Research Proposal Report

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Title: Female Leadership in managers positions in the healthcare system in Spain in Castellón.

Introduction

There is a lack of female leadership roles in the healthcare system. In Spain, only 37% of the managers roles in the healthcare system are held by women (Lara, 2024). This means that although most of the work in this industry is carried out by women, there is a lack of female leadership, and the decisions are still taken by men.

In Spain, the last record published by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE) in 2023, established that in 2022 the number of registered health professionals stood at 946,5151. This number showed an increase of 2.7% in comparison to the previous year. If divided by gender, 651,450 were women (3% increase in comparison to previous year) and 295,065 were men (2% increase in comparison to previous year). If this number is written in fractions, it can be stated that 2/3 of the workforce in Spain are women and 1/3 are men. In addition, the top three largest groups were nurses followed by doctors and then pharmacists (INE, 2023).

Furthermore, it must be considered that the competence of Spanish healthcare is the responsibility of each Autonomous Community, and its financing must be accounted for within the regional financing system. In Spain, there are 17 Autonomous Communities and two Autonomous Cities (Secretaria de Estado de Relaciones con las Cortes y Asuntos Constitucionales, 2023).

An Autonomous Community is a political administrative geographical region with its own government which has independent responsibility for healthcare, education, and a number of other functions of government (Ministerio de Politica Territorial y Memoria Democrática, 2024; European Committee of the Regions, 2024; Turespaña & Ministerio de Industria y Turismo, 2024; Artículo 55 Constitución Española, 2024).

According to Women in Global Health (2023) women occupy 70% of health worker roles, and they do 80% of the main functions of nursing and midwifery. If the responsibilities are divided proportionally this would mean that 70% of the managers should be women, however, men occupy less than 30% of the workforce and they hold 75% of managers jobs (Women in Global Health, 2023). According to Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, in 2024 they established a similar percentage to previous years. They established that 70% of the health care workforce are women but only hold approximately 25% of leadership roles (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2024). Much of their studies focus on breaking down barriers for women reaching leadership positions, and it has been found that having a lack of mentorship and gender biases and harassment are factors. This institution aims to raise awareness of how female leadership can have an impact on the health space (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2024). This proposal and dissertation will focus on identifying factors which influence this, and how leadership models can be used to encourage a change of trends and empower women into getting a promotion and getting into manager roles.

Literature Review

Leadership can be described as the process of guiding teamwork with the purpose of accomplishing a common goal that could not be achieved when doing individual work. Having leadership within an organisation is crucial and essential for the success of a business (McKinsey & Company, 2022; Bupa, 2024). Excellent communication skills, authenticity and being yourself, curiosity, analytical prowess, adaptability, creativity, resilience, empathy and an ability to navigate through uncertainty and crises, are some of the characteristics that describe the essence and core of what makes a good leader according to Linda Hill (cited in Havard Business Review, 2023; RED SUMMA (Red Universitaria Virtual Internacional), 2020). Rubio Jorge et al. (2024), also emphasise the leadership characteristics that any manager should apply in the health care sector and how leadership affects the profession. Another perspective is that Leadership can be applied to many professions such as public administration, business strategy, economics, sport management and so on.

Female leadership in the healthcare system has been researched and documented by many people and it has been a topic of debate in society. Recent research includes Santucci et al. (2023) who published an investigation about gender inequality within the medical profession in Spain. The study uses a comprehensive analysis of the gender bias in the medical profession equally to investigating leadership positions across distinct aspects, such as research, organisations, and departments in the healthcare sector.

In Croatia, there has also been an article published by the University of Zagreb which studied the role of women and leadership in the healthcare system. This study evaluates the situation between 1990 and 2021 on the advancement of women in leadership positions in European countries, and how there is little advancement to promote women in leadership inside the healthcare system (Radin, 2023). In 2024 Hadi published a report about the leadership challenges that women face in the healthcare industry in Saudi Arabia and what obstacles there are to prevent them to obtain leadership roles (Hadi, 2024). All this previous research comes to similar conclusions that around the world maternity, balancing work life, gender inequality and discrimination could be the reasons why females do not pursue a career in management and do not get promotions.

In 2022, EADA business school in Barcelona and ICSA group released a press statement about the investigation about the female presence in management positions (EADA Business School & ICSA,2022). The study indicates that there has been a decrease in the presence of females in management positions in the last decade. Another study published by Bolio et al. (2023) has evaluated why women do not occupy top positions in leadership roles in Spain. The results of this study suggest that the issue is complex and involves multiple factors including the perception that the employer does not value females in the workplace, gender stereotypes within society which affect a woman's aspirations and the fact that many women occupy support roles and assistant roles.

