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Global Formalities and Informalities: Social Changes and Transformations



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Ánfora	Manizales - Colombia	Vol. 33	Nº 60	337 P.	enero-junio	2026	L-ISSN 0121-6538 E-ISSN 2248-6941
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Ánfora	Manizales - Colombia	Vol. 33	Nº 60	337 P.	enero-junio	2026	L-ISSN 0121-6538 E-ISSN 2248-6941
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Ánfora	Manizales - Colombia	Vol. 33	Nº 60	337 P.	enero-junio	2026	L-ISSN 0121-6538 E-ISSN 2248-6941
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Ánfora	Manizales - Colombia	Vol. 33	Nº 60	337 P.	enero-junio	2026	L-ISSN 0121-6538 E-ISSN 2248-6941
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Ánfora	Manizales - Colombia	Vol. 33	Nº 60	337 P.	enero-junio	2026	L-ISSN 0121-6538 E-ISSN 2248-6941
--------	----------------------	---------	-------	--------	-------------	------	--------------------------------------

CONTENTS

CONTENIDO • CONTEÚDO

13 EDITORIAL

José Carlos Luque Brazán • Ana Yolanda Rosas-Acevedo

.....

RESEARCH AND REFLECTIONS • INVESTIGACIONES Y REFLEXIONES • INVESTIGAÇÕES E REFLEXÕES

GLOBAL FORMALITIES AND INFORMALITIES:
SOCIAL CHANGES AND TRANSFORMATIONS

- 24 An Outlook on Global Research into Female
Unemployment during the Covid-19 Pandemic
[English Version]

*Una mirada a la investigación mundial sobre desempleo
femenino durante la pandemia Covid-19*
[Versión en español]

*Um olhar sobre a pesquisa mundial acerca do desemprego
feminino durante a pandemia de Covid-19*

Fabio Andrés Hincapié • Natalia Vanegas Carmona

.....

- 54 The Non-place of Domestic Work in the
Intermediation of Digital Platforms
[English Version]

*El no-lugar del trabajo doméstico en la
intermediación de las plataformas digitales*
[Versión en español]

*O não-lugar do trabalho doméstico na
intermediação das plataformas digitais*

Natali Niño Patiño • Cristina Viana Medina

.....

- 78 Labor Informality in Private Police Forces in Mexico
[English Version]
La informalidad laboral en las policías privadas de México
[Versión en español]
A informalidade laboral nas polícias privadas do México

Lucía Carmina Jasso López

.....

- 105 Rural Women of Hidalgo, Mexico: Between Labor Informality and Subsistence during the Pandemic, 2022
[English Version]
Mujeres rurales de Hidalgo, México: entre la informalidad laboral y la subsistencia en pandemia, 2022
[Versión en español]
Mulheres rurais de Hidalgo, México: entre a informalidade laboral e a subsistência na pandemia, 2022

Itzia María Cazares-Palacios · Jozelin María Soto-Alarcón ·
Diana Xóchitl González-Gómez

.....

- 127 Employment Quality in Colombia: A Sectoral and Regional Gender Analysis for 2025
[English Version]
Calidad del empleo en Colombia: un análisis sectorial y regional por género en 2025
[Versión en español]
Qualidade do emprego na Colômbia: uma análise setorial e regional por gênero em 2025

Gustavo Ríos Salgado · Andrés Felipe Aristizábal Toro ·
Cindey Bermúdez Agudelo

.....

151 Effectiveness of Care Provided by Psychology
Trainees in University Counseling Centers

[English Version]

*Eficacia de la atención ofertada por psicólogos en
formación en centros de atención universitarios*

[Versión en español]

*Eficácia do atendimento oferecido por psicólogos em
formação em centros de atendimento universitários*

Alexander Echeverry Ochoa · Laura Sofia Martínez Hernández ·
Jairo Esteban Rivera Estrada · Paula Andrea Galindo Ochoa ·
Álvaro Alejandro Acosta Echevarría

.....

173 A New Post-Pandemic Perception of Nursing in the Social Sphere

[English Version]

Una nueva percepción de enfermería post-pandemia en el ámbito social

[Versión en español]

Uma nova percepção da enfermagem pós-pandemia no âmbito social

Danelia Gómez Torres · Elizabeth Alarcón Delgado ·
Juan Carlos Castañeda López · Karla Sofía Gómez Alcántara

.....

194 Precariousness of the Human Condition in the Context
of Violence in Colombia: Letting the Youth Die

[English Version]

*Precariedad de la condición humana en el contexto de la
violencia en Colombia: un dejar morir a la juventud*

[Versión en español]

*Precariedade da condição humana no contexto da
violência na Colômbia: deixar morrer a juventude*

Marta Cecilia Betancur García

.....

RESEARCH ON OTHERS TOPICS • INVESTIGAÇÕES EN OTRAS TEMÁTICAS • INVESTIGAÇÕES SOBRE OUTROS TÓPICOS

- 218 Delayed Cancer Diagnosis: Bibliometric Analysis
and Its Relevance for Health Systems
[English Version]

*Diagnóstico tardío del cáncer: análisis bibliométrico
y su relevancia en sistemas de salud*
[Versión en español]

*Diagnóstico tardio do câncer: análise bibliométrica
e sua relevância nos sistemas de saúde*

María del Mar Vargas Díaz • María Fernanda Tobar Blandón •
Oscar Marino López-Mallama • Alexander Almeida Espinosa •
Carlos Andrés Fandiño-Losada

.....

- 248 *Ceteris Paribus* Laws and Argumentation Schemes
[English Version]

Leyes ceteris paribus y esquemas de argumentación
[Versión en español]

Leis ceteris paribus e esquemas de argumentação

Miguel Antonio Fonseca Martínez

.....

- 265 The Environmentalist Discourse versus the Bureaucratic
Discourse: The Cenagoso Bajo Sinú Wetland Complex, Colombia
[English Version]

*El discurso ambientalista frente al discurso burocrático:
Humedal complejo cenagoso Bajo Sinú-Colombia*
[Versión en español]

*O discurso ambientalista frente ao discurso burocrático: O
Complexo de Humedais Cenagoso Bajo Sinú, Colômbia*

Eduardo Kerguelén-Durango • Freddy Santamaría-Velasco

.....

- 289 The Magic of Reality in “Un viejo que leía novelas de amor”
(The Old Man Who Read Love Stories) by Luis Sepúlveda
[English Version]

*La magia de la realidad en «Un viejo que leía
novelas de amor» de Luis Sepúlveda*
[Versión en español]

*A magia da realidade em “Un viejo que leía novelas de amor”
(O velho que lia romances de amor), de Luis Sepúlveda*

Antonia Kyriakoulakou

.....

- 315 Weaving Meanings: Laura Montoya and the Symbolic Fabric
at the Caribbean Frontier of Colombia, 1917–1930
[English Version]

*Tejiendo significados: Laura Montoya y el entramado
simbólico en la frontera caribeña de Colombia, 1917–1930*
[Versión en español]

*Tecendo significados: Laura Montoya e o tecido simbólico
na fronteira caribenha da Colômbia, 1917–1930*

Carolina María Horta Gaviria

.....

EDITORIAL

Global Formalities and Informalities: Social, Economic, and Political Transformations

[English Version]

Formalidades e informalidades globales: cambios sociales, económicos y políticos

Formalidades e informalidades globais: transformações sociais, econômicas e políticas

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Abstract

Labor informality in Latin America is neither an institutional anomaly nor a premodern remnant; it is the contemporary mode of economic and social governance in the Global South. This editorial proposes a structural reading of informality as a political device that secures the competitiveness of global capitalism through the externalization of risk and the dispossession of rights. The evidence presented in the dossier shows that the phenomenon takes multiple forms, platformization of domestic work, outsourcing

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of security, rural women's overload, subjectivation of precariousness, and devaluation of health care, but all refer back to the same logic: the erosion of social citizenship and the hollowing out of work as a right. Informality is not the absence of the State, but its selective and functional presence that enables the transfer of value from feminized, rural, and peripheral sectors to economic elites. In this way, the real economy of care, community health, and everyday subsistence sustains what statistics fail to capture. Contemporary struggles over work go beyond the factory and shift toward social reproduction, territories, and daily life, which compels a rethinking of "decent work" as a democratic horizon rather than a contractual residue. Recovering the political centrality of care and social reproduction requires dismantling the fiction of informality as an "exception" and naming it instead as a core structure of peripheral capitalism. Where rights recede, there is no void: there is dispossession.

Keywords: informal economy; labor precarization; reproductive labor; Global South; care; social citizenship.

Resumen

La informalidad laboral en América Latina no es una anomalía institucional ni un residuo premoderno, es la forma contemporánea de gobierno económico y social del Sur Global. Esta editorial propone una lectura estructural de la informalidad como dispositivo político que garantiza la competitividad del capitalismo global mediante la externalización del riesgo y la desposesión de derechos. La evidencia presentada en el dossier muestra que el fenómeno adopta múltiples expresiones —plataformización del trabajo doméstico, tercerización de la seguridad, sobrecarga femenina rural, subjetivación de la precariedad, y desvalorización del cuidado sanitario—, pero todas remiten a una misma lógica: la reducción de la ciudadanía social y el vaciamiento del trabajo como derecho. La informalidad no es ausencia de Estado, sino presencia selectiva y funcional a la transferencia de valor desde los sectores feminizados, rurales y periféricos hacia las élites económicas. De este modo, la economía real del cuidado, la salud comunitaria y la subsistencia cotidiana sostienen lo que las estadísticas no reconocen. Las luchas contemporáneas por el trabajo superan la fábrica y se desplazan hacia la reproducción social, los territorios y la vida cotidiana, lo que obliga a repensar la noción de «trabajo digno» como horizonte democrático y no como residuo contractual. Recuperar la centralidad política del cuidado y la reproducción social implica desmontar la ficción de la informalidad como una «excepción», y nombrarla como una estructura central del capitalismo periférico. Allí donde el derecho retrocede, no hay vacío: hay despojo.

Palabras clave: economía informal; precarización laboral; trabajo reproductivo; Sur Global; cuidados; ciudadanía social.

Resumo

A informalidade laboral na América Latina não é uma anomalia institucional nem um resquício pré-moderno; é a forma contemporânea de governo econômico e social do Sul Global. Esta editorial propõe uma leitura estrutural da informalidade como um dispositivo político que garante a competitividade do capitalismo global mediante a externalização do risco e a despossessão de direitos. As evidências apresentadas no dossiê mostram que o fenômeno assume múltiplas expressões, plataforma do trabalho doméstico, terceirização da segurança, sobrecarga feminina rural, subjetivação da precariedade e desvalorização do cuidado em saúde, mas todas remetem a uma mesma lógica: a redução da cidadania social e o esvaziamento do trabalho como direito. A informalidade não representa ausência do Estado, mas sim sua presença seletiva e funcional à transferência de valor dos setores feminizados, rurais e periféricos para as elites econômicas. Desse modo, a economia real do cuidado, a saúde comunitária e a subsistência cotidiana sustentam aquilo que as estatísticas não reconhecem. As lutas contemporâneas pelo trabalho ultrapassam a fábrica e deslocam-se para a reprodução social, os territórios e a vida cotidiana, o que obriga a repensar a noção de “trabalho digno” como horizonte democrático e não como resíduo contratual. Recuperar a centralidade política do cuidado e da reprodução social implica desmontar a ficção da informalidade como uma “exceção” e nomeá-la como uma estrutura central do capitalismo periférico. Onde o direito recua, não há vazio: há despojo.

Palavras-chave: economia informal; precarização laboral; trabalho reproductivo; Sul Global; cuidados; cidadania social.

Informality can no longer be understood or defined as a distortion of the labor market or as a simple “regulatory deficit”, but rather as a complex and deliberate architecture of global capitalism that produces and reproduces social, economic, geographic, and epistemic hierarchies between the North and the South (Rojas, 2022). Within this framework, the informal is not the pathological counterpart of the formal; it is its structural condition of possibility, revealing the decline of North-Global capitalism and the fact that its “legality” and “stability” rest systematically on *chupacabras* logics, those based on precarization, outsourcing, and the erosion of the rights of subjects from peripheral countries. The dominant economic narrative has attempted to reduce this discussion to a matter of institutional design or State insufficiency, yet such a depoliticized reading conceals the central fact: informality is a device for the global management of inequality (Rojas, 2022). What is usually presented as a deficiency is, in fact, a political strategy.

A report issued by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2018) indicates that 93% of informal employment is concentrated in developing countries, and Latin America, once the laboratory of import-substitution industrialization (ISI) for *justicialista* elites, and later the neoliberal laboratory of liberal elites (ECLAC, 2022; ILO, 2024; Luque *et al.*, 2025), has become today the structural laboratory of post-neoliberal precarization. This economic articulation is inseparable from a political shift: the management of the labor force is reorganized not around full employment but around the methodical dispossession of rights, time, and social recognition. The boundary between formal and informal is no longer juridical but geopolitical: subjects in the Global South are born closer to the abandonment enacted by their *chupacabras* democracies than to the legal protection of their human rights. For this reason, it is essential to recognize that the framework shaping this dossier, coordinated in its call by PhD Candidate Moisés Rojas, is not merely academic, but also historical and civilizational. It is not a collection of sectoral labor studies, but a critical cartography of informality as the contemporary governing regime of the South. Neoliberalism does not “tolerate” informality: it needs it, produces it, designs it, reproduces it, administers it, and then normalizes it through discourses that individualize labor responsibility and moralize survival (Rojas, 2022).

Latin America has been constructed as a functional periphery, but today it is also an epistemic and political periphery: what is experienced here as labor precariousness is, in reality, the “undeclared mode” of global capitalism. Stable contractual forms are the historical exception, not the rule; the liberal myth of wage-based citizenship does not correspond to the life trajectories of the vast majority of the world’s population. Thus, informality is not a labor issue but a democratic one: where there are no minimum guarantees of subsistence, full

citizenship cannot exist. Precarization also functions as a method of political silencing. The region operates as a triple laboratory: economic (dispossession), juridical (semi-legalized deregulation), and subjective (moral normalization of scarcity). Informality not only privatizes risk, shifting it from the State to the individual, but also privatizes guilt: it transforms survival into a “personal” problem rather than the result of a structural order of domination. This mechanism explains why meritocratic rhetoric coexists without contradiction with pauperization: precariousness becomes naturalized. This dossier departs from this stark evidence: informality is not an accidental flaw of the system; it is its contemporary mode of governance (Rojas, 2022). Work has become a territory of silent colonization, where platforms, outsourcing, care economies, rurality, and dispossession converge in a single pattern of rights degradation. The central question organizing the contributions gathered here is not “how to correct” informality, but “what form of domination sustains it and against whom it operates.”

