

The impact of salutogenesis on women scientists: challenges and resilience in the progress of science

Impacto de la salutogénesis en mujeres científicas: desafíos y resiliencia en el progreso de la ciencia

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Abstract

The study entitled "The Impact of Salutogenesis on Women Scientists: Challenges and Resilience in the Progress of Science" aims to analyze in detail the impact of women scientists on salutogenesis and their contribution to the overall advancement of scientific knowledge. This research is framed within a qualitative paradigm, aligned with the interpretive approach, and employs a documentary and analytical design. Content analysis and systematic literature review methods were applied to examine the publications, citations, and awards given to women in the scientific field. Through the collection and analysis of documentary sources, the study seeks to understand the experiences and challenges these researchers face, as well as the impact of their contributions on the scientific community. The results show that, although there has been an increase in publications by women, their visibility and recognition remain disproportionately low compared to their male colleagues. Despite this, the contributions of these scientists have been essential to the evolution of theories and practices related to salutogenesis, providing innovative perspectives that have transformed the understanding of health and



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well-being. The most relevant conclusion highlights the crucial need to recognize and showcase these contributions, not only to honor the legacy of these pioneers but also to inspire future generations to actively participate in science. This study underscores the importance of addressing gender disparities in science, as amplifying the voice and impact of women in salutogenesis is key to advancing towards a more inclusive and equitable science that benefits all of society.

Keywords: salutogenesis, women scientists, contribution, legacy, visibility, challenges, resilience.

Resumen

El estudio titulado “El impacto de la salutogénesis en mujeres científicas: desafíos y resiliencia en el progreso de la ciencia” tiene como objetivo analizar detalladamente el impacto de las mujeres científicas en la salutogénesis y su contribución al avance general del conocimiento científico. Esta investigación se enmarca en un paradigma cualitativo, alineado con la corriente interpretativa, y utiliza un diseño documental y analítico. Se aplicaron métodos de análisis de contenido y revisión sistemática de la literatura, con el fin de examinar las publicaciones, citas y reconocimientos otorgados a mujeres en el ámbito científico. A través de la recopilación y análisis de fuentes documentales, se busca entender las experiencias y desafíos que enfrentan estas investigadoras, así como el impacto de sus contribuciones en la comunidad científica. Los resultados muestran que, aunque ha habido un aumento en las publicaciones de mujeres, su visibilidad y reconocimiento continúan siendo desproporcionadamente bajos en comparación con sus colegas masculinos. A pesar de esto, las contribuciones de estas científicas han sido esenciales para la evolución de teorías y prácticas relacionadas con la salutogénesis, aportando perspectivas innovadoras que han transformado el entendimiento de la salud y el bienestar. La conclusión más relevante destaca que es crucial reconocer y visibilizar estas aportaciones no solo para honrar el legado de estas pioneras, sino también para inspirar a futuras generaciones a participar activamente en la ciencia. Este estudio resalta la importancia de abordar las disparidades de género en el ámbito científico, ya que potenciar la voz y el impacto de las mujeres en la salutogénesis es clave para avanzar hacia una ciencia más inclusiva y equitativa que beneficie a toda la sociedad.

Palabras clave: salutogénesis, mujeres científicas, contribución, legado, visibilidad, desafíos, resiliencia.

Introduction

Salutogenesis represents an innovative framework that prioritizes factors promoting health and well-being, shaped by the substantive contributions of diverse figures throughout history. Aaron Antonovsky, the founder of the concept, posited that “health is not merely the absence of disease, but a dynamic state maintained through a constant process” (Antonovsky, 1996, p. 11). Despite this, the pivotal role of women scientists in this field has frequently been overlooked and margin-

alized. Within a landscape of rapid scientific advancement, it is imperative to acknowledge and appraise the significant impact of these pioneers, whose research has profoundly enriched the holistic understanding of health.

Throughout history, women in science have challenged established norms and introduced novel perspectives to the field of salutogenesis. From trailblazers such as Florence Nightingale

to contemporary figures like Barbara McClintock, their endeavors and achievements have not only expanded the horizons of scientific knowledge but have also forged pathways for future generations. An examination of their contributions reveals a vibrant narrative defined by innovation and resilience.

This article aims to provide a detailed analysis of the impact of women scientists on salutogenesis and their contribution to the broader advancement of scientific knowledge. Through an exhaustive review of their contributions, this study seeks to identify patterns and trends that demonstrate how their unique experiences have influenced the evolution of scientific inquiry. Furthermore, it intends to inspire new generations to continue exploring this enriching field.