Another study published in the Forbes magazine (Tzure, 2022) details how there should be more women leaders in healthcare and cancer research, and what measures need to be taken to persuade women to attain managers roles. The University of Southern California in the USA published an article in 2023 about how leadership by women inside the health care industry has evolved over time and what the future holds (University of Southern California, 2023).

Furthermore, the Women and Talent report 2024 written by Women in Healthcare, an initiative of "Fundación de Ciencias del Medicamento y Productos Sanitarios" (FUNDAMED) (Quiroga *et al.* (2024) with the support and sponsorship of the informative newspaper for health professionals in Spain Gaceta Medica, supports development within societies that they are committed and engage to promote female talent in many areas. The report also gathers and contains quantitative data on the presence of women in the distinctive services that the health services and hospitals offer across Spain. In addition, the results are divided into five main categories. These are Gender, Autonomous Community, Province, Medical Speciality and Hospitals. The results reveal that although 61% of the specialists are women, they only hold 33% management roles. Furthermore, 71,9% of the public administrative hospitals are led and manage by men. And as by Autonomous Communities, none of the 17 show more female than male head of services (Quiroga *et al.*,2024).

The Federación de Asociaciones Cientifico Medicas Españolas (FACME) and the collaboration of Conferencia Nacional de Decanos de Facultades de Medicina Españolas (CNDFME) works and promotes a project called Women in Medicine in Spain (WOMEDS) which is the organisation that participates in the report 'Women and Talent 2024' (Porras, 2024; Quiroga et al., 2024). As mentioned before, the report divides and classifies data from the 17 distinctive Autonomous Communities and two autonomous cities and ranks them. The tendency is that the data offered by the autonomous communities are almost identical to the Women's and Talent report. The Valencian Community is ranked as the 6th Autonomous Community with the major difference in gender gap payments between genders (The Valencian Community is where the province of Castellón can be found). Despite the data presented in this report, the Government for the Valencian Community has approved the application of a temporary programme to combat the salary gap in the health sector for the 2023 fiscal year. The Regional Ministry of Health has approved the application of the temporary programme to combat the pay gap for female categories in the health sector and has allocated a budget of 2.5 million euros (Generalitat Valenciana Gabinete de Comunicación , 2024; Valencia Plaza, 2024).

Another important study is "Mujeres e Inovación" written in collaboration with Observatorio Mujeres, Ciencia e Innovación (OMCI), Fundación Española para la Ciencia y la Tecnología (FECYT) and the Ministerio de Ciencia. The first edition was in 2020 and this report is the third edition. The aim of this report is to analyse the situation of women in the field of innovation in any sector including healthcare. The results show that there has been major advancement towards Research and Development and Innovation (R&D&I) systems and toward facilitating women in leadership, however it has not researched equality in the participation of women in accessing funding and getting and reaching promotion in their jobs. The difference between the last two editions published and the latest one is that there are qualitative data presented as anonymous surveys which were conducted and presented with equal weight to the Quantitative data. The surveys asked the direct opinion of several leading women in diverse fields to ask their thoughts about how innovation can be applied in the professional fields and equally to find out the reality and first-hand what challenges they face in their daily work life (Unidad de Mujeres y Ciencia del Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades & Fundación Española para la Ciencia y la Tecnología (FECYT), 2024).

As stated in the report “Datos y Cifras del Sistema Universitario Español” (2024) published by the ministry of science, innovation and universities, the number of undergraduate students enrolled in any degree of the health sciences in the academic year 2022-2023 is distributed as follows: 72,2% are female and 27,8% are men. Meanwhile, the number of postgraduates enrolled in any master’s degree of the health sciences is divided into 72,8% are female and 27,2% are male. Moreover, the report also states the number of postgraduates enrolled in any PhD studies in the health sciences are 61,9% are women and 38,1% are men. This report states facts of the Spanish university system and it divides them into the distinctive academic branches (Secretaria General Técnica. Centro de Publicaciones. Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades, 2024).

Rationale

This topic has always interested me, and it leaves me perplexed as to how this industry is composed by a large majority of women, and despite this they are in a minority of positions of responsibility and decision making. Also, since I was a little child, I have had a close contact with the industry as my mum works in the industry as a nurse and a vast majority of my contacts work in the health care sector.