The genealogy of this phenomenon cannot be explained solely by macro-economic transformations, but by a long political process. The fragmentation of the working class is not a spontaneous effect, but the result of dispersal policies: subjective, territorial, juridical, and relational. Precarization occurs by dismantling bonds: the collective is atomized, the communal liquefied, the legal bureaucratized, and subsistence turned into an individual itinerary. The Global North continues to function as a center of calculation that externalizes the costs of social reproduction onto the feminized bodies of the South, impoverished territories, and invisibilized rural economies. The platform is the new name of the colony: an interface that organizes work without face, without history, without rights, and without citizenship. What is decisive is that this labor coloniality does not present itself as oppression but as “innovation,” “flexibility,” or “modernization”.

Informal economy has become the real matrix of employment, yet it continues to be labeled as an “exception”; meanwhile, stable employment has become the exception but is still named as the “norm.” This deliberate mismatch produces an ideological effect: it erases structural violence and portrays precarization as mere conjuncture. Informality is therefore not a residue of the past but the economic organization of the present. It is an accumulation regime that operates through diffuse extraction of value: it extracts time, care, emotional availability, mobility, forced flexibility, and fragments of life. Unlike Fordism, it no longer concentrates workers, it disperses them. It no longer regulates, it outsources. It no longer promises stability, it manages uncertainty as a structural condition. There lies its political efficacy (Rojas, 2022).

This framework explains why most Latin American countries do not “move out” of informality despite numerous reforms: because the issue is not public policy but geopolitical position within the international division of labor. While

the North externalizes social costs to maintain its fiscal and symbolic stability, the South internalizes adjustment, flexibilization, and the transfer of unpaid value. The minimum wage in the South is the invisible counterpart of consumption in the North. Without exported precariousness, there would be no imported abundance. Neoliberal globalization did not homogenize the world; it hierarchized it, and did so through labor. There is no informality without coloniality, just as there is no “competitive” market without differential regimes of dispossession. Global economic governance has been relentlessly asymmetric, and these imbalances are not institutional accidents but the structural expression of a world-economy in which exploitation travels not upward but always downward and outward. The South pays the bill of global capitalism: it pays with deferred rights, absorbed life-time, and fractured trajectories.

This dossier does not merely measure informality; it categorizes it as a social system. Informality is an order, a grammar, a technique of government, a way of distributing suffering and uncertainty, and above all a moral frontier: it defines who deserves protection and who may be discarded without social scandal. When the majority of the population belongs to that margin, we are no longer dealing with an “alternative economy”, but with the structural norm of late capitalism. From this point, it becomes essential to examine how informality reorganizes the social in every dimension: gender, territory, health, care, rurality, migration, security, community labor, and emotional labor. If formal employment is no longer the center of social reproduction, then the unit of analysis is not the factory, it is life itself. Precariousness shifts from the workplace to everyday existence.

This epistemic turn also reconfigures social conflict. The struggle for rights is no longer waged solely within classic union frameworks, because the working class, dispersed, outsourced, indebted, and feminized, no longer recognizes itself only in factories or industrial production centers. It is now deployed in street markets, households, fields, digital mediation, hospitals, urban mobility, and the care practices that sustain the common but remain unnamed. Fragmentation has not eliminated conflict, but it has dispersed it politically. For this reason, this editorial situates itself in a horizon that requires rethinking the question: What counts as work today, and who is socially recognized as a worker? This question can no longer be answered through formal legal definitions, because material reality exceeds the law. Labor norms remain anchored in stable wages, but societies no longer are. The law protects what no longer exists and neglects what sustains life. The contradiction is stark.

The Global South does not face only economic gaps; it faces gaps of recognition. The issue is not the lack of formal jobs, but the surplus of unrecognized work. The boundary between employment and work becomes political: there is work without employment, effort without wages, production without rights,

responsibility without protection. One can work without fitting any juridical category, but one cannot live without bodies that sustain social reproduction. Productive labor is recognized; reproductive labor is invisibilized. This fracture produces structural inequality. Informality operates as political pedagogy: it teaches subjects to naturalize that their time does not belong to them, that their care has no value, and that their agency is not a right but a favor. This silent disciplining prevents precarization from generating immediate rupture; instead, it produces administered resignation (Segato, 2016). Neoliberalism does not triumph because it persuades, it triumphs because it exhausts.

At this point, it becomes clear why informality is directly tied to citizenship: precariousness not only deteriorates material conditions but also horizons of recognition. A subject without stable rights can scarcely contest the public sphere; they are confined to mere survival. Informality is, at its core, a policy of social depoliticization (Rojas, 2022). When survival occupies the place of deliberation, democracy is emptied of substance and of hope.

This diagnosis prepares the entry point for the contributions gathered in this dossier, which do not merely describe labor phenomena, but allow a reading of the political map of precarization in contemporary Latin America. From the technological mediation of domestic work to impoverished rurality; from the privatization of security to the contradiction between perception and reality in employment quality; from mental health sustained by students in clinical training to the social reconfiguration of care in nursing, the articles included here constitute empirical evidence of a single global architecture: the organized dispossession of everyday life. The structural architecture of informality acquires a human face when observed in the concrete sectors where it materializes, the bodies upon which it is imposed, and the forms of time, mobility, and vulnerability it captures. The first level of reading in the dossier shows that informality is not homogeneous: it adopts different logics depending on the social space where it operates, yet it always preserves the same underlying traits, lack of protection, deregulation, transfer of risk, and devaluation of labor. The articles in this issue demonstrate empirically that informality is a system, not merely an economic condition.

On the first axis is the study by Niño and Viana (2026) on domestic work mediated by digital platforms. This is a clear example of the “new frontier” of precarization: the home transformed into a productive space without legal recognition. The so-called “technological intermediation” does not modernize labor relations, it externalizes them: the algorithm replaces the contractual link, transforming employment into an automated and faceless service. Here we observe how neoliberalism operates not only at the material level but also at the symbolic one: it calls “independence” what is isolation, “flexibility” what is vulnerability,

and “opportunity” what is mere survival. Digital mediation thus becomes a device that erases the employer and liquefies all social obligation of recognition.

A second axis is Jasso’s (2026) study of labor informality among private security forces in Mexico. This case is particularly illustrative because it dismantles the myth that informality is concentrated only in “low-skilled” sectors: here we see how a sector that, due to its nature as public security, should be heavily regulated, ends up operating under conditions of extreme vulnerability. Security, an essential function of the State, is outsourced, but upon outsourcing it becomes precarious, and when precarious, the rule of law freezes. Informality thus produces a double asymmetry: it dispossesses subjects and weakens the very notion of social citizenship. The implicit message is devastating: not even “strategic” work guarantees rights. Precarity is no longer an accident, it is the rule.

The third article in the dossier, by Cazares-Palacios *et al.* (2026), reveals something even deeper: informality is not only a labor condition but a dispossession of life itself. In rural territories, informality manifests as triple exclusion, economic, territorial, and in terms of care. There, women’s labor sustains households and food economies, yet remains invisible because it does not enter State measurement frameworks. The pandemic did not create vulnerability; it exposed it. What broke was not the social fabric, but the thin layer of illusion that covered it. This text confirms that contemporary capitalism does not extract only labor power: it extracts life-time, emotional availability, and the energy of community reproduction. What is expropriated in the countryside is not only income; it is agency.

While these first three articles describe informality as extraction, the work of Ríos, Aristizábal, and Bermúdez (2026) shows the epistemological fissure of the model: “subjective employment quality” appears high while objective quality is low. This mismatch confirms the ideological core of neoliberalism: the substitution of rights with expectations and citizenship with self-perception. If material reality does not improve but perception does, then control no longer operates through the disciplining of bodies but through the shaping of subjectivities. The precarized worker learns to consider survival as “luck” and exploitation as “merit.” The contrast between subjective perception and material reality, demonstrated by Ríos, Aristizábal, and Bermúdez (2026), confirms that informality now operates not only as an economic regime but as an affective and symbolic one: it captures not only labor power but imaginaries. Hegemony ceases to rely exclusively on wage regulation and begins to rely on the administration of expectations. Where social justice is absent, symbolic satisfaction is manufactured. Dignity is replaced by endurance.

The final two contributions in the dossier reveal the deepest core: the struggle over the social value of care and living labor. Echeverry *et al.* (2026) demonstrate

that even in university contexts, supposedly protected, institutionalized, and formative, the emotional and health support provided rests on highly feminized and undervalued practices (Fraser, 2013; Federici, 2018). The “teaching-service” model functions because there are students who sustain the mental health of others without equivalent recognition. Care appears as “learning”, even though it is in fact labor: affective, clinical, and social labor. The case of post-pandemic nursing reinforces this line: society discovered the centrality of care but did not modify its structure of recognition. It applauded publicly but did not dignify materially. This is the most brutal paradox of contemporary capitalism: what sustains life is the least remunerated, the least protected, and the most feminized. Nurses and caregivers, like rural vendors, domestic workers, and outsourced guards, are not informal because law is lacking, but because inequality abounds.

What unites all these manuscripts is not the labor theme, but political unveiling: informality functions as the moral boundary of recognition. It determines who counts as a citizen and who as disposable labor; who deserves security and who must provide it without receiving it; who may be a rights-bearing subject and who is reduced to an invisible social support. This dossier demonstrates that precariousness is the new grammar of governance in the Global South (Luque *et al.*, 2025).

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GLOBAL FORMALITIES
AND INFORMALITIES:
SOCIAL CHANGES AND
TRANSFORMATIONS

Research & Reflection

Investigaciones y reflexiones
Pesquisa e reflexão

An Outlook on Global Research into Female Unemployment during the Covid-19 Pandemic*

[English Version]

Una mirada a la investigación mundial sobre desempleo
femenino durante la pandemia Covid-19

Um olhar sobre a pesquisa mundial acerca do desemprego
feminino durante a pandemia de Covid-19

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Abstract

Objective: To provide a review and bibliometric analysis of global research on female unemployment during the Covid-19 pandemic, with the aim of identifying its evolution and determining predominant trends. **Methodology:** Using the Scopus database, documents relevant to the topic were selected and subsequently processed through bibliometric tools such as Tree of Science (ToS), Bibliometrix, and Gephi. **Results:** The

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most influential countries, journals, authors, and documents related to the topic were identified. The documents were classified into three groups based on the “tree of science” metaphor: classical/seminal works, structural contributions, and perspectives. This latter group revealed current research trends in studies on female unemployment in the context of the pandemic. **Conclusions:** Female unemployment experienced a marked increase during the Covid-19 pandemic, intensifying the challenges faced by this population. Furthermore, the findings show that mental health, gender inequality, and socioeconomic repercussions have become central axes in the field’s research agenda.

Keywords: mental health; social inequality; Covid-19; women’s employment; labor market (obtained from the UNESCO Thesaurus).

Resumen

Objetivo: ofrecer una revisión y análisis bibliométrico de la investigación a nivel mundial en desempleo femenino durante la pandemia de Covid-19, con el propósito de determinar su evolución e identificar tendencias predominantes. **Metodología:** utilizando la base de datos Scopus, se seleccionaron documentos pertinentes al tema; posteriormente, se procesaron mediante herramientas bibliométricas como *Tree of Science (ToS)*, *Bibliometrix* y *Gephi*. **Resultados:** se determinaron los países, revistas, autores y documentos más destacados con relación al tema. Los documentos se categorizaron en tres grupos con base en la metáfora del «árbol de la ciencia»: trabajos clásicos/seminales, estructurales y perspectivas. Este último grupo reveló las tendencias actuales en la investigación del desempleo femenino en el contexto de la pandemia. **Conclusiones:** el desempleo femenino experimentó un marcado incremento durante la pandemia de Covid-19, que intensificó los desafíos para esta población. Además, se evidencia que la salud mental, la desigualdad de género y las repercusiones socioeconómicas se consolidan como ejes centrales en la investigación del campo.

Palabras clave: salud mental; desigualdad social; Covid-19; empleo de las mujeres; mercado de trabajo (obtenidos del tesoro UNESCO).

Resumo

Objetivo: oferecer uma revisão e análise bibliométrica da pesquisa mundial sobre o desemprego feminino durante a pandemia de Covid-19, com o propósito de identificar sua evolução e determinar as tendências predominantes. **Metodologia:** utilizando a base de dados Scopus, selecionaram-se documentos pertinentes ao tema, que posteriormente foram processados por meio de ferramentas bibliométricas como Tree of Science (ToS), Bibliometrix e Gephi. **Resultados:** identificaram-se os países, revistas, autores e documentos mais influentes relacionados ao tema. Os documentos foram categorizados em três grupos com base na metáfora da “árvore da ciência”: trabalhos clássicos/seminais, contribuições estruturais e perspectivas. Este último grupo revelou as tendências atuais da pesquisa sobre desemprego feminino no contexto da pandemia.

Conclusões: o desemprego feminino apresentou um aumento significativo durante a pandemia de Covid-19, intensificando os desafios enfrentados por essa população. Além disso, evidencia-se que a saúde mental, a desigualdade de gênero e as repercussões socioeconômicas consolidam-se como eixos centrais na agenda de pesquisa da área.

Palavras-chave: saúde mental; desigualdade social; Covid-19; emprego das mulheres; mercado de trabalho (obtidos do tesouro UNESCO).

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruptions in the global labor market, affecting both formal and informal sectors; in particular, women's employability experienced a significant decline (Marconatto *et al.*, 2022; Ortiz & Rodríguez, 2022). Alongside rising unemployment rates, the crisis not only destabilized the economy but also disrupted mental well-being, intensifying anxiety, loneliness, and stress within households (Oliveira *et al.*, 2023).