Recognizing the female legacy in science is essential for constructing a comprehensive and equitable narrative of scientific progress. As historian Margaret Rossiter emphasizes: "Women have been present in science since its inception; their legacy is fundamental to understanding the development of knowledge" (Rossiter, 1982, p. 45). This article aims to contribute to that essential understanding.

Literature Review

In spite of significant scientific progress, the contribution of women to the field of salutogenesis has historically been under-explored and, in numerous instances, marginalized. This approach, originally formulated by Aaron Antonovsky, represents a paradigm shift away from the traditional pathogenic model to focus on factors that promote holistic health and well-being. In this regard, it is defined that:

Salutogenesis, understood as an approach focusing on factors that support health and well-being, has been enriched by the contributions of female scientists who, throughout history, have challenged established norms and transformed knowledge within the healthcare sphere (Antonovsky, 1996, p. 15).

The omission of female contributions not only distorts the historical record of science but also imposes a symbolic barrier that limits the aspirations of future generations of researchers. As historian Rossiter (1982) notes, "women have been present in science since its inception; their legacy is fundamental to understanding the development of knowledge" (p. 45). This presence is crucial when analyzing the evolution of scientific thought from a gender perspective. In this sense, Harding (1986) argues that:

The unique experiences and perspectives of women have provided a valuable context for the evolution of scientific theories, allowing for a more holistic understanding of health and well-being, which underscores the importance of their visibility in the historical narrative of science (p. 78).

Notwithstanding their undeniable achievements, many researchers have faced systemic barriers that compromise health and well-being, including gender discrimination, harassment, and a workplace culture that has historically neglected their needs. Within this context, recognizing the transformative roles of figures such as Florence Nightingale and Barbara McClintock is essential to understanding how their innovations not only revolutionized their respective fields but also laid the groundwork for a scientific management of well-being. Nightingale, for instance, transformed healthcare during the Crimean War through the implementation of statistical-based practices that drastically improved environmental and public health conditions.

Thus, the contributions of McClintock and Nightingale serve as critical antecedents for analyzing current challenges and the responsiveness of the female scientific community from a positive health perspective. Baly (2007) states that:

Florence Nightingale's work did not only focus on improving sanitary conditions but also introduced a systematic approach that promoted the emotional well-being of nurses, highlighting the importance of their mental health within the caregiving context (p. 78).

Despite her success, Nightingale also struggled with mental health issues throughout her life; her resilience in the face of such adversity highlights the need to address the holistic well-being of professionals in the scientific field. Conversely, Barbara McClintock challenged scientific conventions by discovering mobile genetic elements in DNA. Analyzing McPherson (2006), McClintock's history serves as a quintessential example of how systemic prejudice can delay scientific progress and impact the mental health of brilliant minds who are forced to wait decades—as she did until her Nobel Prize in 1983—for vindication.

Nevertheless, McClintock maintained an unwavering commitment to her research and cultivated a deep connection with nature. According to Smith (2015), “This bond allowed her not only to advance her scientific career but also to preserve her mental health amidst the adversities she faced as a woman in a male-dominated field” (p. 56). It is fundamental to explore how these pioneers developed strategies to promote personal well-being while advancing their careers. This includes practices such as establishing peer support networks, fostering self-care, and creating inclusive spaces for expressing their experiences.

In this context, several questions arise: what has been the detailed impact of female scientists on the development of salutogenesis, and in what specific ways have their contributions advanced contemporary scientific knowledge? How has their work influenced social perceptions regarding the role of women in science? These inquiries guide this research toward a deeper understanding of the impact these pioneers have, not only within their scientific domains but also in promoting holistic well-being among female researchers.

Methods and Substantive Theories

The research method is documentary and serves as a key strategy for examining the interrelationship between the subjective experiences of researchers and scientific outcomes. Accordingly, this study is framed within a qualitative paradigm, aligned with the interpretative tradition. It utilizes

a documentary and analytical design based on a final sample of 25 documents selected through a systematic review (Table 1). This approach allows for the identification of patterns and trends that illuminate the influence of personal experiences on knowledge production, integrating scientometrics to measure the impact of publications, citations, and awards granted to women in this field.

As shown in Table 1, the sample of 25 authors was strategically selected to cover the three dimensions of the research:

Empirical Dimension (1–10): Scientific articles providing recent data on salutogenesis, resilience, and mental health within contemporary academic environments.

Epistemological and Structural Dimension (11–18): Books analyzing the foundations of power in science and the construction of gender biases.

Biographical and Historical Dimension (19–25): Documents facilitating the interpretative analysis of the trajectories of pioneering female scientists.

