0.46	0.51	ns	0.47	0.42	ns	0.61	0.44	0.35	ns	ns	3
			1	0.86	-0.46	0.66	0.35	0.52	0.52	ns	0.71	0.57	0.34	0.32	0.32	4
				1	-0.42	0.67	0.39	0.49	0.41	ns	0.60	0.42	0.40	ns	ns	5
					1	ns	-0.35	-0.32	-0.33	ns	-0.42	-0.47	-0.40	ns	ns	6
						1	.67	0.36	ns	ns	0.47	0.33	ns	ns	ns	7
							1	0.42	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	8
								1	0.65	ns	0.45	ns	ns	ns	ns	9
									1	ns	0.50	ns	ns	ns	ns	10
										1	0.32	ns	ns	ns	ns	11
					ns: $p > 0.05$						1	0.79	ns	ns	ns	12
					Not bold: $p < 0.05$							1	ns	ns	ns	13
					Bold: $p < 0.01$								1	ns	ns	14
														1	ns	15
															1	17
2.2	1.3	1.6	2.1	2.2	2.6	2.2	2.5	1.5	1.6	1.1	2.1	2.1	2.2	1.2	1.6	mean

Indicator 16 (Physical aggression) was not reported in the family businesses studied. Only a few indicators show strong to very strong correlations; most of the significant indicators show medium to low degrees of association. To the latter are added the non-significant association relationships that include indicators 11, 14, 15, and 17. The results also show some negative associations, mainly in indicator 6 (Hyperactivity) and, to a lesser extent, in indicator 12 (Dissatisfaction).

The overall mean of the boredom level was 1.9012; the 95% confidence interval for this mean (1.787, 2.012), with a maximum population value of 2.81 and a minimum of 1.31. The boredom means calculated by entity studied fit a normal distribution ($p < 0.124$). Table 4 details the results of crossed analysis for the sociodemographic variable.

Table 4.

Cross-analysis of sociodemographic variables.

Variable	Category/numeric	Boredom mean score	p-value	Test
Business type	Restaurant	1.968	$p < 0.137$	t-test
	Restaurant-Bar	1.792		
Number of employees	< 10	1.857	$p < 0.419$	t-test
	> 10	1.951		
Location	Center	2.187 (*)	$p < 0.040$	One-way ANOVA + Tukey test
	North	2.044		
	South	1.875		
	Southeast	1.862		
	Northwest	1.766		
	East	1.729		
	West	1.646 (*)		
Genre	Male	1.9052	$p < 0.819$	t-test
	Female	1.8750		
Age range (years)	30-50	1.9708 (*)	$p < 0.045$	One-way ANOVA + Tukey test
	> 50	1.8830		
	< 30 30-50	1.8250		
Education	Non-college graduate	1.926	$p < 0.574$	t-test
	College graduate	1.858		
Seniority	Numeric	1.9012	$p < 0.152$	Spearman-Rho
Working hours	Numeric	1.9012	$p < 0.244$	Spearman-Rho

Significant differences were found in the mean levels of boredom when crossed by location. Entities located in the central zone presented the highest levels of boredom, while the lowest mean level was recorded in the western zone. As for the age variable, the 30 to 50 years age group presented the highest mean level of boredom. The other sociodemographic variables were not significant.

4.2. Qualitative Approach

Following Eisenhardt and Graebner [60], the potential to replicate or extend the chosen theory was the criterion for choosing the cases. In addition, the choice of cases sought to illustrate the applicable concepts, so that the theory was developed rather than simply verified [60, 61]. An in-depth interview script was adopted, consisting of 17 questions based

on the same 17 aspects of boredom proposed for the research (Table 1). The causes and manifestations of boredom influenced by the family nature of the organization were included [59]. Seventeen owners who had a managerial role and extensive knowledge of both the company and the family were interviewed. Table 5 lists the frequency of the indicators identified in the comments derived from the interviews with restaurant leaders.

Table 5.

Frequency of indicators identified in the interviews.