This economic shock amplified hardships in households where women are the primary providers, further hindering socioeconomic progress and heightening uncertainty (Chitiga *et al.*, 2022; Katris, 2021). Additionally, unemployment exacerbated existing problems such as inequality, poverty, and hunger, trapping women in a vicious cycle of disadvantages; ranging from limited educational and financial opportunities to reduced chances of accessing leadership roles or managing their own businesses (Ronaghi & Scorsone, 2023; Schippers *et al.*, 2022).

Nevertheless, the crisis has also shed light on deeply rooted gender inequalities that persist in society (Tusińska, 2021). Although the pandemic introduced changes to the labor landscape, such as flexible schedules and remote work, these have also triggered new challenges related to inequality and working conditions (Mazzucchelli *et al.*, 2022). Thus, while society faces the challenges generated by the pandemic, these are particularly acute for women, as they compound pre-existing gender issues (Khan *et al.*, 2023).

Despite the undeniable relevance of female unemployment during the pandemic, no literature review specifically addressing this topic has yet been identified. It is within this context that the present study seeks to fill this gap. Although some related approaches have emerged, they have examined tangential themes: a bibliometric analysis of decent work in the context of Covid-19 (Anholon *et al.*, 2022), a bibliometric study on youth unemployment (Ralph & Arora, 2022), a review of labor inequalities among ethnic minority workers in the British health and social care sectors during the pandemic (Hussein, 2022), and an examination of the pandemic's impact on the health of those in precarious employment (McNamara *et al.*, 2021).

To address this gap, the present study offers a bibliometric review and analysis of global research on female unemployment during the Covid-19 pandemic, using scientific mapping techniques and tools such as R-Studio, Bibliometrix, and Tree of Science (ToS). In addition, data extracted from the Scopus database are analyzed to determine its evolution and identify prevailing trends.

The structure of this article is divided into four sections. The first explains the methodology used in the search for documents and research records; the

second presents the theoretical approach; the third carries out the bibliometric and network analysis. Finally, the conclusions, limitations, and future research agenda are presented.

Methodology

The development of this study is grounded in a scientific mapping approach, which employs bibliometric tools to analyze the structure, patterns, and trends of a field of knowledge (Chen, 2017; Leydesdorff, 1987; Noyons *et al.*, 1999). Accordingly, various analytical methods are used, including indicators and metrics in publication statistics (author, country, institution, journal) (Zupic & Čater, 2015), as well as co-citation, author, document, and country networks (Herman *et al.*, 2000). In addition, the most relevant documents are identified and classified using the Tree of Science (ToS) metaphor (Robledo *et al.*, 2022; Valencia-Hernández *et al.*, 2020).

Data Selection

To conduct this investigation on female unemployment and Covid-19, a search was performed in the Scopus database, which is considered one of the most important worldwide (Martín-Martín *et al.*, 2018; Prancutė, 2021). The search equation used was: ("unemployment") AND ("female" OR "woman" OR "women") AND ("covid" OR "pandem*"), yielding 1,154 records containing these terms in their title, abstract, or keywords. The search was conducted on June 3, 2023.

Processing, Analysis, and Visualization

Tools such as Bibliometrix (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017), Tree of Science (ToS) (Robledo *et al.*, 2022; Valencia-Hernández *et al.*, 2020), and Gephi (Mathieu *et al.*, 2009) were employed. Bibliometrix is a free tool integrated into R-Studio and offers a wide range of functionalities for bibliometric analysis (Aria *et al.*, 2020), making it one of the most widely used tools for studies of this type (Duque *et al.*, 2021b; Duque & Oliva, 2022; Homolak *et al.*, 2020; Díaz *et al.*, 2023a; Barrera *et al.*, 2022).

ToS was also employed. This application, based on graph theory, is used to extract database references and construct a co-citation network of documents.

It enables the analysis of bibliometric metrics, such as citation and co-citation indicators, in order to identify and classify the most relevant documents in the field. Moreover, it allows classification of the most influential works through the metaphorical framework of the Tree of Science. This tool has been validated and applied in various prior studies (Giraldo *et al.*, 2022; Grisales *et al.*, 2023; Hoyos *et al.*, 2022; Loaiza *et al.*, 2022; Robledo-Giraldo *et al.*, 2023; Torres *et al.*, 2022).

To visualize the network constructed with ToS, the Gephi tool is used (Mathieu *et al.*, 2009), which allows interaction with the network data and with each document included in it. This makes it possible to understand how a research area evolves. Furthermore, Gephi is an open-source, freely accessible tool widely used in similar studies (Clavijo-Tapia *et al.*, 2021; Donthu *et al.*, 2020; Jacomy *et al.*, 2014; Meier, 2020; Díaz *et al.*, 2023b).

Following this procedure, documents are classified into three categories: roots (seminal documents), trunk (structural documents), and branches (perspectives or clusters). This categorization enables an understanding of the theoretical evolution of a field of knowledge. This methodology has been applied successfully in previous research and has proven effective in identifying trends across multiple areas (Duque *et al.*, 2021a; Hoyos *et al.*, 2023; Hurtado & Ortíz, 2022; Díaz *et al.*, 2023a; Robledo *et al.*, 2023; Trejos-Salazar *et al.*, 2021).

Results

Bibliometric Analysis

Country Analysis.

Table 1 presents the countries that contribute most to research on the topic under study, based on data retrieved from Scopus. The United States is identified as the country with the highest number of publications, with 417 documents, representing 43.12%. It is followed by the United Kingdom with 118 publications, corresponding to 12.20%. Notably, 48.29% of the publications come from the American continent; 33.40% from Europe; 14.37% from Asia; and, finally, 3.93% from Africa. The studies with the greatest contribution to the topic are published in English and Spanish.

Table 1. *Publications by Country.*

Country/Region	Number of Publications	% of Total
United States	417	43%
United Kingdom	118	12%
Australia	70	7%
China	57	5%
Canada	50	5%
India	49	5%
Italy	48	4%
Spain	48	4%
Germany	39	4%
South Africa	38	4%
Japan	33	3%

In addition, the country collaboration network (Figure 1) shows that countries with the lowest participation in the topic include Saudi Arabia (3.5%), Belgium (2.44%), and Bangladesh (2.3%). It is worth noting that Colombia participates in collaboration networks on this topic with countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, and Sierra Leone.

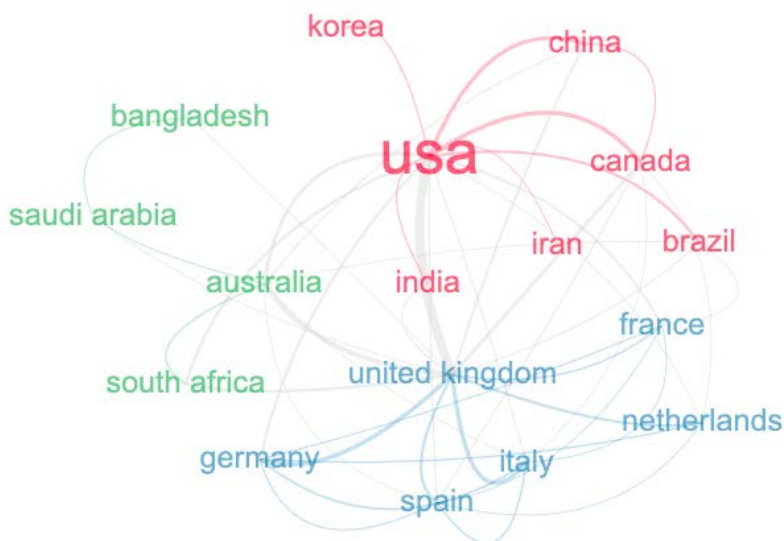


Figure 1. Country Collaboration Network.

Journal Analysis.

Table 2 lists the ten most important journals on the topic of study, along with the highest number of published documents. These records were likewise retrieved from the Scopus database. The table displays the number of publications, the country of origin of each journal, its h-index, quartile, and the 2022 SJR indicator (information sourced from Scimago). The *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, published in Switzerland, has 94 publications, an h-index of 167, and is ranked in quartile Q2; it contributes 8.5% of the total publications, making it the most prominent journal. However, it is worth highlighting that *PLOS ONE*, based in the United States, has the highest h-index (404) and is classified in quartile Q1, making it an outstanding journal in this field. It is also important to note that 90% of the journals belong to quartile Q1, indicating that they generate high-impact research despite having fewer publications.

Table 2. *Leading Journals.*

Journal	Number of Publications	<i>h-index</i>	Quartile	SJR 2022	Country
<i>International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health</i>	94	167	Q2	0.83	Switzerland
<i>Plos One</i>	50	404	Q1	0.89	United States
<i>BMJ Open</i>	29	139	Q1	106	United Kingdom
<i>Frontiers in Psychiatry</i>	22	96	Q1	1.22	Switzerland
<i>Jama Network Open</i>	16	106	Q1	4.11	United States
<i>Journal of Affective Disorders</i>	14	217	Q1	1.99	Netherlands
<i>Psychiatry Research</i>	13	159	Q1	2.14	Ireland
<i>Nutrients</i>	11	178	Q1	1.29	Switzerland
<i>Journal of Clinical Medicine</i>	10	95	Q1	0.94	Switzerland
<i>SSM Population Health</i>	10	41	Q1	1.79	United Kingdom

Author Analysis.

Table 3 presents the authors with the highest relevance in publications on the topic indexed in Scopus. It includes the number of publications, the *h-index*, and citation counts for each author. The table shows that most authors have four publications. The most cited author is Ichiro Kawachi, with 183,113 citations. He is a Professor of Social Epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and also holds the highest *h-index* (191). The second-most influential author is Xhien Chen from the National University of Singapore, with an *h-index* of 80 and 24,500 citations. Likewise, authors Agyapong and Allen have the same number of publications.

Table 3. *Leading Authors in Scopus.*

Author	Number of Publications	<i>h-index</i>	Number of Citations
Chen, Xhien	4	80	24.500
Fancourt, Daisy	4	57	12.766
Kawachi, Ichiro	4	191	183.113
Matsuda, Seiichi	4	45	6.508
Nagata, Toshi	4	44	7.070
Shen, M.	4	74	22.864
Tateishi, Soichiro	4	59	2.354
Tsuji, Moriya	4	58	12.028
Agyapong, VIO	3	31	2.939
Allen, J.D.	3	25	3.941

Network Analysis.

Figures 2 and 3 present two visualizations: one illustrating the collaboration network and the other depicting the co-citation network. As noted earlier, the data were obtained from Scopus and the networks were generated using the Bibliometrix tool.

A prior selection was made of the most cited authors, reflected in the size of their names in the network graphs, which corresponds to their number of publications and scholarly output. Similarly, it is evident that the Americas constitute the region with the highest concentration of research contributions on the topic.



Figure 2. Authors network.

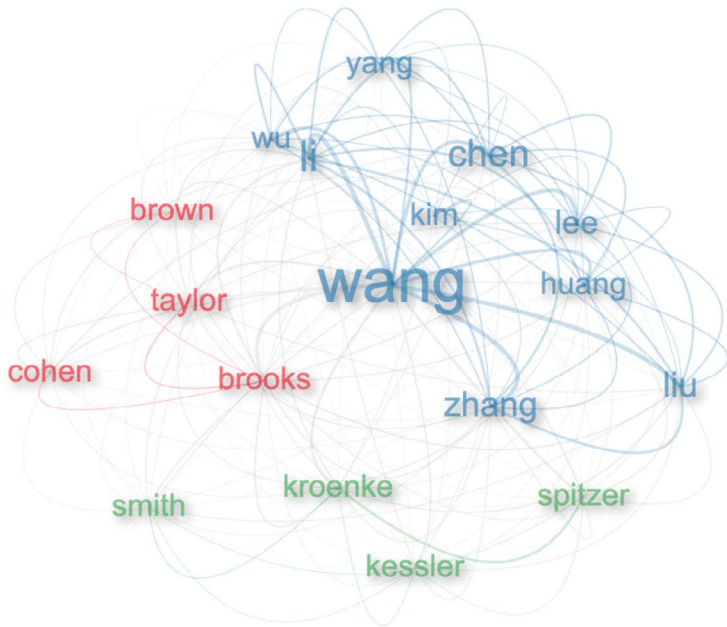


Figure 3. Authors' Co-citation Network.

Tree of Science Analysis

To conduct this analysis, the metaphor of the Tree of Science (ToS) was applied, allowing for the classification of the most influential documents in the field. These documents were grouped into three categories based on their theoretical and conceptual contribution: Roots (classics), foundational works that provide the core theoretical basis; trunk (structural documents), studies that consolidate and develop the field, connecting foundational and current perspectives; and branches (perspectives), recent or emerging works that extend, diversify, or challenge existing lines of research. These components, previously examined in detail, are visually represented in Figure 4.

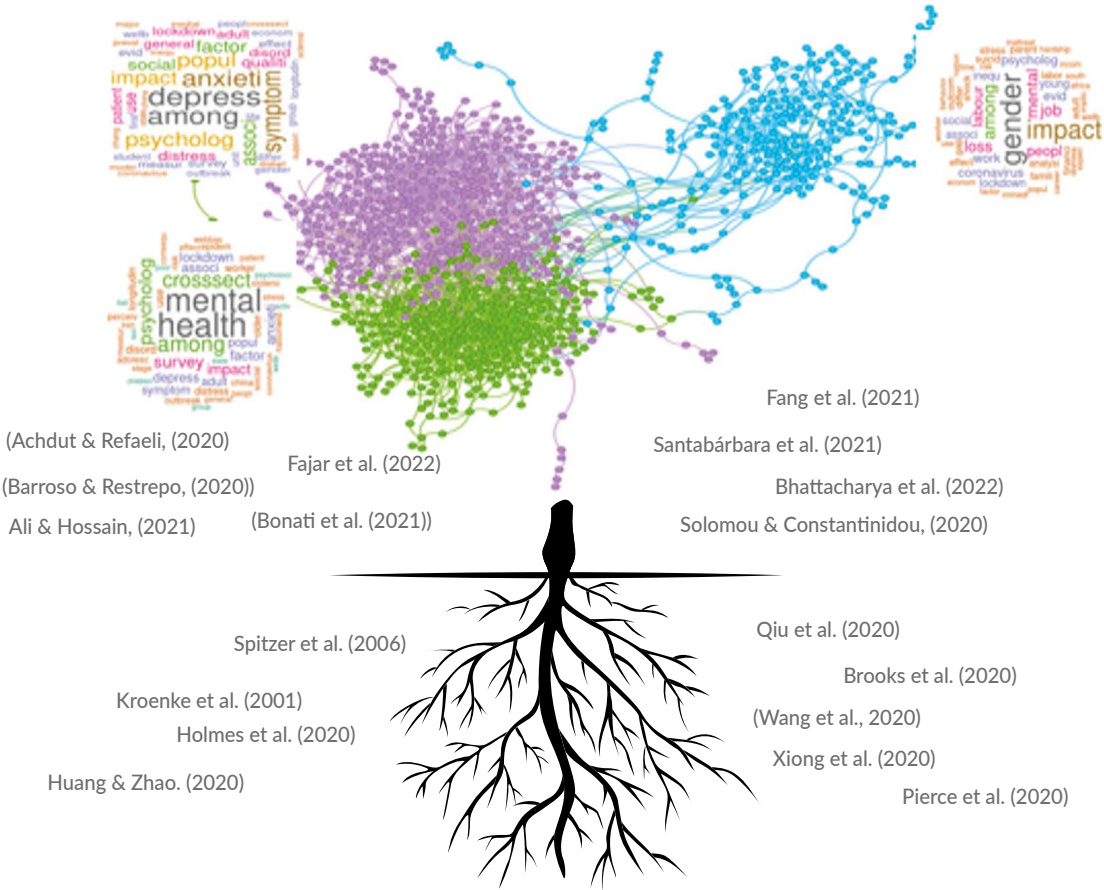


Figure 4. Tree of Female Unemployment.