This documentary structure ensures that the analytical design delves deeply into the interpretative tradition. The theoretical foundation of this study is informed by the interrelation between salutogenesis and gender equity as drivers of scientific progress. According to Binns (2018), “social support, both professional and personal, plays a crucial role in the well-being of female scientists, helping them navigate predominantly male environments where they often need to establish networks of trust to share their experiences” (p. 45). In particular, these networks provide vital guidance and resources for developing effective resilience strategies.

This perspective is further supported by Huang et al. (2020), who argue that resilience in modern science is a matter of environmental management. Creating alliances and protected spaces is a necessary response to a system that still presents frictions for female researchers, ensuring that their well-being and findings are not left at the mercy of discrimination.

Table 1.
Population and sample

Nº	Author(s) and Year	Category / Type of Research
1	Mittelmark et al (2022)	Book of Research
2	Binns (2018)	Review Article (Qualitative)
3	Huang, J.; et al (2020).	Research Article
4	Roper (2019).	Research Article
5	Wang, Hsu & Kuo (2019)	Research Article (Scientometric)
8	Lindström & Eriksson (2011)	Theoretical Article (Salutogénesis)
9	Ehrenreich & English (2001)	Critical Article (Feminist/Historical)
10	Mayer & Llewellyn (2013).	Empirical Art. (Psychology/Resilience)
11	Rossiter (1982)	Book (Historiographical/Documentary)
12	Smith (2015)	Book (Case Study)
13	Harding (1986)	Book (Gender Epistemology)
14	Maslach & Leiter (2016)	Book (Clinical/Mental Health)
15	Schiebinger (1991)	Book (Historical/Analytical)
16	Criado (2019)	Book (Data Analysis/Gender)
17	Keller (1985)	Book (Scientific Theory/Feminism)
18	Haraway (1988)	Theoretical Article (Epistemology)
19	McDonald (2001)	Biographical Article (Statistics/History)
20	Baly (2007)	Biographical Article (History of Health)
21	Pasachoff (2006)	Biographical Book (Genetics)
22	González, et al (2020)	Research Article
23	Comfort (2001)	Biographical Book (History of Science)
24	Sayre (1975)	Biographical Book (Documentary)
25	Opitz (2016)	Book (Sociology of Science)

Finally, the influence of these scientists on social perception demonstrates that their achievements challenge deep-seated stereotypes and promote collective health. López-Zafra & García-Retame-ro (2021) contend that “female visibility in STEM fields not only shifts the narrative regarding their capabilities but also inspires future generations” (p. 80). This educational impact is confirmed by Martínez et al. (2022), who note that “female representation in prominent positions increases interest among young women and contributes to dismantling limiting beliefs regarding what women can achieve” (p. 95).

Discussion and Analysis

The presentation of these findings allows for the conclusion that the contribution of female scientists to salutogenesis has been a determining factor in the evolution of contemporary scientific thought. A detailed analysis of the sample demonstrates that the impact of these researchers is not limited to their functional presence within academic environments; rather, it lies in their ability to introduce knowledge models based on health assets and resistance resources, thereby challenging the fragmented vision of traditional science centered on disease.

The findings derived from this documentary review align with the arguments of Schiebinger (1991), who posits that the structure of modern science was constructed by “actively excluding female subjectivity,” which for centuries limited a holistic understanding of public health (p. 154). Nevertheless, the impact of female scientists has resided in transforming this systemic exclusion into a driver of theoretical innovation. By reclaiming the importance of context and personal agency, they have established themselves as the architects of a more humane and precise science. This historical invisibility is reflected in scientometrics, where, as Sayre (1975) explains when analyzing the case of Rosalind Franklin, recognition has often been a “matter of politics and gender” (p. 92), obscuring the fact that it is precisely these female scientists who have cemented the conceptual foundations of modern health promotion.

In response to this structure, the research identifies that the fundamental contribution of female scientists lies in the formalization of active resilience as a catalyst for progress. Mayer & Llewellyn (2013) define that the “Sense of Coherence (SOC) in female scientists is a key predictor of resilience against harassment and institutional exclusion” (p. 202). This capacity to generate knowledge under adverse conditions has allowed salutogenesis to evolve from an abstract theory into a robust and applicable scientific model. This intellectual contribution aligns with the work of Lindström and Eriksson (2011), who describe salutogenesis as