	Indicator	Number of interviewees
1	Poor sustained attention	16
2	Dysregulation of attentional control	16
3	Sadness	15
4	Inattention	14
5	Dissatisfaction	14
6	Mind wandering	13
7	Increased attentional lapses	12
8	Anger	12
9	Hyperactivity	12
10	Executive disfunction	11
11	Frustration	11
12	Attention-related cognitive errors	10
13	Helplessness	9
14	Depressive episodes	9
15	Verbal aggression	8
16	Hostility	3
17	Physical aggression	0

A semantic network was built considering transcriptions from interviews using Atlas.ti software (Figure 1). This network allows us to appreciate the interrelationships among the indicators from the interviewer's standpoint. The interviews revealed that mind wandering is associated with hyperactivity and anger. Both occur when frustration is experienced when performing routine tasks. In this way, some kind of hostility and executive dysfunction in decision-making develops. The interviewees attributed the frustration to the dissatisfaction and sadness resulting from repetitive and unavoidable activities that last a long time. In turn, dissatisfaction and sadness give rise to poor and sustained attention, even leading to episodes of total inattention. A small number of interviewees mentioned that sadness develops a feeling of helplessness and depressive episodes, which lead to a certain hostility and verbal aggression towards family members and employees. This phenomenon is more frequent among older interviewees [46, 47].