Seminal Documents (Root).

This section highlights the most influential and foundational documents related to research on female unemployment during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The analysis shows how the challenges generated by the pandemic intensified psychological, emotional, and affective disorders—including diminished self-esteem—among other impacts. These effects were strongly reflected across society, influencing both labor market dynamics and public health.

The psychological impact produced by the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated quarantine measures triggered a series of adverse outcomes such as stress, exhaustion, irritability, indecision, uncertainty, detachment, lack of concentration, and a decline in work performance. This scenario resulted in widespread reluctance to work, which subsequently led to contract suspensions, mass layoffs, and rising unemployment (Kroenke *et al.*, 2001; Brooks *et al.*, 2020).

Moreover, many of the consequences stemming not only from the pandemic but also from mandatory isolation and physical and social distancing are directly associated with risk factors and health problems. These include suicide, self-harm, alcohol and psychoactive substance abuse, domestic violence, excessive work burden, financial stress, grief, loss, unemployment, homelessness, and relationship breakdown (Holmes *et al.*, 2020).

At the same time, Covid-19 had a significant impact on global economic indicators and unemployment rates, which experienced a marked increase. This situation posed a threat to national economies, as people affected by job loss developed heightened levels of anxiety, stress, and psychiatric symptoms (Xiong *et al.*, 2020).

Furthermore, the worldwide spread of the virus had a disproportionately strong effect on young people and women compared with the rest of the population. This was largely due to rising unemployment and the resulting psychological distress; factors that have intensified concerns regarding mental health, an area of particular focus for the World Health Organization (WHO) (Pierce *et al.* 2020).

Drawing again on the study by (Brooks *et al.* 2020), most research reported negative psychological effects, identifying stress, frustration, financial losses, unemployment, and fear of Covid-19 infection as the most alarming factors for society. Likewise, psychological distress, panic disorders, and depression have created heightened vulnerability among women and migrant workers, particularly as confinement measures led to soaring unemployment rates. Strict and unprecedented public-health measures significantly affected daily life worldwide, especially in employment and education (Qiu *et al.*, 2020). The study's findings also help clarify the extent of psychological impact, revealing that women exhibited the highest percentage of symptoms and elevated levels of depression, anxiety, stress, and consequently, unemployment (Wang *et al.*, 2020). Going forward,

special attention should be paid to vulnerable groups such as young people, older adults, women, and migrant workers.

Structural Documents (Trunk).

This section highlights the structural studies that examine unemployment, gender inequality, mental health, Covid-19, and its treatment. These investigations are among the most recent in the field and provide insight into how these factors profoundly affect individuals' well-being.

Long-term unemployment resulting from the pandemic has produced severe consequences, with young people and women being the most negatively impacted in terms of mental health. Having to leave their jobs or studies, combined with worsening personal circumstances, increases psychological risk (Achdut & Refaeli, 2020). This study also analyzes the differential impact between men and women in the labor market, clearly showing that women are disproportionately affected. Reductions in working hours or complete job loss are common, although gender inequalities in employment existed even before Covid-19 (Ramos & Bolívar, 2020).

Regarding Covid-19 treatment, research has assessed the validity of vaccination. Individuals who expressed doubts or lack of confidence in the vaccine tended to have lower educational levels, were unemployed, or were female heads of household (Fajar *et al.*, 2022). A survey showed that 32.5% of respondents were hesitant about the vaccine due to uncertainty surrounding government and WHO communications; moreover, low-income populations and unemployed individuals expressed skepticism about its effectiveness (Ali & Hossain, 2021). Covid-19 vaccination awareness studies aim to provide communities with clear information, promote virus mitigation, evaluate the effectiveness of preventive measures, and emphasize the importance of vaccines in low- and middle-income countries (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2022).

Santabábara *et al.* (2021) found that key risk factors associated with the development of anxiety included the initial or peak phase of the outbreak, female gender, younger age, marital status, social isolation, unemployment, education levels, access to credit, lack of knowledge about the virus, and certain lifestyle and personality traits. Psychological experiences during lockdown also produced adverse consequences for women heading households and caring for young children. Job loss, self-employment, and informal work made the situation especially difficult during the pandemic (Bonati *et al.*, 2021).

Additionally, unemployment driven by strict mobility and social-distancing regulations most heavily affected women aged 18-29, who experienced a decline

in quality of life along with higher levels of depression and anxiety (Solomou & Constantinidou, 2020).

Perspectives (Branches).

Perspective 1: Unemployment and Psychological Impact. This perspective includes studies related to the psychological effects of the pandemic, gender inequalities in unemployment, and, in some cases, evidence of psychological support and improvements in general well-being.

From a sociocultural standpoint, the psychological impact of a global health crisis such as Covid-19 generated widespread negative effects, including depression, stress, and anxiety (Wang *et al.*, 2020). Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) and sleep disturbances highlighted the need to prioritize mental-health support to ensure population well-being (Huang & Zhao, 2020). These risk factors disproportionately affected women and young students, underscoring the need for public-policy strategies to reduce negative mental-health outcomes and provide psychological support (Xiong *et al.*, 2020).

Feelings of loneliness increased among people with disabilities during the pandemic, reducing quality of life and heightening psychological vulnerability (Holm *et al.*, 2023). Unemployment was linked to anxiety symptoms, revealing the vulnerability of affected populations and stressing the need to implement policies promoting mental-health assistance during and after the pandemic, with special support for disadvantaged socioeconomic groups (Reme *et al.*, 2022).

Psychological disorders intensified during the pandemic (Yusuf *et al.*, 2022). Young people now face greater risk of major depressive disorder (MDD), with loneliness, low resilience, and financial hardship acting as key contributing factors (Gabarrell-Pascuet *et al.*, 2023). Women experienced a heavier psychological burden due to unemployment, income loss, and fewer opportunities, widening mental-health disparities. Policies supporting equitable employment opportunities and financial stability are crucial (Hwang & Shin, 2023). Enhancing social support in the workplace can strengthen industry sustainability and recovery by reducing stress and improving overall well-being (Liu *et al.*, 2023).

Perspective 2: Mental Health. This perspective examines mental health during and after the pandemic, psychological well-being, medium- and long-term strategies, and coping and psychosocial support in the workplace.

The literature includes studies addressing psychological, social, and neuroscientific effects (Holmes *et al.*, 2020). Mental-health burdens increased, especially among frontline female nurses, stressing the need to protect their psychological well-being (Lai *et al.*, 2020). Quarantine measures triggered psychological distress,

panic disorders, anxiety, depression, and stress, all of which require clinical attention and support (Qiu *et al.*, 2020).

Adverse consequences for mental health were also observed (Bonati *et al.*, 2021). Patients with bipolar disorder exhibited significantly higher levels of anxiety, stress, and depression during the pandemic (Li *et al.*, 2022). Job loss was shown to indirectly intensify these symptoms, underscoring the need for medium- and long-term strategies centered on population mental health and well-being (Parra *et al.*, 2023).

The pandemic produced a profound mental-health effect, with sociodemographic factors influencing psychological trauma; post-traumatic stress disorder affected up to 12.4% of respondents (Cao *et al.*, 2022). Psychosocial working conditions deteriorated, with emotional exhaustion becoming a critical and difficult-to-manage issue among employees (van Elk *et al.*, 2023). Entrepreneurs faced limited resources, high levels of depression, and the difficult decision to exit the market (Hussain & Li, 2022). Despite these negative impacts, the pandemic fostered resilience and motivated coping strategies and psychological-support seeking (Jiang *et al.*, 2022).

Perspective 3: Gender Inequality. This perspective documents gender inequality, job loss, and challenges and alternatives for mitigating negative effects during and after Covid-19.

Gender inequalities have been historically evident across countries. During the Covid-19 crisis, women and workers with lower educational levels were the most negatively affected, facing job loss and reduced income (Adams-Prassl *et al.*, 2020). Women bore a heavier burden and experienced greater psychological distress due to higher probabilities of unemployment or reduced working hours (Zamarro & Prados, 2021). The pandemic reinforced structural gender inequalities, making it imperative to address them, ensure fair labor distribution, and explore alternative economic systems to support women and their families (Power, 2020).

Economic recession triggered by the pandemic also resulted in job losses among Black communities, underscoring structural inequalities and the importance of supportive policies (Holder *et al.*, 2021). Households with limited resources suffered reduced food and health security, increasing the risks of depression and anxiety (Bottan *et al.*, 2020). Both women and men faced restrictions in job opportunities, labor participation, and career advancement (Heggeness, 2020).

To mitigate these negative impacts, it is crucial to address issues such as job loss, low or middle incomes, and mental-health concerns (Umucu *et al.*, 2022). Promoting labor equality during and after the pandemic is essential, as reduced working hours, job losses, and rising unemployment disproportionately affected women (Güven *et al.*, 2023). Addressing workplace gender inequalities is key to

fostering equitable and inclusive recovery (Mazzucchelli *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, exploring techniques to moderate employment shifts and redistribute labor between men and women is vital for the future (Doorley *et al.*, 2022).

Conclusions

The findings suggest that female unemployment grew exponentially during the pandemic period, revealing the structural inequities that persist in the labor market. In this sense, the women most affected were those in situations of vulnerability, who experienced greater job loss, an increased burden of domestic and unpaid work, and, consequently, heightened psychological strain and economic instability. Within this context, mental health, gender inequality, and socioeconomic repercussions emerge as transversal themes in the academic production of the period analyzed.

The results stemming from the Tree of Science analysis enabled the structuring of the problem at three levels. A growing concern was revealed regarding the psychosocial consequences generated by female unemployment, the widening barriers to accessing formal employment, and the absence of clear gender-focused public policies. For this reason, recent studies have tended to examine the relationship between mental health and working conditions, as well as the gender-differentiated effects of precariousness, poverty, and insecurity.

Furthermore, the bibliometric analysis showed a notable geographical concentration of scientific production in countries of the Global North. This underscores the need to foster research from Latin American, African, and Asian contexts, where gender gaps tend to be more pronounced and labor dynamics are often more informal.

Ultimately, this study not only fulfills its objective of mapping and analyzing the state of the art on female unemployment during the Covid-19 pandemic, but also provides a conceptual and empirical framework to guide future research. Likewise, it offers key inputs for designing public policies and economic recovery strategies that place gender equity, mental health, and social justice as fundamental pillars in the post-pandemic context.

Limitations and Recommendations

Future studies are encouraged to incorporate additional databases such as WoS and Springer to broaden the scope of information on female unemployment during and after Covid-19, as the present study relied exclusively on Scopus. It is also considered important to extend the time frame, as only documents from 2000–2023 were included.

Finally, it is recommended that future research employ alternative analytical tools capable of generating different types of data and evaluations, given that this article used only R-Studio, Bibliometrix, and ToS; tools that, while widely accepted by the scientific community, could be complemented with additional methodologies.

Research Agenda

The following topics illustrate research areas that should be addressed in future studies on female unemployment, particularly in crisis contexts such as the Covid-19 pandemic. These topics focus on deepening the understanding of the relationship between unemployment and psychological impact (Yusuf *et al.*, 2022). It is essential to further explore this problem in order to propose strategies to mitigate the effects of these conditions on women's emotional well-being, especially regarding variables such as socioeconomic status, age, and religious beliefs (Hwang & Shin, 2023).

In this direction, it is recommended to track the socioeconomic factors associated with depressive symptoms among young women, considering elements such as social isolation, social support, and resilience. Additionally, it is important to examine women's workplace well-being and the relationship between social support and occupational stress, taking into account variables such as work experience and job position (Liu *et al.*, 2023).

It is also crucial to deepen the analysis of psychological trauma inequalities experienced by low-income populations, as well as to evaluate compliance with preventive measures that may have affected mental health (Lewańczyk *et al.*, 2023). Parallel to this, future research should explore specific working conditions—such as workload and organizational support—and their association with well-being indicators such as sleep quality, mental health, and job satisfaction (van Elk *et al.*, 2023).

A core topic in the future research agenda is the intersection between unemployment and gender inequality. In this regard, it is advisable to initially examine pre-existing structural inequalities that limit women's access to labor opportunities (Güven *et al.*, 2023), analyzing wage gaps, career progression, promotion patterns, and employment opportunities at both national and international levels. This includes assessing mechanisms for the equitable redistribution of jobs and salary ranges, as well as gendered labor patterns (Doorley *et al.*, 2022).

Finally, it is necessary to develop studies that propose targeted public policies to mitigate the effects of job loss during economic crises, to protect mental health, and to ensure equitable access to financial resources. These strategies should aim to strengthen individual and collective resilience, promote decent working conditions, and support an inclusive and sustainable economic recovery with a clear gender perspective (Umucu *et al.*, 2022).