The importance of this topic is endorsed by the April 2024 conference discussing advancing women's leadership in global health and promoting gender equality, which addressed the multifaceted challenges impeding women's progress in leadership roles in global health (WomenLift Health, 2024).

This research topic is important because many of the studies have been looking at the situation of each country globally and it can lead to subjective interpretation and generalisation towards the whole country. In addition, it can be that in one Autonomous Community the situation is different in comparison to another Autonomous Community, whilst many studies have generalised the situation. Furthermore, there could be distinctive factors that could differentiate the situation across Spain, which would include government funding, population, workforce variations and so on. (Secretaria de Estado de Relaciones con las Cortes y Asuntos Constitucionales, 2023; Valencia Plaza, 2023).

Furthermore, in June 2023 there were regional elections and as a result there was a change in the government of not only the Autonomous Community but also the city council. All the studies published up to this point investigated and collected the data associated with the previous government, and changes made by the new government including new laws or allocation of more money towards the investment of the healthcare system or to promote female leadership in this sector may have had an impact (Garcia, 2023; Valencia Plaza,2023; Romero, 2023).

Hypothesis

The main hypothesis of the reason behind why females do not achieve leadership roles in the health sector is that they are put into a dilemma in their career, because if they want to start a family they may have to choose between their career and getting into roles with higher levels of responsibility, and a good quality of family life. Equally, the challenges of reconciling work and child upbringing with caring for the elderly family members could be a barrier. Lower salaries in comparison to male leaders and discrimination in the sector and in society could also be a reason behind the idea and an obstacle to female healthcare workers perusing managerial roles.

Moreover, it is possible that women experience a lack of support from their employers. Stereotypes and a lack of role models promoting female leadership inside the healthcare system could also be preventing women in the healthcare industry from pursuing a career in leadership within their field. Furthermore, selection and promotion processes within the company could marginalise and segregate females, and the lack of government policies to promote equality could be contributing to the gap between males and females in leadership promotions within the healthcare sector (United Nations, 2023; Ruiz-Ocaña, 2023; Berrio Manrique, 2022; UN Women, 2021; Bode, 2017).

Aim

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the reasons for the lack of women in leadership roles in the healthcare system in Castellón and in Spain, and to find solutions.

Objectives

- Review the history of the healthcare system and evaluate factors that investigate reasons why female workers do not achieve or get into managerial roles.

- Survey staff members in the health services in Castellón to investigate what factors are preventing women from advancing in their careers.

- Investigate the measures that government is taking to promote female management and leadership in healthcare and evaluate their effectiveness.

- Collect primary data from the managers in the health care system in Castellón to gather their perspectives and how they apply for and approach leadership roles in the industry.

Research Methods & Methodology

In 2016, Saunders et al. developed a model known as the Research Onion. This methodology model outlines the steps that every researcher needs to follow when conducting research (Saunders et al.,2023; Melnikovas, 2018). The Research Onion is formed and divided into the following six different sections:

- Philosophy
- Approach
- Strategy
- Time
- Techniques
- Procedures

Please find a copy of the model in the next page in Image 1.