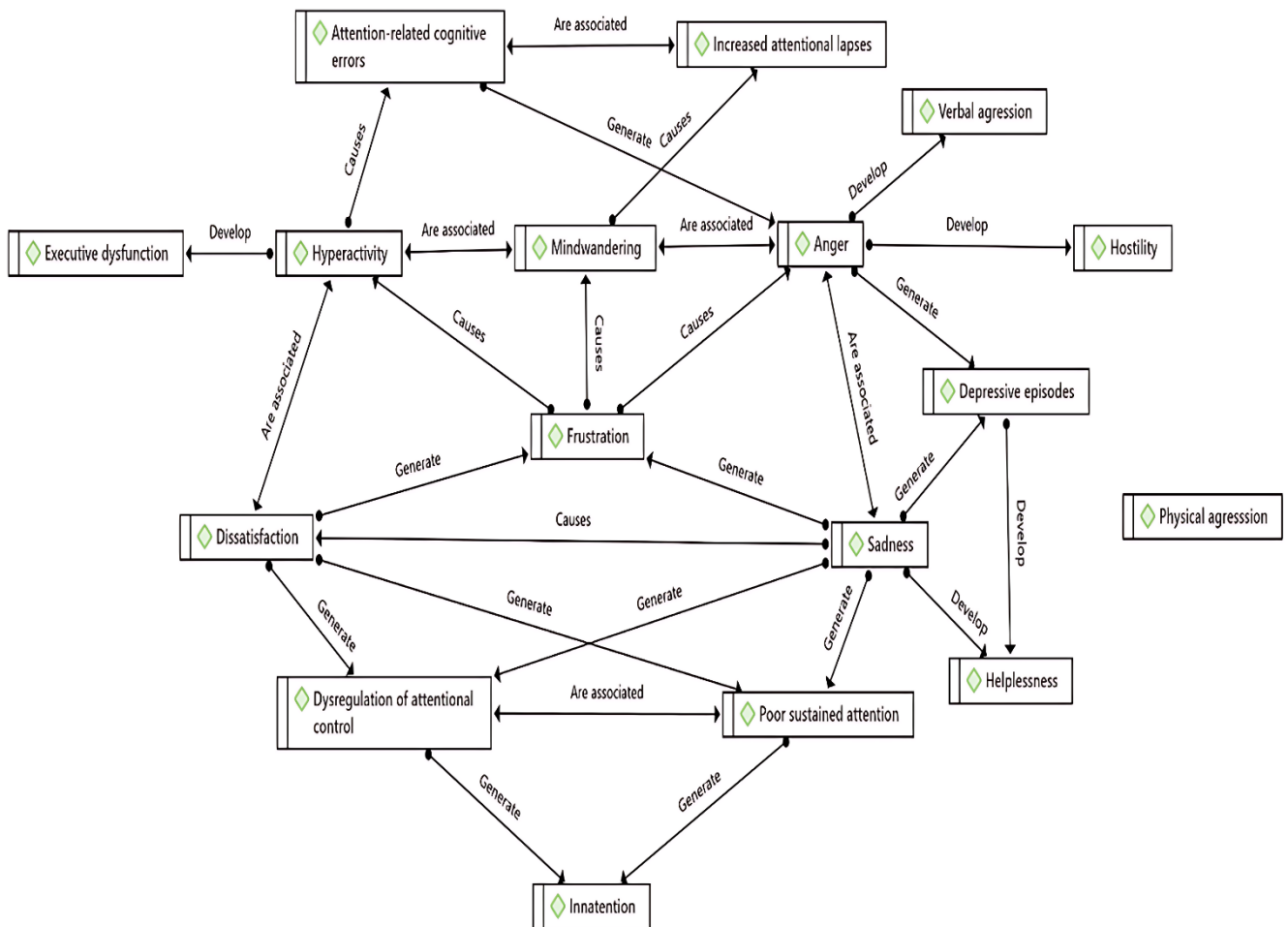


Figure 1.
Semantic network analysis of the interviews.

5. Discussion

The parameters of the BoSy level are low. The confidence interval for the BoSy mean is in the first quintile of the scale. The association values seem to agree with the theory. In particular, the results for indicators 1, 3, 4, 5, and 7 agree with previous studies [59]. On the other hand, indicators 8, 11, 14, 15, and 17 differ from those reported in the related literature [55]. Finally, indicator 6 correlates negatively, which differs from what was pointed out by Gerritsen et al. [59]. Global appreciation suggests that the relational analysis of the BoSy indicators seems to be in line with the theory. Inconsistencies can be attributed to the limited availability of study units due to selectivity constraints.

With respect to the cross-analysis with sociodemographic variables, the location of the economic entity was significant for the central and western zones of the city, with the highest and lowest levels of BoSy, respectively. The central zone is the oldest in the city and the most conflictive in terms of crime incidence and urban infrastructure [62]. These factors may have an impact on BoSy levels, although these values are not high. The low levels of boredom in the western zone could be associated with the fact that this area is not noted for its tourism economy [63]. It is not clear whether these factors affect the levels of boredom of the family leaders responsible for the management of the economic entities studied. In relation to the age variable, the 30-50 years age group is the one with the highest level of BoSy. However, the value found is very close to the general mean. No factors associated with the variable age were identified.

Finally, it has already been discussed that young people are less likely to repress and hide their emotions as a result of the pressures that arise from entrepreneurial activities [43]. This group tends to show different patterns of participation than their older relatives. In addition, young family members who disengage from learning entrepreneurial activities require different responses from older family members [45].

6. Conclusions

From a quantitative perspective, it is concluded that managers of family tourist restaurants in Juarez, Mexico, experience relatively low levels of BoSy. This level falls in the first quintile of the adopted scale. The results also suggest that the location of the economic entity and the age of the manager significantly affect BoSy levels. The results of the relational analysis suggest that, in general, the incidence of BoSy is in line with theory and that the few inconsistencies could be related to the sample selection criteria. A noteworthy finding is that in no case do BoSy levels lead to physical aggression events.

From a qualitative perspective, findings suggest that young family members develop different ways of valuing the daily routine in business life. A more daring and adventurous spirit, typical of their age, motivates them to prefer challenging and difficult tasks. In the face of failure, this group is not overly concerned with negative outcomes and emotions. In contrast,

older family members prefer to perform easier tasks in an effort to avoid, as much as possible, failure and the resulting negative effects, such as boredom.

This research was limited to only 40 touristic restaurants that were restricted to the fulfillment of three conditions. For future studies, a more exhaustive search for entities or a relaxation of the selection criteria is recommended.

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