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The Non-place of Domestic Work in the Intermediation of Digital Platforms*

[English version]

El no-lugar del trabajo doméstico en la intermediación de las plataformas digitales

O não-lugar do trabalho doméstico na intermediação das plataformas digitais

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Abstract

Objective: To understand the aporetic situations generated by the use of digital platforms in the intermediation of domestic work performed by women in Bogotá D.C from a socio-legal perspective. This is analyzed in light of the social reconfiguration produced by super-modernity, a phenomenon Marc Augé terms the “non-place”

Methodology: Qualitative, based on case studies through a hermeneutic analysis, starting from the legal-normative framework to delve, —based on the concept of the “non-place”— into the sociocultural dimensions of the relationships shaped by the use of digital platforms in domestic work. **Results:** The legal configuration of digital intermediation, grounded in classical assumptions of time and space in employment contracts, was found to produce aporetic situations sustained by conditions of turnover, dispensability, and segregation, which prevent the weaving of symbolic interactions among the concurrent population. **Conclusions:** Three discussion categories arise that must be considered in the socio-legal debate on domestic work mediated by digital platforms: 1) the diffuse space of legal regulation in labor relations, 2) socio-spatial segregation, and 3) exclusion to non-historical spaces generated by the digital intermediation model.

Keywords: domestic work; labor intermediation; non-place; reproductive work (from the Women’s Thesaurus).

Resumen

Objetivo: comprender, desde una perspectiva socio-jurídica, las situaciones aporéticas que producen el uso de plataformas digitales en la intermediación del trabajo doméstico realizado por mujeres en la ciudad de Bogotá D.C. Lo anterior, debido a la reconfiguración social acontecida bajo el producto de la sobremodernidad, y que Marc Augé denomina «no-lugar». **Metodología:** cualitativa, basada en el estudio de casos desde un análisis hermenéutico, la cual parte de la configuración jurídico-normativa para profundizar —según el concepto del «no-lugar»— en las dimensiones socioculturales de las relaciones que producen el uso de plataformas digitales en el trabajo doméstico.

Resultados: se evidenció que la configuración jurídica de la intermediación digital, que parte de presupuestos clásicos en tiempo y espacio del contrato laboral, producen situaciones aporéticas sostenidas sobre las condiciones de rotación, prescindibilidad y segregación que no permiten tejer interacciones simbólicas entre la población concurrente. **Conclusiones:** se abren tres categorías de discusión que deben ser tenidas en cuenta en la discusión socio-jurídica del trabajo doméstico mediado por plataformas digitales: 1) el espacio difuso de la reglamentación jurídica en las relaciones laborales, 2)

la segregación socioespacial, y 3) la exclusión a los espacios no-históricos engendrados sobre el modelo de intermediación digital.

Palabras clave: trabajo doméstico; intermediación laboral; no-lugar; trabajo reproductivo (obtenidos del Tesouro de mujeres).

Resumo

Objetivo: compreender, a partir de uma perspectiva sociojurídica, as situações aporéticas decorrentes do uso de plataformas digitais na intermediação do trabalho doméstico realizado por mulheres na cidade de Bogotá D.C. Tal análise se justifica diante da reconfiguração social advinda da sobremodernidade, fenômeno que Marc Augé denomina “não-lugar”. **Metodologia:** pesquisa qualitativa, baseada no estudo de casos com enfoque hermenêutico, partindo da configuração jurídico-normativa para aprofundar —à luz do conceito de “não-lugar”— as dimensões socioculturais das relações produzidas pelo uso de plataformas digitais no trabalho doméstico. **Resultados:** evidenciou-se que a configuração jurídica da intermediação digital, fundamentada em pressupostos clássicos de tempo e espaço do contrato de trabalho, gera situações aporéticas sustentadas nas condições de rotatividade, descartabilidade e segregação, as quais impedem o estabelecimento de interações simbólicas entre os sujeitos envolvidos. **Conclusões:** emergiram três categorias que devem ser consideradas no debate sociojurídico sobre o trabalho doméstico mediado por plataformas digitais: 1) o espaço difuso da regulamentação jurídica nas relações laborais; 2) a segregação socioespacial; e 3) a exclusão de espaços não-históricos gerados pelo modelo de intermediação digital.

Palavras-chave: trabalho doméstico; intermediação laboral; não-lugar; trabalho reprodutivo (extraídos do Tesouro de Mulheres).

Introduction

The accelerated technological development of recent years has disrupted the forms of relationships in the lifeworld, substantially changing personal, social, economic, and labor relations. In the face of this total transformation, which requires global reflection, directing attention toward reproductive work, specifically domestic service, mediated by digital intermediaries is proposed.

Domestic service as part of reproductive work has been fractured by the sexual division of labor and is carried out mainly by poor, migrant, and Afro-descendant women. Due to the social construction of gender roles that naturalize their function in society, domestic service has been excluded from the labor rationale of productive work. This leads to its precariousness, low remuneration, and even being regarded as a duty, which results in a devaluation of the activity and a belittling of the people who perform it (Niño, 2021). Consequently, in Latin America, domestic service has developed under informal conditions, which increases exploitation and the lack of guarantees for the women in this sector¹.

In recent years, however, a phenomenon has unfolded that deserves attention. The increase in companies seeking to outsource services through digital platforms has impacted the transformation of service provision. These platforms develop their business offerings mainly through three models: the first is built on the conception of female workers as independent; the second, by contrast, is consolidated as a bridge to connect service personnel to other companies; and the third is a model in which the platforms directly hire the female workers and offer the services.

Despite being distinct forms of contracting, they have in common the fact that they are developed through the transfer of constant locations. Female workers move through different spaces in the city to meet service demands, which leads to the construction of the “non-place.”² This concept, coined by Marc Augé (2000), refers to a reconfiguration on which the products of super-modernity are based: spaces where encounters between individuals fail to generate symbolic interactions. As a result, the possibility of mutual recognition dissolves, given that the scrutiny of the other is fleeting. Spaces called “place”, by contrast,

¹ According to a survey conducted by DANE in 2020, 62% of people engaged in domestic service earn a minimum wage or less.

² The concept of non-places is proposed by Marc Augé (2000) in the text “Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Super-modernity” (2000), as a product of super-modernity in which there is no longer any identity with the different settings of life, since their fixation is quickly erased by an ephemeral construction that eliminates any possibility of history, narratives, and relationships. The non-place does not allow an existential relationship with objects due to constant transit and makes establishing acquaintances or knowledge about the other or others impossible.

would be: the neighborhood shop where neighbors do their shopping every day, the park where children and their families meet after school, or the tree-shaded bench where neighbors pause after running errands. Spaces which, in short, allow the community to coexist; these are called “places” because, over time, they lend themselves to the maturing of relationships and to the generation of roots, as well as to the exchange of knowledge beyond what is imposed by market logics. A non-place would be the airport, the train station, or the shopping mall—spaces where one is in transit and casual crossings with others are so quick and volatile that they do not allow the consolidation of symbolic exchange that translates into recognition.

It is important to note that non-places are not only situated at the confines of the space where the relationship occurs, but that, by eroding the time that constitutes the anthropological places of the female workers, they also strip workers of their condition as historical subjects, which is produced by a common-union. The management of their relationship with time and place—now marked by constant transit that confines them exclusively to labor tasks—ultimately subjects them to “non-historical” spaces and deprives them of the possibility of narrating their own story. In turn, by stripping the subject of their historical condition, these spaces also remove the possibilities for emancipation. These are the new spaces, hereafter “non-places,” upon which labor relations mediated by digital intermediation in domestic service are configured.

This has created diffuse elements for legal regulation, insofar as contemporary law presupposes a subject who inhabits a specific space and a specific cultural time, who has relationships with a defined environment and concrete people. By contrast, intermediation built upon non-places detaches itself from legal assumptions; that is, the relationships established in the traditional paradigm become unbalanced in super-modernity. The female workers no longer go to a place to provide their services, but to a non-place.

Consequently, this paper seeks to answer the following question: What aporias emerge in the non-place of performing paid domestic work due to the legal configuration of digital platform intermediation? To develop this thesis, the first part presents a description of the legal configuration of the business model that has developed from the intermediation of digital platforms in paid domestic work. In the second part, three aporetic situations are revealed, arising from the diffuse spatial condition that presupposes a subject who does not inhabit a specific place, but rather a non-place, pushing female domestic workers who perform their labor through digital intermediation into scenarios of segregation, exclusion, and abandonment.

The current state of the research problem presents two diagnoses. On the one hand, there is a constant denunciation of digital platforms that outsource domestic service tasks, such as the study by Ferrerira and Nociolini (2021), which highlights the labor precariousness in which female domestic workers who mediate their work through digital platforms find themselves. On the other hand, the article “Caregiver and Domestic Service Digital Platforms in Latin America and the Caribbean” (2024) shows how a legal framework that determines the form of contracting between companies and female workers can contribute to labor formalization. The diagnosis, then, focuses on showing that those platforms that only act as links for information transfer are contributing to forms of labor precariousness, insofar as the form of contracting is neglected. However, those platforms that assume the labor relationship are formalizing jobs in this sector.

Nevertheless, despite these important approaches to understanding the phenomenon, they neglect the focus that this article seeks to make evident, namely, how female domestic workers provide their services, which opens spaces of non-places. Even when there is formalization of employment, there are aporias that cannot be resolved with current law and that, on the contrary, contribute to forms of labor precariousness to which women are mainly subjected. Therefore, the research aims to create a critical framework for the labor protection of this sector.

The methodological strategy of this research is qualitative, based on a hermeneutic analytical perspective. Within this framework, legal and philosophical issues surrounding the phenomenon of digital platform intermediation in domestic work were identified. The research employed the following strategies: literature review, observational analysis, and case study analysis. The case study methodology is understood to integrate multiple perspectives with a holistic component, as outlined by Yin (1994)³.

Using the case study, fourteen digital platforms operating in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia, were analyzed. Based on the collected data, a matrix of contractual typologies was developed, enabling the identification of the different forms of contracting used to connect women domestic workers with third-party beneficiaries—those seeking to have these services performed in their homes, offices, or other spaces. This analysis led to a typological distinction in the hiring arrangements of domestic workers, as well as an examination of the implications

³ A case study investigation successfully addresses a technically distinctive situation in which there are many more variables of interest than observational data; and, as a result, relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data that must converge in a triangulation style; and, also as a result, benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions that guide data collection and analysis (p. 13).

stemming from the variation in responsibilities and labor obligations associated with each model.

In the next phase of the research, observational analysis provided detailed information about the activities carried out by female domestic workers whose labor is mediated by digital intermediation platforms in the city of Bogotá. These workers commute from their homes to various workplaces using public transportation. This information was then correlated with data analysis from institutional reports on commuting times, the location of bus stops, gender segregation in Bogotá's public transport system, the residential locations of service users in relation to those of the women providing the service, as well as the analysis of scholarly documents on the impact of rating systems in digital labor, and an analysis of laws and their materialization.

These elements, analyzed from a hermeneutic perspective on the labor conditions of women working through digital platforms, based on the concept of "non-places" developed by anthropologist Marc Augé, made it possible to establish that domestic service, administered through digital platforms, pushes female domestic workers toward sterile spaces —hereafter referred to as "aporetic"— that prevent them from claiming their labor rights. This concept is used as the methodological basis that allows comparing information and making a critical diagnosis to establish the relationship between the sample, the collected information, and the established theory.

The proposed hypothesis is that the new forms of intermediation of domestic work conceal dynamics of exploitation that escape the traditional structural logics of labor law in this area and foster precariousness in the lives of domestic workers —and even of users— by transforming the spaces where the experience of labor and work is materialized. This evidences the limits of labor law that leave those who provide this service without protection.

Legal Configuration of the Intermediation between Digital Platforms and Domestic Work

Digital platforms are considered technological tools that enable the development, management, and administration of the resources of a given business; they have transformed supply and demand relationships, and with them, the way services are provided. Thus, new technologies have acted as intermediaries in a market model based on mediation through the use of electronic devices, which establish the connection between the person providing a service and the one needing it. The development of intermediation, as outlined in the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 181 of 1997, can occur primarily in two ways. The first is a third party that does not intervene in an employment relationship but connects the parties. The second is the employer of those who offer a service and make it available to a third person who would not enter into an employment relationship but merely benefits from the service.

In the case of Bogotá D.C., among the platforms offering domestic service-related labor, companies were identified that have developed the various models previously described, each with distinct nuances. Among the platforms analyzed, some operate as intermediaries and classify workers as independent contractors, as seen in the cases of *365 Timbrit* and *Ayda*. Others, such as *Agemser* and *Zolvers*, function as intermediaries that act as employment exchanges, facilitating the hiring process. Finally, some platforms employ workers directly and offer their services to third-party clients.

To better analyze the models developed in digital platforms and domestic service, the contractual model is divided into three stages. Clarifying that platforms can combine services and provide those services in various ways is important; for this reason, three specific models are addressed in general. They will be described in order to determine the nature of the contract that arises between the parties involved.

Intermediation: Female Independent Workers

Several platforms have developed a model based on intermediation between the person who will provide the service and the person who will receive it. This model shifts the responsibility for protection and social security to the worker, who is considered an independent person. This indicates that she is not required to comply with a set schedule, insofar as she can regulate and adjust the application according to her convenience. Remuneration is based on the work performed,

and some platforms retain a percentage of the fee paid for the service. From this analysis, two forms of work management can be identified within this model: **(1) As a source of information and communication.** For example, in the case of *365 Timbrit*, the platform simply serves as a network that enables connection, where the worker can have contact with the client, set prices, and arrange schedules. While this platform is completely free, it charges for a premium account to access better information, but does not intervene in the management or creation of the work. **(2) As a work manager.** Some platforms set prices, establish schedules, and provide training on how to offer the service, which constitutes a way of disguising employment relationships, since “they configure the nature of the work, appropriate its value, and regulate behaviors” (Ferrerira & Nociolini, 2021, p. 3). Similarly, the research shows that although platforms seemingly grant workers the ability to manage their own time, this autonomy is a diffusion of time that deviates from classical labor logics and ultimately serves as a form of concealment. Once the worker accepts a service, her time becomes regulated in terms of arrival and departure. Moreover, the application retains authority to set prices, determine service conditions, implement a rating system, and impose sanctions on workers.