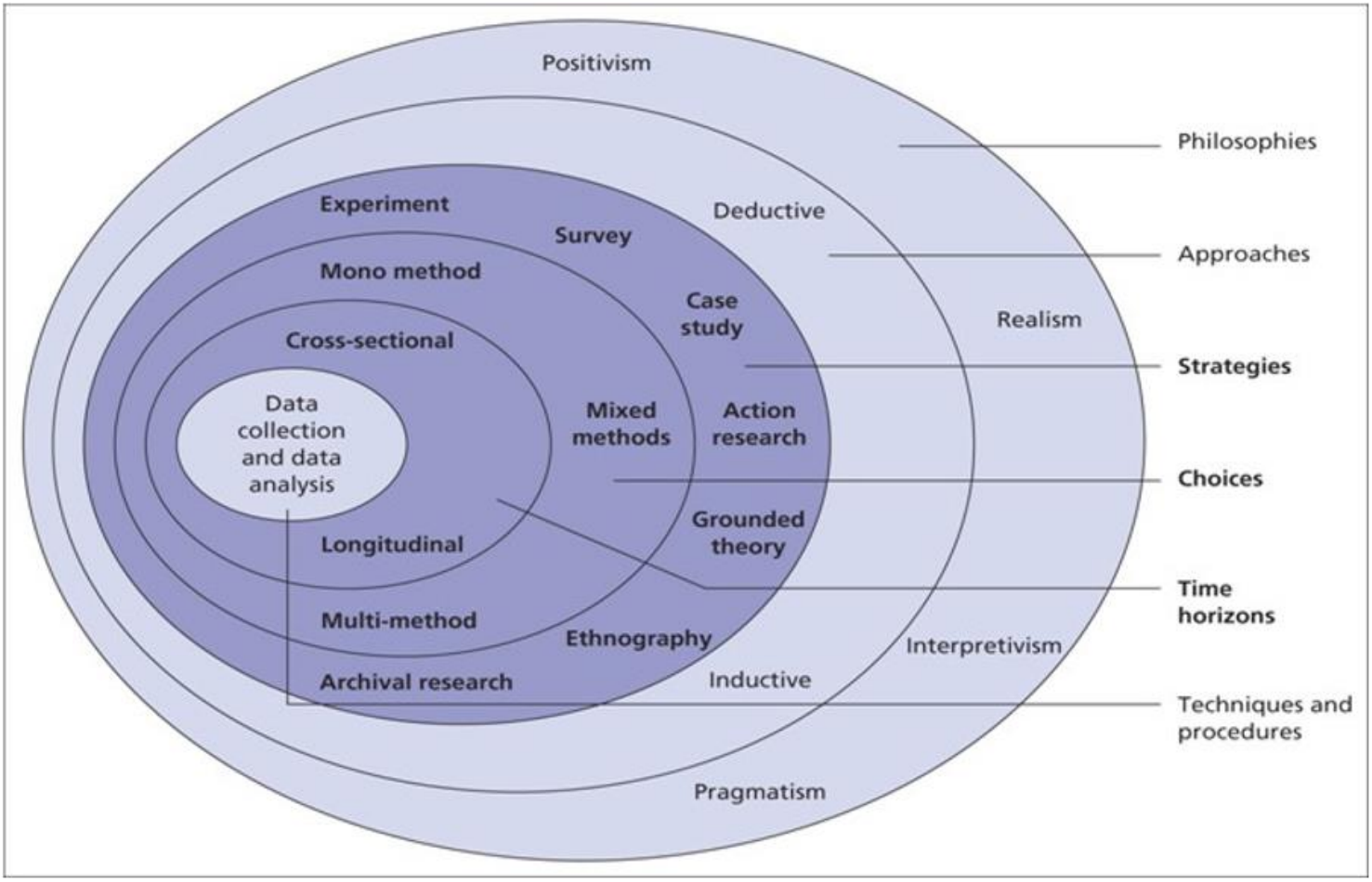

Image 1. Research Onion

The philosophy of this research is following a realistic and positivist approach. The reason to choose this approach is to reflect and demonstrate the reality of the healthcare sector equally to reflect the population's opinion. Realism investigation is based on an objective rather than subjective approach (Trigg, 1980 cited in Khin Wong and Yow Fui, 2012).
Positivist research is based on a philosophical approach that is based on analytical and logical knowledge to understand reality. Obvious specifics aim to explain and predict the phenomena. The approach taken to conduct this project will be deductive.

Deductive research establishes and investigates, and it is ground in an assumption or presumption equally to demonstrate if this presumption represents reality or not (Abreu, 2014; Proudfoot,2023). This proposal and dissertation will be based on deductive research and a hypothesis was formed to focus this study on a given an assumption which is to be proven or disproven. In addition, a hypothesis was developed to establish a relationship between leadership, female workers, and managers roles in the healthcare sector. Saunders et al. (2021), explained that there are two types of investigations: these are either longitudinal or cross sectional. Longitudinal investigations require repetition over a period just like they require a lengthy period to complete. On the contrary, cross-sectional investigations are design to be conducted at a particular time and they do not require an extended period to be completed. This proposal will conduct a cross-sectional investigation that will it take place between January and July 2025, and it will investigate the situation in Castellón de la Plana over this period (Evans, 2024). The study will not require repetition, although it must be said that it would be beneficial and intriguing to repeat the study in 2030 to compare the results and see if there is an evolution with the data obtained in 2025.

When conducting research, there are three types of research. These are quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. The method chosen in this proposal will be a mixed method approach due to the fact it will give a better understanding of the problem. Below can be found a table defining and highlighting the main objectives and outlining examples of the distinct types of research that exist today, comparing the advantages and disadvantages of the mixed methods approach.
Please find Table 1 and Table 2 in the following pages (Teesside University, 2024; Evans, 2024; Government of the United Kingdom, 2020; Parra, 2023; Takona, 2023).

	Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research	Mixed Method Research
Definition	Quantitative research is measured or categorised through statistical analysis. In addition, it is used to assemble and decipher numerical data.	Qualitative research is the mechanism used to collect non-mathematical information	It is a combination of elements of quantitative and qualitative research in a single research study
Main Objective	The main objective is to test hypotheses and theories concurrently	The main objective is to gain in deep insight into topics	The main objective it is to have a clearer conclusion by collecting and analysing both quantitative and qualitative
Examples	❖ Surveys ❖ Experiments ❖ Observations	❖ Interviews ❖ Literature reviews ❖ Ethnography ❖ Focus Groups	❖ Surveys ❖ Interviews ❖ Experiments ❖ Literature reviews

Table 1. Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Method Research, definition, main objectives and examples

Advantages	Disadvantages
Combination of both methods can support the individual (qualitative and quantitative) methods Provide stronger evidence More precise data in comparison to one method of research.	Complex to carry out If it is compared using only one method or both methods, it can be said that having a combination of methods will require more specialist skills to analyse data and interpret them. Time management can be limited, and it may require extra resources.

Table 2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Mixed Method Research

In Research methods, there are two types of research. These are primary or secondary based. Primary investigation is the collection of data by the researchers themselves. Data can be collected through surveys, interviews, or sampling (Bhat, 2024). This will be a piece of primary research that will be done by developing a questionnaire for people working in the province of Castellón and workers in the industry, which could be either national workers or international workers. The questionnaire will be online. Meanwhile, Secondary research is based on existing data and will be used to form the Literature Review using websites, books, journals, government publications and healthcare policy documents (Bhat, 2023).

Most of the work will be distributed and conducted online, however, it will be considered that if people do not have a computer, a printed version of the questionnaire will be printed out. Interviews will also be done online using software such as: Teams, Skype, or Google Meet. In case, people do not have access to a computer, personal interviews will be conducted. The participants will be chosen through personal contacts from the area and working in the health care industry such as: doctors, nurses, nursing assistants, psychologists' support staff etc...

Only people over the age of 18 years will be eligible to take part and will have to provide consent. This will be indicated before taking the interview. They will be required to answer every question in order that direct comparisons of the results can be made. The questionnaires will include open, multiple choice, rating, matrix, demographic, and Likert Scale questions (QuestionPro, 2024). In addition, participants will be asked to give their opinions in relation to answers they provide. The questionnaire will be done in Spanish due to the location and lack of English fluency, although, a translated copy of the questionnaire in English will be put into the dissertation. The questionnaire will be distributed to social media platforms as it easy and quick to distribute and it is also the easiest way to get all the data together. In addition, this will enable the research to be conducted from oversees and make investigation in the area more accessible. The research will be conducted in accordance with UWTSD Research and Ethical Code of Practice, and data collected will be in line with UWTSD policies on data collection, retention, and storage (University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2022).

Barriers to this research could include the busy schedules of healthcare staff, unwillingness to participate or rules prohibiting the sharing of information. Another complication would be not getting the equal number of responses made by females and males to have a non-biased result. The recommended people who answer the questionnaire will be professionals who work in this industry. A consideration that needs to be taken is that it is necessary to have an equal number of responses made by female and male, and it is intended that a total range between 100-150 people answer the questionnaire. This will be done to provide valid results and to be non-biased. However, as stated above the industry is composed of a majority of female workers and this could also influence the study.

Resources, Planning & Data Collection

The research will be done via a computer. Questionnaires will be done via Google Forms so that data will be easy to analyse. Word documents will be used to write down the dissertation and a copy will be saved on a cloud server in order not to lose the documents and to make them accessible in any device. The Skype university address will be used to ensure confidentiality. To avoid losing any information or in case there are problems accessing a computer, backups on an external disk will be made. In the case that the person who is being interviewed does not have Skype other applications will be discussed to meet such as: Google or Teams. If the person does not have access to a computer, a physical meeting will be arranged. This will be the last option, however, as there will be limited opportunities to visit Castellón in person.

The use of Google Forms as a method of collecting data has its advantages and disadvantages. Please find the table below.

Advantages	Disadvantages
It is free and it allows easy storage of information The interface is easy to use Questionnaires can be varied and personalized by adding photos and changing the background. Data is stored in the cloud, and it can be accessed easily on various devices Unlimited distribution Direct Integration to Excel which will help us to analyse the data	You need a Google account to access it. Limited characters and limited weight of each response Limited graphics Security vulnerability as the password for all the Google apps is the same.