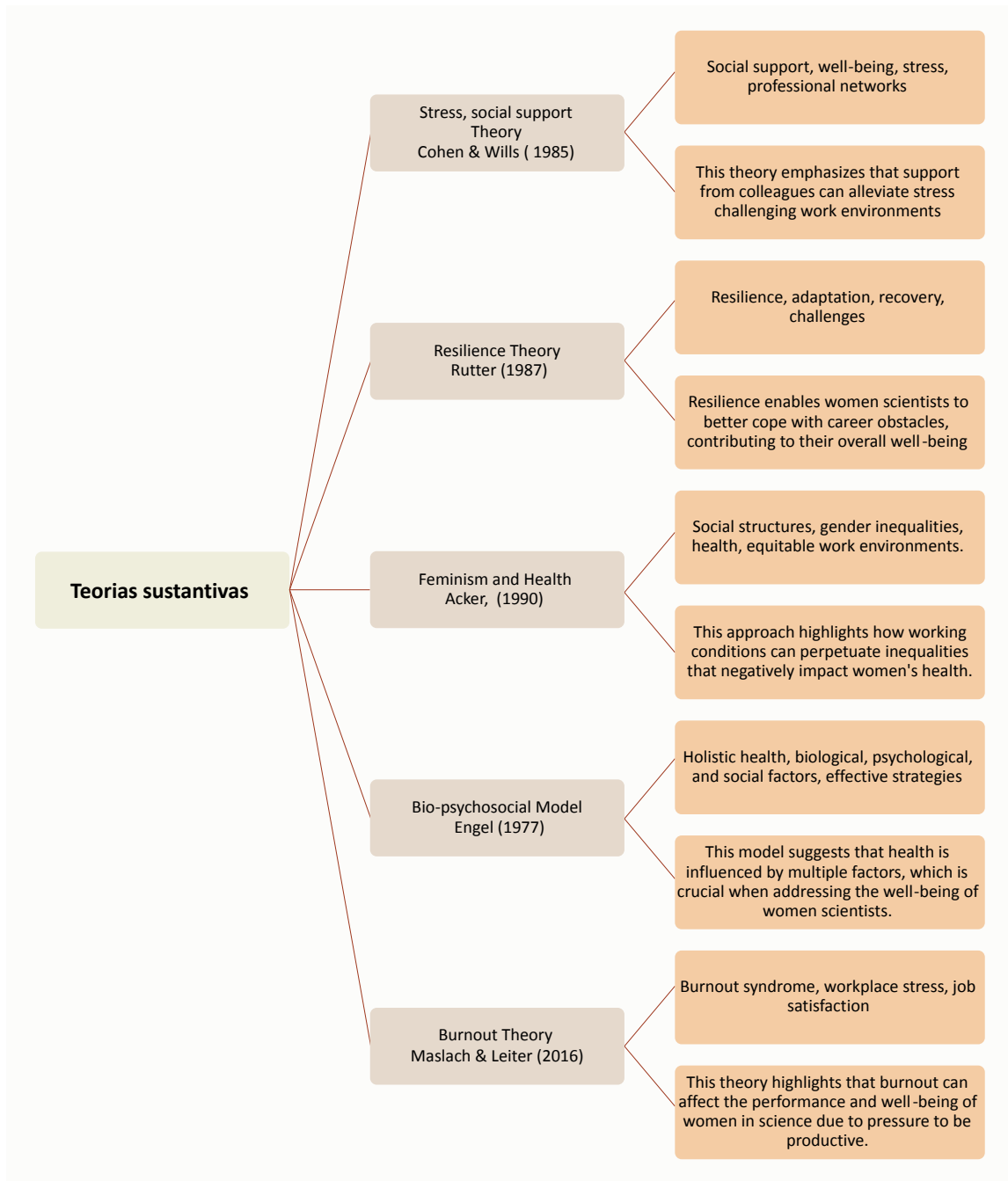


Figure 1.
Substantive Theories of the Study

the “capacity of individuals to utilize available resources to give meaning to their professional and personal lives” (p. 85)—a concept that female scientists have validated through their investigative rigor and their ability to identify factors that promote life and universal knowledge.

Ultimately, the evidence reinforces the notion that the impact of female researchers on salutogene-

sis constitutes the necessary axis to close the “data gap” that has biased science for decades. As Criado (2019) proposes, “the gender data gap is a direct consequence of considering the male body as the universal standard” (p. 210). By integrating their leadership and technical perspective, female scientists have not only contributed new data but have also ensured that the advancement of scientific knowledge is more equitable. Their legacy,

therefore, stands as a substantial contribution to the architecture of a global science where health assets and female resilience are recognized as the true engines of contemporary scientific progress.

The qualitative and documentary analysis reveals that the contribution of female scientists to salutogenesis represents a structural reconfiguration of the global architecture of scientific knowledge. This impact is evident in the researchers' ability to transform systemic exclusion—defined by Schiebinger (1991) as the omission of female subjectivity—into a driver of innovation that reclaims personal agency as a fundamental variable for scientific progress. In highly complex technical sectors, such as engineering and complex systems production, there is a growing trend in female representation linked to mentorship networks. This advancement finds support in the Social Support Theory of Cohen and Wills (1985); from this perspective, relational backing acts as a health asset that enhances professional self-efficacy and excellence in knowledge production.