In general terms, the concept of work mediated by digital platforms is problematic. The Ilaw Network (2023) (Legal Assistance Network for Workers) has compiled a database, for the Latin American context, that gathers bills, administrative resolutions, and judicial decisions in this sector. Regarding the latter, a total of 20 court rulings were identified between 2018 and 2022, of which 11 established the existence of an employment relationship between the platform and the worker. The main sectors that have filed claims are transportation, with platforms such as UBER, and the delivery sector. However, the debate is not easy, and legal experts have opted to make a diagnosis regarding the service provided, as each develops in a different field, and the jobs and the sector in which these practices take place may have specific characteristics that differentiate the relationships.

Regarding domestic service, Ferrerira and Nociolini (2021) describe the model implemented by the company *Donamaid*, which operates in Brazil. Through an application, it allows the recruitment of people who work in cleaning, telling them they are their bosses and are independent in managing their time; however, it generates an entire control mechanism, such as prohibiting the sharing of contact information, not using a cell phone at work, and leaving before the agreed time. The worker must check the application at least four times a day, have money for transportation and for the supplies she must bring, and in case of canceling the service, the platform imposes fines.

Similarly, these platforms conceal employment relationships through a rhetoric of autonomy and flexible time management, while undermining the protections guaranteed by labor law, such as wages and social benefits, even in the case of daily employment. This is despite the fact that Decree 1072 of 2015 and related regulations establish the obligation to pay daily social benefits. This creates a dual legal responsibility to the platform offering the service, and to the individual receiving it. Both parties are required to assume responsibility for the payment of benefits to those performing this work through the platforms, given that they exercise the full range of employer powers. In other words, platforms that define the work and determine: (i) obligations, (ii) responsibilities, and (iii) pricing, are effectively meeting the three conditions of an implicit employment contract. In doing so, they are disguising labor relationships, resulting in increased precariousness.

Intermediation: As Managers for the Hiring of Wage Labor

In this model, platforms operate as intermediaries or as an employment exchange for hiring cleaning personnel. Two forms of contracting can be developed: **(1) As a bridge for the formalization of work without intervening in the negotiation:** this is the case of *Zolvers*, which manages workers' information regarding place of residence, available schedules, and connects them with potential employers. In the ILO report, Pereyra, Poblete, and Tizziani (2023) describe the model developed by *Zolvers*, one of the most important companies in Latin America for this sector. It sets a price at the beginning of the relationship, and later, the parties proceed to agree on the labor conditions. In this way, *Zolvers* conducts the selection and registration process for the platform, which, after approval, allows the worker to view the offers approved by the application. Workers apply for the ads, and once accepted, the parties agree on the hiring (Pereyra *et al.*, 2023).

Female Workers with Employment Contracts Directly with the Application

Part of the rationale for hiring workers to perform domestic service relates to the trust involved in allowing people into homes. This leads companies providing these services through platforms to consider it important to build trust through workers, which entails using employment contracts that, based on a series of interviews and documentation requirements, generate and reinforce, through the sanctioning authority of labor law, the duties and obligations that workers must

assume. Even though the worker has an employment contract, she is subject to the demands made through the digital platforms.

The different forms of providing the service through digital platforms show that, although there are several ways to materialize the legal relationship, service configurations are subject to new logics of time and space that blur the understanding of the classic employment contract and impose new forms of exploitation, now subject to precarious discourses that invite the women performing this work into uncertainty about the workplace they must attend daily. This implies numerous difficulties in reaching new spaces, the possibility that the worker may be replaced at any time, and a constant variation of employers who determine her duties, leading to insecurity about responsibilities that may arise in cases of occupational accidents and workplace harassment, among others.

Aporias of the Non-place in the Digital Intermediation of Domestic Service

The previous section examined the legal configuration of labor intermediation to demonstrate the emergence of a new conception in the materialization of domestic service, one that disrupts the foundational assumptions of classical labor law, which is grounded in fixed notions of time and space. As a result, women performing this work are increasingly situated within *non-places*, contributing to the precariousness of their labor. This section shifts the focus to the social transformations brought about by digital intermediation, intending to identify a mutation in the lifeworld of female domestic workers. Specifically, the displacement and redefinition of the spaces where their labor is performed have undergone a process of dissolution. Workers no longer travel to a specific place to provide their services; rather, they are directed toward *non-places*.

In contrast to the “non-place” is the “place,” an anthropological space of belonging, of care, of half-finished conversations that must be resumed and that, over time, generate identity. When female domestic workers have a fixed workplace, the transportation and even the home where they work are configured as a “place” (in the anthropological sense proposed by Augé), but when place disappears, so too does the possibility of creating spaces for dialogue with other workers that generate awareness about labor conditions and experiences. This is not about romanticizing the place as a space that produced well-being for domestic workers, but about bringing to light the loss of culture, history, and relationships that are sacrificed in the name of progress and that give rise to new forms of exploitation.

From the legal diagnosis that configures labor intermediation in domestic service, it can be noted that workers encounter companies that support the possibility of consolidating job offers, which tends toward the formalization of employment and the payment of labor rights. However, this formalization of work is carried out based on the need for the service, which is now controlled, manipulated, and directed by the applications, meaning that the worker finds herself in a continuous change of location and workplace. This, in turn, creates aporias that, as stated, are formed from the configuration of the non-place.

In other words, what is common across the various intermediary companies is precisely the consolidation of the information they manage, which ultimately determines the workspaces where domestic workers are to carry out their tasks, regardless of whether the business model classifies the worker as dependent or independent. The constant fluctuation imposed by the control of information and the need to respond to various service requests—whether the platform acts as a coordinator or as an employer—subjects these women to multiple work scenarios throughout the city. These are navigated precariously, given the fragmented and inadequate public transportation infrastructure.

In light of the above, the purpose of this section is to reveal the diffuse space generated in the socio-legal nature of domestic work, due to the reconfiguration brought about by the intermediation of digital platforms in this field. This reconfiguration is based on the product of super-modernity that Marc Augé calls the “non-place,” which produces aporetic situations that perpetuate exploitation and precariousness. To this end, the study will address three specific aporias, noting that they are not closed, and others may be identified. On this matter, Derrida (1998) states:

I once used the word aporia and proposed a kind of non-passive endurance of the aporia as a condition of responsibility and decision. Aporia rather than antinomy: the word antinomy was to some extent unavoidable, since what was at stake, in the order of the law (*nomos*), were contradictions or antagonisms between equally imperative laws. Here, antinomy deserves rather the name of aporia, insofar as it is neither an “apparent or illusory” antinomy, nor a dialectical contradiction in the Hegelian or Marxist sense, nor even a “transcendental illusion in a Kantian-type dialectic,” but an endless experience. (p. 12).

Thus, the three aporetic situations revealed in this analysis occur in: (1) the immediacy with which workers are connected to users via transactional virtual flows mediated by technology, and the opposition that arises in the material territory in which workers travel through the city of Bogotá, segregated under socioeconomic logics; (2) the productive model of efficiency, sustained through

the numerical rating of technologized work that conceals a discriminatory and exclusionary system against pregnant women, women with disabilities, illness, advanced age, LGBTQ populations, and/or with contingencies stigmatized by social canons. This, due to the constant turnover of personnel, leads to the consolidation of a culture in which workers are considered disposable, as illustrated in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* when describing the experience of the handmaid concerning the wife: “she does not speak to me unless she cannot avoid it. To her, I am a disgrace. And a necessity” (Atwood, 2023, p. 37); and (3) the final aporetic situation occurs in the diffuse space of contemporary law, which is subject to the constant reconfiguration of the subjects involved in the relationship, making identifying labor responsibilities regarding violence and harassment in the world of work impossible.

On the Speed of Virtual Transactions vs. the Slowness of Public Transportation that Segregates the City

Paid domestic work carried out in the city of Bogotá is, for the most part, performed by women living in poverty⁴. This economic condition forces them to inhabit vulnerable areas, far from the residential spaces where the population with purchasing power that requests their services lives. This is because the city of Bogotá—a mirror of large Latin American cities—is structured under logics of segregation and economic stratification. It places domestic service providers, mediated by digital platforms, in an environment of precariousness, resulting from the socio-spatial conditions that reproduce the schemes of territorial exclusion, lacking human-centered planning, and pushing workers to carry out their jobs under yet another form of structural injustice; in this case, spatial injustice.

The lack of equitable planning in public transportation, which addresses the needs of the most vulnerable population, makes it impossible for workers to balance the time dedicated to professionally performed productive work with the time dedicated to reproductive work and personal care, since, in addition to the time spent at their paid jobs, they must endure long commutes on public transportation—both in distance and time, given that Bogotá is one of the most congested cities in the world—to reach their workplaces.

In this analysis, emphasizing another key element is important: digital intermediation platforms are structured under a supply-and-demand model

⁴ According to ECLAC (2023), domestic work is highly feminized, with women accounting for 91.1% of those engaged in this labor in Latin America.

that imposes a rotation pattern in the assignment between the person who will provide the service and the person who will receive it. This scenario may lead domestic workers to attend more than five different services per week in a constant alternation of transportation routes, spaces to intervene in, and clients to serve, which aggravates the situation described above.

Thus, the precariousness of labor guarantees they have, together with the consolidation of socio-spatial segregation in public transportation brought about by the growth of routes without effective and equitable planning, inserts domestic workers —mediated by digital platforms— into situations described here as “aporetic”. The first of these arises from their permanent displacement, where the immediacy with which workers are connected to users via transactional virtual flows —mediated by technology— stands in opposition to the material space in which they move through a fragmented territory under socioeconomic logics.

In this way, the flexibility and speed of the user to assign the service according to their needs, as well as the speed with which the platform assigns the provider who will perform the service, contrast with the following structural components to which the female domestic worker is subjected:

(1) Due to the rotation in the assignment of workplaces —subject to demand— the worker must allocate additional time beyond transportation time and paid work time. In other words, the domestic worker subjected to rotation is unaware of the real time that new public transportation connections and routes will require, as well as the travel time from the nearest transportation stop to the assigned workplace. This adds an extra factor to travel times: planning and anticipating commutes⁵. All of this results in an increase in the time the worker devotes to commuting to work, which is not included in the recognition of her fees.

(2) Due to factor (1), the domestic worker finds it more difficult to reconcile her double working day, productive, as already described, and reproductive. Through caregiving, women weave their territories and establish connections with their families (Rodríguez, 2024). The latter takes place in the home and is arbitrarily assigned due to the historical roles produced by the sexual division of labor, permeated by roles established according to patriarchal schemes, which will

⁵ Conceivably, algorithms could be used to establish territorial parameters that assign services to domestic workers closer to their homes. In cases where the requested service is part-time, another job could be scheduled within a defined radius —measured in meters— to mitigate a structural deficiency in the public transportation system. However, considering the territorial segregation on which the urban structure of Bogotá is built, connecting the places of residence of female domestic workers with the areas of demand would not suffice to overcome the distances faced by a significant portion of the workforce. This is because service demand, often better paid, is generally concentrated in areas far removed from where the workers live.

ultimately cause less presence in the accompaniment and care of their children. This has consequences for the psychosocial development of children, whose vital and academic needs accumulate in the absence of parental support.

The above, combined with the socioeconomic conditions in which the families of female domestic workers live, explains the impossibility of paid external support to cover caregiving needs in their own homes. This creates a vicious circle that prevents the social emancipation of the most vulnerable social classes in Latin America and calls for the deconstruction of the mythologized narrative of meritocracy. There is no possibility of merit for a child when the house that shelters them is empty.

(3) As a result of the last two items presented here, the female domestic worker performing the job in the modality under study suffers a new loss: the familiar faces with whom she shared stories, experiences, and knowledge at the bus stop or on the bus itself, and even the landscapes and facades that signaled the arrival at work. She loses, ultimately, a place because it has been transformed into a *non-place*. And with it, that space of identification that is the mirror that is the other, the one in which injustice normalized became labor and/or social vindication thanks to the guidance of other women who had been through similar conditions. Public transport became a space that sheltered the encounter among women who work in private households, scattered throughout the city.

Domestic workers perform their labor in closed spaces that are not open to the public, which implies a separation that, in many cases, has led to the normalization of oppression. However, in the long public transportation commutes and the trust that comes from habitual encounters, women performing the same type of work can talk about their labor conditions and experiences. These dialogues create relationships of sorority and become improvised sessions of education on salary increases, the obligation to pay annual bonuses, health and pension affiliation, among others. Support networks that, in many cases, were formalized through union membership, and which now vanish in an endless series of relationships, spaces, and events that must be constantly undertaken due to permanent displacement (Niño, 2024).

What the walls concealed, transportation revealed. In the informal sector, it has not been institutions that have most effectively promoted a labor rights pedagogy among domestic workers, but rather the workers themselves, through the exchanges that occurred during the exhausting commutes home on public transportation. It is important to note that, although public transportation will continue to be the primary means of mobility for domestic workers, the rotation system, enabled through digital intermediation, disrupts the cohesion and collective struggles that once existed. The constant change in routes and

schedules erodes the possibility of recognizing a familiar face through repeated encounters, and with it, the trust necessary to share the intimate conditions of one's labor—and life—conditions that become worthy of reclaiming as if they were one's own.

On the Expulsion and Disposability Model, Based on the Quantitative Efficiency Rating

The increase in the sense of disposability among workers has been heightened through the power granted to the user by the impersonal materialization of their selection and evaluation of the service provided, carried out—indeed, even concealed, one might say—through a simple transactional operation within the application. This has had direct consequences on the way the subjectivities that transact outside the digital sphere are conceived: dehumanization sketches—or blurs—identification.

The globalization of media and social networks has brought about profound changes in the lifeworld, in culture. One no longer lives rooted in a specific place, nor even in a shared language. We have shed our cultural garments to embrace a new way of being in the world. We have been detached from the tangible to be elevated into the immaterial. It is the flows and information networks that now provide us with knowledge, certainties, values, and even identity. We live increasingly de-territorialized, adrift. Our *res extensa*, however, is reaffirmed in the market. “A market that, rather than uniting, seeks to standardize”. For it is erected upon and sustained by precariousness and the fragmentation of emergent values. (Viana, 2018, p. 47).