Table 3. Advantages and Disadvantages of using Google Forms as method of collecting

Planning is an important part of this research project because it is important to know what needs to be done at every point, and assignments and chapters need to be developed over time through the course of the dissertation. In addition, it helps with organisation and work life balance. The writing of the dissertation will start in January 2025 and will finish in July 2025 with the submission of the dissertation. Therefore, planning and establishing a visual graph of how the time will be distributed during the time of in which the final degree project is carried out is essential. The Gant Chart is a horizontal bar chart used to display the duration of each task from the start date to the finish date. Also, it is one of the most popular managerial tools used in business and it allows anyone to view immediately the progress that has been made with the tasks that need to be carried out (Bianconi, 2024; Vasankari, 2024; Shweta et al., 2024). In this proposal and dissertation, a Gant Chart will be used to identify all the necessary tasks that need to be completed and when will they be carried out. Please find attached a copy of Table 4 in the next page.

Gant Chart Project Planner 2025							
This is calendar of the project planner that will cover what tasks need to do to complete the dissertation							
						Predicted time of completing a task	
Activity or Task	Time period						
	January	February	March	April	May	June	July
Aims & Objectives							
Proposal							
Introduction							
Healthcare system in Spain							
Chapter 1							
Chapter 2							
Chapter 3							
Chapter 4							
Chapter 5							
Questionnaire							
Interviews							
Leadership Theory							
Theory of the dissertation							
Meetings with supervisor							
Results							
Analysing Results							
Bibliography							
Conclusion							
Editing							
Backups							

Table 4.Gant Chart Project Planner 2025

Resources Implications

Resource implications are an important part of the dissertation and this proposal. As a university student, all the secondary research will be carried out by searching online and visiting the public library as well as the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) library and the Universidad Jaime I (public university in Castellón). In addition, the resources available are limited in comparison to researchers for governments or other large institutions. Free software and reliable sources will be used to collect data. Important books will be viewed in libraries, and in the case that it cannot be found using the resources of both Universities to obtain materials useful for the dissertation, other online sources such as Googler Scholar will be used (Biggam, 2021).

Time is also vital for any investigation. The time given to develop this research is six months, however during the holiday period (Christmas and Easter) the researcher will continue to write the dissertation, and in addition, regular meetings with the supervisor will be allocated and draft deadlines established.

Ethical Considerations

In this dissertation and proposal, primary research will be collected, therefore questionnaires will be delivered. The questionnaires will be anonymous. This will be done in order not to influence anyone, and to protect personal data and not breach any UK or European data protection laws, as well as to get more honest answers from participants. In addition, the questionnaire is voluntary, therefore no one is obliged to do it if they do not want to. There will be a small summary explaining that the data that is collected will be used for research at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in Wales, United Kingdom and that it is for the final project of a master's degree. The data and results will always remain anonymous, and it will state that if they do not feel comfortable or change their mind, they can always drop out without any commitment. Furthermore, a section discussing ethics and any sensitive data will be included. Before publishing any research or questionnaires, the University Research Ethics Code of practice will be followed to avoid compromising any participants, the university or the researcher (University of Wales Trinity Saint David,2022).

In the questionnaire there are questions that could be seen as personal, which are the sex and age. To make these questions easier, there will be options to tick the correct answer and in regard to age, participants will also have to tick the box where age will be indicated by groups. This means no specific age would be known by the researcher.

Problems can occur at any time unexpectedly, but some problems can be prepared for. The first thing that can happen is that data could be lost. To prevent this, regular backups will be saved into different devices.

A distinctive problem is that there are not enough people who could answer the questionnaire due to language barriers. In Spain the official language of the country is Spanish, and most of the population in Spain do not speak English. If the questionnaire is written in English few people will participate in the questionnaire as a result the data could be affected and this would be a challenge as people may feel rejection and doubtful to answer the questionnaire. To avoid this, the questionnaire will be put up in Spanish and English so that people can choose in which language they will do the questionnaire, in case there are international members of staff whose English is better than their Spanish.

A distinctive setback is time. Some chapters and section may require longer to write them, or the researcher could potentially fall ill. To solve this, regular meetings will be held with a supervisor and extra hours will be worked when the deadline is approaching. Falling ill or having in intervention for health reasons is unexpected, however, to try to avoid this, eating healthily, taking regular brakes, playing sports and regular medical check-ups will help to maintain health through the whole proposal and dissertation process.

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