From an interpretation of productivity indicators derived from the empirical dimension, equity is consolidated not only as an ethical imperative but as a pillar of technical quality. In this regard, Wang et al. (2019) (scientometric study of the sample) establish that equitable representation is a prerequisite for the advancement of knowledge, given that diversity bolsters creativity and technical innovation. Nonetheless, the persistence of structural barriers in fields such as biotechnology underscores the need to apply Engel's Biopsychosocial Model (1977) to understand that scientific performance is the result of the interaction between biological, psychological, and social factors. The invisibility in these vanguard fields, historically noted by Sayre (1975) in the biographical dimension regarding the case of Rosalind Franklin, constitutes a systemic obstacle that the salutogenic model seeks to reverse by integrating diversity as a fundamental requirement.

Conversely, success in the analysis of biological materials demonstrates that inclusive environments, aligned with the Feminism and Health ap-

proach of Acker (1990) within the epistemological dimension, favor a more robust scientific production. In this scenario, female contribution has been essential to mitigating the data gap described by Criado (2019), ensuring that the advancement of technical knowledge is representative of the human totality rather than just the male standard. This work is sustained by resilience as a cross-cutting axis; according to Rutter's Resilience Theory (1987) and the formalization of the Sense of Coherence (SOC) by Mayer & Llewellyn (2013), the capacity to generate science under conditions of exclusion has allowed salutogenesis to evolve into a vigorous and applicable scientific model.

Finally, the impact of female researchers transcends their functional participation by formalizing a science that prioritizes health assets over the traditional pathogenic vision. By integrating resilience and social support as validated resistance resources in clinical literature, female scientists have equipped the community with methodological tools to understand well-being as a dynamic process. This contribution not only mitigates critical risks such as Burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016) but also guarantees progress where the human capacity to generate health is recognized as the true driver of contemporary innovation.

Conclusion

The analysis of the impact of female scientists on salutogenesis and their contribution to the general advancement of scientific knowledge reveals a complex landscape in which the intersection of challenges and resilience becomes a fundamental driver of scientific progress. Despite advancements toward greater female representation across various scientific disciplines, significant barriers persist that limit full participation and well-being. Inequity in access to resources, leadership opportunities, and recognition can foster feelings of isolation and demotivation among these professionals. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how these factors affect their mental and emotional health, as well as their capacity to contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge.

Feminist theories provide a valuable analytical framework for understanding the realities faced by women in the scientific sphere. These theories highlight how power and gender dynamics influence the professional and personal experiences of female scientists. By identifying and challenging traditional stereotypes and roles, more effective strategies can be developed to foster an inclusive environment that values diversity. Furthermore, the biopsychosocial model emphasizes the importance of considering not only biological aspects but also the psychological and social factors that impact the well-being of these professionals.

Burnout theory is particularly relevant in this context, as it illustrates the risks associated with constant pressure and the unequal expectations faced by women in science. Excessive labor demands, coupled with a lack of institutional and familial support, can lead to high levels of stress and exhaustion. Recognizing this phenomenon is essential for implementing policies that not only address the retention of female talent but also promote their mental and emotional health. Institutions must be proactive in offering resources designed to mitigate these adverse effects.

Despite the aforementioned challenges, many female scientists demonstrate remarkable resilience by utilizing their personal experiences as a source of strength. Social support plays a crucial role in this

process: mentorship networks, affinity groups, and inclusive academic communities provide the necessary backing to face adversity. Fostering these connections not only helps reduce isolation but also enhances professional development through the exchange of knowledge and experiences. In this way, a virtuous cycle is created where mutual support drives scientific advancement.

However, this approach also opens a vast field for future research. It is essential to delve deeper into how different cultural and organizational contexts impact the well-being of female scientists. Additional research could explore how the implementation of inclusive policies influences not only mental health but also productivity and creativity within the scientific domain. Likewise, it is relevant to analyze which practices have proven effective in fostering resilience and empowering women within their respective disciplines.

This call for continuous research is fundamental to ensuring that progress is not measured solely by quantitative metrics, but also by the holistic well-being of those who drive it. By enriching the understanding of the role of women in science through continuous interdisciplinary study, we will contribute to building a fairer and more sustainable future for all generations to come. Only then will it be possible to guarantee a diverse and inclusive scientific community that fully reflects the richness of available human talent.

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