In a culture where the paradigm of knowledge exchange has been replaced by that of economic transaction, value is measured according to efficiency criteria. In this way, under these new parameters, female domestic workers are subjected to evaluations by users after each of the services provided. This becomes a method of optimizing labor. Those workers who do not meet the quantitative measurement criteria established by intermediation platforms will be expelled or, failing that, relegated to low-visibility rankings determined by the efficiency algorithms of the platform itself; this, in turn, reduces their chances of being selected to provide their services. This logic of evaluation means that the worker must give her best every working day, since she is always subjected to constant dynamics that require her to learn about new places, people, tastes, and preferences. Her work is always uncertain or unfamiliar, because while the task itself may be the

same, the conditions under which it is performed are uncertain, and therefore more precarious.

Given the vulnerability and socio-economic precariousness in which female domestic workers are immersed, combined with the power the user has to determine visibility within platform algorithms through their rating—whether expressed quantitatively or qualitatively in the form of an opinion—workers may be forced to accept requests outside the agreed terms, under pressure from the threat of arbitrary reprisals via the user's ability to rate the completed work, a tool to which the worker herself has no access. This new form of intermediation in domestic labor relationships perpetuates, and even exacerbates, hierarchization and segregation.

The capacities that drive the development of these systems and innovations are not necessarily intrinsically brutalizing, but they become so when they operate within certain types of organizing logic. These capacities should have been used to develop the realm of the social, to expand and strengthen the well-being of society, which includes working with the biosphere. Instead, they have almost always been used to dismantle the social through extreme inequality, to destroy much of the middle-class life promised by liberal democracy, to expel the poor and vulnerable from their lands, jobs, and homes, and to expel pieces of the biosphere from their vital space. (Sassen, 2015, p. 15).

The constant turnover of personnel who come to perform the domestic tasks required by the user causes the worker's identity to become disconnected from her labor. This prevents the user from knowing the worker's potential beyond the skills required in the technical execution of her duties. In this way, "soft skills", so highly valued today as distinctive and valuable resources in hiring, are lost due to the establishment of mere technologized transactions. This impoverishes relationships, flattening and shortening them; they are emptied of value and built upon the foundations of dehumanization. Contingencies do not matter, only efficiency does.

This productive model of efficiency, sustained through the numerical rating of technologized labor, conceals a discriminatory model that dehumanizes workers and expels from its ranks pregnant women, those with disabilities, illnesses, members of discriminated and stigmatized populations, the elderly, and LGBTQ+ individuals. This is not only dehumanization, but—as the author of the previous quote points out—expulsion, even when disguised as inclusion.

That is, while from a formal perspective this population group may be included in the labor pool, user ratings ultimately expel them from service assignment. Evaluation criteria are not limited solely to efficiency parameters, but also to subjective assessments in which socially accepted and established normative standards mediate the rating given. This results in workers in the labor pool being excluded from assignments because the algorithm excludes them due to low ratings. Thus, a new aporetic situation emerges.

We are witnessing systematic discrimination in intermediation against those women who are not in a peak stage of productivity or who do not meet socially accepted standards, making it impossible to provide them with labor, legal, and social protection that would shelter them in their vulnerable situation. As Monique Witting (2005) points out, women, though visible as sexual beings, still —despite all efforts— remain invisible as social beings. Finally, women often accept and endure precarious conditions due to being in situations of greater vulnerability (Garavito *et al.*, 2023).

Labor Relations in the *Non-place*: on the Diffuse Space of Legal Regulation in Labor Relations in the *Non-place*

Labor law emerged at the beginning of the 20th century in Latin America out of the need to differentiate itself from other legal systems, especially from relationships of a civil nature. Labor regulations are largely based on the intrinsic relationship of time and space between employer and worker, which allows for the functioning of the labor market relationship system.

However, digital transformation dissolves the essential elements upon which the employment contract was traditionally constituted and, at the same time, makes it impossible to discern the application of the employment reality test. The negative impact of the *non-place* can not only lead to the disregard of the employment relationship but also erase the rights that are protected and can no longer be made visible. First, the power of direction is fragmented into multiple wills, which results in increased labor exploitation. Second, erasing the employment relationship as the personal provision of services in a specific place generates new challenges in the identification of risks such as workplace and sexual harassment, and unforeseeable occupational hazards. Each of these is described below.

(1) The fragmentation of subordinating powers: women thrown into these relationships do not find a clear figure of direction, but rather several actors who evaluate their function and, therefore, control the activity. Erasing a clear figure of the employer has repercussions for the construction of legal institutions,

such as para-subordination and related norms (as is the case in Italian legislation); various theorists maintain that self-employed workers, even without the element of subordination, have labor rights. For Vasconcelos (2021), this figure is nothing more than a disguise to avoid recognizing the full extent of labor rights. However, what is relevant about this institution is not the quality of the worker since, in the Colombian case, most platforms hire workers directly, and others risk labor lawsuits, given that Colombian legislation has been clear regarding domestic service work. Therefore, para-subordination is relevant because it reveals the transformation of the employer into employers, fragmenting the subordinating power for the provision of the service. This results in increased exploitation, as workers are subjected to endless changes in the performance of their work, requiring a constant flow of orders depending on the place they must go, which pushes their capacities to the limit.

The *workplace*, unlike the *non-place*, generates decent work that entails learning and appropriation, which can be materialized through relationships of trust. However, the endless configuration of relationships in the *non-place* generates abuse of capacities, forcing the worker to accept arbitrary clauses and adapt to jobs that do not allow her to build a safe environment for training and seeking new opportunities.

This overexploitation does not mean that domestic work does not require training and techniques for its performance, but rather that the *non-place* subjects women to various moods, dispositions, and spaces they do not recognize and that may intimidate them.

(2) The direct provision of the service in the non-place: in the *non-place*, risks arise that cannot be foreseen and controlled by a company when activating prevention, sanction, and reparation mechanisms. Specifically, female domestic workers may be subjected to forms of violence and harassment at work that go unnoticed in their suffering and may not even be recognized by legal systems, since, although the ILO contemplates in *Convention 190* the possibility of violence and harassment by third parties, this is not recognized in Colombia. Furthermore, *Law 1010 of 2006* does not consider these figures outside the employment relationship; for its part, the Constitutional Court has recognized some cases, such as harassment of contractors, but not by third parties involved in the employment relationship.

The performance of work can also be exposed to countless occupational hazards arising from the structure of the *non-place*. The *place* allows for the trust of the known, of human relationships; in the *non-place* there is no such predictability, and the female domestic worker does not know what risks may arise in the place where she is to perform her duties: illnesses due to inadequate hygiene in certain locations, or carrying out activities that involve the use of

dangerous materials, among others. The worker goes to the *non-place* with the possibility of encountering serious difficulties that cannot be foreseen. In Colombia, the implementation of the General System of Occupational Safety and Health implies that employers know each space that can increase risk possibilities. The *non-place* does not allow for this; companies are not in a position to conduct prior studies of the spaces where the worker will perform her duties, which is why her functions are exposed.

Conclusions

The increase in demand for the services offered by domestic work intermediary companies in Bogotá responds to the needs arising from the social, spatial, and economic transformations that have been taking place in recent decades. Despite technological advances, the legal configuration is still manifested under the assumptions of the classic employment contract, which inevitably leads to the generation of *non-places* that produce aporias, which in turn foster the exploitation of reproductive labor.

While innovation in this form of intermediation has been observed to generate positive effects, such as a tendency toward the formalization of domestic work, which has historically been relegated to informality, the conditions of domestic workers under this relationship remain precarious, with a tendency toward segregation. They are subjected to new logics of exclusion, which have contributed to generating situations of incongruity referred to in this article as “the aporias emerging from the *non-place* of female domestic workers”. These aporias will continue to be sustained under similar models, insofar as the form remains transitory, ephemeral, agile, fast, and imbued with a sense of dispensability.

Care must be exercised around relationships of recognition, which arise in anthropological spaces; otherwise, workers are pushed to inhabit “non-historical” spaces, where time erases their trace in history, thereby annihilating their condition as historical subjects. This is why the only way out of the aporias is a radical understanding and appreciation of what reproductive labor entails, insofar as if this labor—based on the reproduction of the human species and the maintenance and care of life—continues to be compartmentalized with distinctions such as domestic service, unpaid household work, care work, among others, its impact on the construction of society is concealed, and different people, especially women, will not feel part of the same exploitation.

However, if reproductive labor is to be regulated in its total impact, with the protections afforded by the framework of decent labor law, it would necessarily lead to a dignified life both for the one receiving care and the one providing it. This would produce a dignified environment involving all members of society and allow for a substantial transformation, dissolving the aporetic contexts.

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Labor Informality in Private Police Forces in Mexico*

[English Version]

La informalidad laboral en las policías privadas de México

A informalidade laboral nas polícias privadas do México

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Abstract

Objective: To examine labor informality in private police forces in Mexico based on the results of the National Survey of Occupation and Employment, published quarterly by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography. **Methodology:** To understand its transformation, data from 2012 to 2024 are analyzed, and to deepen the study of the

phenomenon, various socioeconomic variables are examined using the results from the third quarter of 2024. **Results:** The findings show an increase in the number of people working in this sector as a consequence of the growing demand for security in the country, but they also reveal high levels of labor informality, which are particularly acute among guards and doormen in private households, and among individuals with vulnerabilities associated with gender, age, schooling, among others. This informality, in addition to directly affecting individuals' economic conditions, triggers other social problems that intensify among populations with greater vulnerabilities and deepen existing inequalities. **Conclusions:** The conclusions drawn for Mexico are contrasted with a review of the literature on this phenomenon in other Latin American countries,

* Institute of Social Research, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Research associated with the project "Private Police Forces in Mexico", code 124263. Funding: Funded by the Institute of Social Research, UNAM. Declaration of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest. Availability of Data: All relevant data are included in the article.

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contributing to the discussion on labor informality in this sector, which constitutes a regional social problem.

Keywords: police; privatization; labor informality; working conditions; criminology (obtained from the UNESCO Thesaurus).

Resumen

Objetivo: estudiar la informalidad laboral en las policías privadas en México a partir de los resultados de la Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo, que publica trimestralmente el Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía.

Metodología: para comprender su transformación, se analizan los datos del 2012 al 2024 y, para profundizar en el estudio del fenómeno, se estudian distintas variables socioeconómicas a partir de los resultados del tercer trimestre de 2024.

Resultados: se muestra el incremento de las personas que laboran en este sector como consecuencia de la demanda de mayor seguridad en el país, pero también se evidencian altos niveles de informalidad laboral, que se agudizan mayormente en los vigilantes y porteros en casas particulares, en las personas con vulnerabilidades asociadas al género, la edad, la escolaridad, entre otros. Esta informalidad, además de afectar directamente la economía de las personas, desencadena otros problemas sociales que se exacerban en la población con mayores vulnerabilidades, y profundiza las desigualdades. **Conclusiones:** las conclusiones de México se contrastan con la revisión de literatura de este fenómeno en otros países de América Latina, y permite abonar a la discusión sobre la informalidad laboral en este sector, que es un problema social en la región.

Palabras clave: policía; privatización; informalidad laboral; condiciones de trabajo; criminología (obtenidos del tesauro de la UNESCO).

Resumo

Objetivo: estudar a informalidade laboral nas polícias privadas no México a partir dos resultados da Pesquisa Nacional de Ocupação e Emprego, publicada trimestralmente pelo Instituto Nacional de Estatística e Geografia. **Metodologia:** para compreender sua transformação, analisam-se os dados de 2012 a 2024 e, para aprofundar o estudo do fenômeno, diferentes variáveis socioeconômicas são examinadas com base nos resultados do terceiro trimestre de 2024. **Resultados:** observa-se o aumento do número de pessoas que trabalham nesse setor como consequência da demanda por

maior segurança no país, mas também se evidenciam altos níveis de informalidade laboral, que se acentuam especialmente entre vigilantes e porteiros em residências particulares, e entre pessoas com vulnerabilidades associadas ao gênero, idade, escolaridade, entre outros. Essa informalidade, além de afetar diretamente a situação econômica das pessoas, desencadeia outros problemas sociais que se agravam na população com maiores vulnerabilidades e aprofundam as desigualdades. **Conclusões:** as conclusões referentes ao México são contrastadas com a revisão da literatura sobre esse fenômeno em outros países da América Latina, contribuindo para a discussão sobre a informalidade laboral nesse setor, que constitui um problema social na região.

Palavras-chave: polícia; privatização; informalidade laboral; condições de trabalho; criminologia (obtidos do tesouro da UNESCO)..

Introduction

Being a police officer is considered high-risk work, particularly in a country like Mexico. Statistics compiled by civil society organizations show that in recent years thousands of police officers have been killed, on average one per day (Causa en Común, 2023), in addition to other risks associated with police duties.

One of the main reasons people choose to become police officers is that they view it as an employment alternative to meet their economic needs, and as a source of stability and benefits that could improve their quality of life and that of their families. The National Survey of Police Professional Standards and Training (ENECAP) (2017) shows that 36.5% chose to become police officers due to “economic need or unemployment,” and 6.8% because they were “seeking economic stability” (INEGI, 2018). However, although the income of formal police officers in some cases allows them to cover basic needs such as food and housing, it is not sufficient to fully pay for expenses such as clothing and footwear, medical services, school costs, savings, among others. Paradoxically, even though policing is essential for society, police officers in Mexico earn precarious wages. This situation is even more frequent and severe among private police forces, whose income levels are generally lower than those of public police institutions. Compounding this, the sector is characterized by persistent labor informality.

In this study, private police forces are understood as “[...] private corporations that, operating as companies and under market logic, offer security services in exchange for financial remuneration” (Jasso, 2025, p. 143), some of which are formal and others informal. However, “[...] there are also individuals or groups who, on their own, carry out surveillance functions in more limited settings, such as streets, buildings, or small businesses, in exchange for payment in a more informal manner” (Jasso, 2025, p. 143).

Labor informality is more pronounced in private police forces. In addition to generally earning less than public police officers, labor informality in this sector has exceeded 75% in some of its modalities, in contrast to Mexico’s national average informality rate (55%) (INEGI, 2023c). As a result, the services provided to the public do not guarantee that personnel are adequately trained and equipped, and their social rights are undermined. This affects the quality of life of individuals who have no alternative but to work under these informal and vulnerable conditions. Evidence shows that “[...] workers in the informal economy work in this way mainly out of necessity, not by choice” (Espejo, 2022, p. 13).

The main source of information is the National Survey of Occupation and Employment (ENOE, for its Spanish acronym), conducted quarterly by

the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, for its Spanish acronym). Among other variables, ENOE measures labor informality in occupations related to private security. The analysis and results are compared with findings from the literature and empirical evidence, particularly in Latin America, where the growth of private police forces and labor informality are also persistent issues.

The analysis begins with a theoretical framework on labor informality as a social phenomenon, followed by an examination of private police forces in Latin America, considering the various effects of labor informality on their lives and the vulnerabilities associated with it as both cause and consequence. Regarding Mexico, using ENOE results, the study analyzes longitudinal growth from 2012 to 2024 and examines a range of socioeconomic variables based on the results of the third quarter of 2024 (INEGI, 2024). Among other factors, the analysis explores who these security guards are, their main characteristics and vulnerabilities, age, income, and education level, and examines labor informality across the different states of the country. Finally, public narratives surrounding this phenomenon are explored, and the study concludes by outlining proposals aimed at informing public policy design.

Labor Informality

Labor informality is a concept that emerged in the 1970s and was coined based on the anthropological studies of Keith Hart, while the concept of the “informal economy” was not officially endorsed by the ILO until 2015 (Espejo, 2022). Historically, it is a social phenomenon that affects millions of people worldwide, undermining their ability to meet basic needs, generating unfavorable conditions, and overall harming their quality of life. It is considered “[...] a product of social inequality in Latin America” (Rubio, 2018, p. 18), a “structural characteristic” (Espejo, 2022, p. 7) of the region, which primarily affects people’s economies and triggers other social problems, problems that are exacerbated among populations facing greater vulnerabilities.

In turn, it functions as a cycle that deepens inequalities. People with limited possibilities of accessing formal employment enter informality as “[...] a way to overcome poverty” (Rubio, 2018, p. 20). It has become “[...] the alternative to unemployment for poor sectors” (Espejo, 2022, p. 10), yet this option rarely provides stability and may instead bring additional problems and complications into their lives.

The literature shows that labor informality is associated with “[...] gender, socioeconomic, ethnic and racial, age-related, and especially territorial inequalities” (Espejo, 2022, p. 7). The vulnerabilities that have been studied function as both cause and consequence, as labor informality increases workplace risks (Rubio, 2018). Poor or inadequate working conditions may lead to accidents or illnesses which, paradoxically, cannot be properly addressed in the public health system due to the lack of benefits such as social security, thereby affecting the economic situation and stability of families.

Labor informality also has effects on a nation’s economy. Over time, it has consolidated as “[...] an endemic feature of our labor markets” (ILO, 2022, p. 7). Economically, it affects “[...] regulatory evasion or the hidden economy, and it is quantified as a latent variable (as a percentage of GDP)” (Rubio, 2018, p. 19). Its economic impact can be significant.

To understand the situation in Latin America, it is relevant to consider the view that “labor informality” is “[...] a result of the functioning of peripheral capitalism” (Espejo, 2022, p. 10), and therefore has a greater impact than in other regions of the world.

In Latin America, the history of labor informality has been persistent. “61% of the jobs created in the 1990s were informal” (Espejo, 2022, p. 12), and by 2022, ILO data show that “[...] the regional informality rate (average of 11 countries) is nearly 50 percent” (ILO, 2022, p. 18). Although informality has decreased, it remains high, as the phenomenon manifests through “exclusion and escape factors,” and is associated with “deficiencies in social policy” (Espejo, 2022, p. 13).

In Mexico, informality has also been a persistent issue. INEGI (2014) explains that “informality” is “[...] the set of economic activities carried out by individuals who, due to the context in which they do them, cannot invoke the corresponding legal or institutional framework in their favor” (p. 26).

INEGI data (2023c) show that in 2022 “[...] the informal economy contributed 24.4% of national GDP at current prices”. The sector with the highest levels of informality has been retail trade (43.7% in 2022), followed by the construction sector and manufacturing industry (24.5% and 12.8%, respectively) (INEGI, 2023c). However, some occupations related to private security have reached even higher percentages.

Literature Review on Labor Informality in Private Police Forces in Latin America

Labor informality is a phenomenon replicated within private police forces across Latin America. This is largely due to the increased social demand for this type of security, which has resulted in exponential growth in recent years, and in some countries has led to unequal dynamics, where private police forces even outnumber public police institutions (Kinosian & Bosworth, 2018).

There are companies, groups, and individuals who offer private security services and who, for various social or economic reasons, operate outside the legal framework and under conditions of labor informality. It is estimated that labor informality in this sector is also driven by “[...] the lack of information and of a centralized registry of activities” (Pérez, 2018, p. 131) on the part of governments, which have been overwhelmed by the phenomenon. Other studies have found that regulatory bodies have limited structure and insufficient capacity to carry out necessary oversight tasks (Jasso, 2025).

Understanding the magnitude and characteristics of labor informality in Latin America is difficult due to:

[...] the large number of private security services that are under-invoiced and/or belong to the informal economy, this is a problem in most countries of the region. Therefore, there is no real knowledge of the scale and growth rate of informality in this market, even though various reports estimate that it reaches nearly 50% of all services provided in most countries of the region. (Frigo cited in Pérez, 2018, p. 132. Own translation).

The literature on this phenomenon in Latin America generally shows that it is a problem in most countries of the region (Pérez, 2018, p. 132). However, the analysis is not homogeneous: While some countries recognize this social phenomenon as a historical issue (Losa, 2018) and have public databases that enable different levels of analysis, in others, information is fragmented. As a result, diagnoses and public policy proposals differ, as illustrated below.

In Uruguay, it is stated that “[...] the private security business has historically had a high level of informality and virtually nonexistent oversight” (Losa, 2018, p. 1), which led to efforts to strengthen inspection mechanisms.

In Nicaragua, it is seen as a current and growing issue. It has been found that “[...] concepts such as ‘informal work’ and ‘precariousness’ have increasingly taken root in existing labor conditions” (Mora *et al.*, 2023, p. 7). Meanwhile, in Ecuador, differences are observed in the provision of security services depending

on whether they are offered in formal or informal contexts and on the economic capacity of those who pay for the service:

Thus, while formal private guarding companies [...] provide services to banks, formal commerce, gated neighborhoods, and certain state offices, informal companies serve low-income sectors, reproducing the same problems of informality observed in other sectors of the country. (Carrión, 2006, p. 1. Own translation).

A study in Costa Rica documents that private security work is carried out by Nicaraguan migrants under conditions of informality. They are referred to as “Guachimanes,” and are hired informally, accepting precarious conditions due to their irregular migration status.

Despite these conditions, this informal work has been essential for migrants in Costa Rica. For seven out of ten respondents, “[...] income from informal private security work is their main source of livelihood” (Mora *et al.*, 2023, p. 10). Furthermore, two out of five respondents “[...] mentioned that their first job in Costa Rica was in private security” (Mora *et al.*, 2023, p. 11). These jobs can last many years; the study found individuals with more than twenty years in the sector. Most work an average of 12 hours per day, with some working 13 hours or more (Mora *et al.*, 2023).

Other social vulnerabilities also push them to accept these informal conditions. In Costa Rica, it was identified that private police officers “[...] are mostly young people who, combined with their irregular migration status, find in informality a primary source of income through private security services” (Mora *et al.*, 2023, p. 16).

In Colombia, it has been observed that because “[...] most verification and control efforts fall on legal companies and not on illegal ones, the cost associated with illegality is very low” (Pérez, 2018, p. 132). A similar pattern is found in other countries, where the costs of informal hiring are lower and, therefore, more attractive for those seeking private security services.

Additionally, a study aimed at “[...] identifying the variables that influence the informal provision of residential private security services” (Martínez, 2021, p. 7) examined a specific Bogotá neighborhood. It was found that this long-standing problem emerged in response to the demand for security and rising violence in the 1960s, and remains relevant today.

The findings show that the 40 informal workers in this residential neighborhood pay for their own social security and work 24-hour shifts every other day (Martínez, 2021, pp. 52-53). And although Colombia has regulatory frameworks for private security, “[...] neither clients nor established actors show significant

interest in complying with what the State requires” (Martínez, 2021, p. 57). It is even suggested that “[...] the informal provision of private security services constitutes, in itself, a substitute service threat as it displaces legal companies” (Martínez, 2021, p. 57).

Variables influencing informal service provision include: lack of educational opportunities, labor conditions that generate financial benefit for clients, economic support to friends or family through hiring, limited opportunities in the city, and economic need (Martínez, 2021, pp. 64-66).

In Buenos Aires, Argentina, research shows the proliferation of private police across multiple spaces: “[...] private security personnel guarding recreational venues such as football matches, shopping centers, both enclosed and open-air, banking institutions, educational centers, and even the least expected sectors” (Page & Glanc, 2024, p. 343).

As in other countries of the region, informality is a constant: “[...] many companies operate clandestinely, without regulation, and their private guards [...] are ‘off-the-books’ workers, or under an unregistered employment relationship, with low wages, poor working conditions, and lacking state oversight and protection” (Page & Glanc, 2024, p. 346).

The most significant contribution of Page and Glanc (2024) is their demonstration that informality in private police forces results in the precarization of their lives, with low wages that force them to take additional jobs, which may even fall into illegality, and leaving them without prospects for upward mobility. The lives of private police officers “[...] are characterized by impoverishment and vulnerability” (p. 348): they travel long distances to work, have little free time, reside in low-income neighborhoods, rely on loans to meet basic needs, and become trapped in cycles of debt that “[...] cannot be separated from their life histories” (p. 353). As one interviewee stated, it is “[...] a debt cycle that is difficult to escape” (p. 354).

Moreover, organizational dynamics within private police forces can contribute to labor informality. Spekuljak (2024) proposes the concept of the “proletarian amalgam of guards,” referring to the additional tasks and activities that guards regularly perform beyond security work. Through this, clients obtain more services and further exploit workers.

In summary, throughout Latin America, labor informality in private police forces is fueled by the vulnerabilities of the population, lower levels of education, older age, limited experience, irregular migration status, among others. In turn, it generates other conditions of vulnerability and precarization that affect quality of life, some of which become nearly permanent.

Methodology

This research is primarily quantitative. Using descriptive statistics, it analyzes labor informality in private security in Mexico, its variation over time, and the socioeconomic characteristics of individuals who work informally in this activity. The main source of information is the National Survey of Occupation and Employment (ENOE, for its Spanish acronym), carried out quarterly by INEGI, which has produced these estimates since 2002, when it “[...] presented to the Delhi Group the first exercise for estimating informal employment” (INEGI, 2014, p. 2).

The definition of “labor informality” guiding this study is that of INEGI, which, in line with the International Labour Organization (ILO) consensus, understands informality from the labor perspective as:

[...] all work carried out without the protection of the corresponding legal or institutional framework, regardless of whether the economic unit using the labor is an unregistered household business or a formal enterprise; therefore, the term ‘informal employment’ applies. (INEGI, 2014, p. 6. Own translation).

The analysis examines two categories: “guards and watchmen in establishments” and “guards and doormen in private households,” which correspond to the provision of private security and surveillance services included in Division 5: Personal Services and Surveillance Workers.

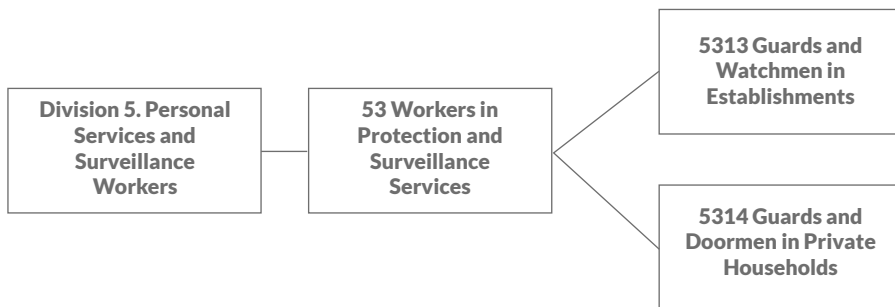


Figure 1. *Classification of personal services and surveillance workers (ENOE).*

Source: author’s elaboration based on INEGI data (2019).

The study examines longitudinal changes in the percentage of labor informality in both categories from 2012 to 2024, considering all four quarters of each year. This component relies on the systematization developed by the Secretariat of Economy (2025) on the platform “*Data México. Perfiles*”, which allows exploration of occupational data derived from the ENOE.

A more in-depth analysis focuses on ENOE results for the third quarter of 2024 (INEGI, 2024). Among other variables, the characteristics of individuals working in these occupations are explored and compared, comprising 3,056 “guards and watchmen in establishments” and 98 “guards and doormen in private households”. The sample size is undoubtedly a limitation, but it offers an approach to socioeconomic indicators. This analysis is relevant given that the ILO has found higher levels of informality among women, younger and older populations, and in territorial terms, in rural areas (Espejo, 2022).

Complementarily, this research incorporates qualitative analysis through the review of academic literature and open sources on labor informality in private police forces, in order to contrast the quantitative findings. Public narratives regarding this issue in Mexico are also examined, with the aim of identifying short- and medium-term perspectives for public policy development.

Results

Over time, the number of people working in private security in Mexico has clearly increased, most likely in response to society’s growing demand for security. Their presence is visible across a variety of public and private spaces, yet the exact number of individuals employed in this industry remains unknown.

Some estimates suggest that private police forces in Mexico exceed one million people, and that around 10% of them are armed (Barragán, 2020). Official measurements, such as those from the National Census of State Public Security, indicate that by the end of 2022 there were 149,939 individuals employed in private security (INEGI, 2023b). However, other sources such as the ENOE, used in this study, report significantly higher figures.

The following pages present the research results. The analysis focuses on labor informality. The initial sections examine the phenomenon of private police forces, explaining their growth and characteristics, such as gender, income, and education, elements that help contextualize labor informality, which is explored in

depth through quantitative data and through an examination of public narratives surrounding the phenomenon.

The Increase in Private Security Guards

The number of private security service providers has increased over time. “Guards and watchmen in establishments” (hereafter “guards in establishments”) rose from 687,582 individuals in 2012 to 887,899 in 2024. Meanwhile, “guards and doormen in private households” (hereafter “guards in households”) decreased from 26,853 to 22,184 over the same period. Altogether, 910,083 people work in this occupation (INEGI, 2024).

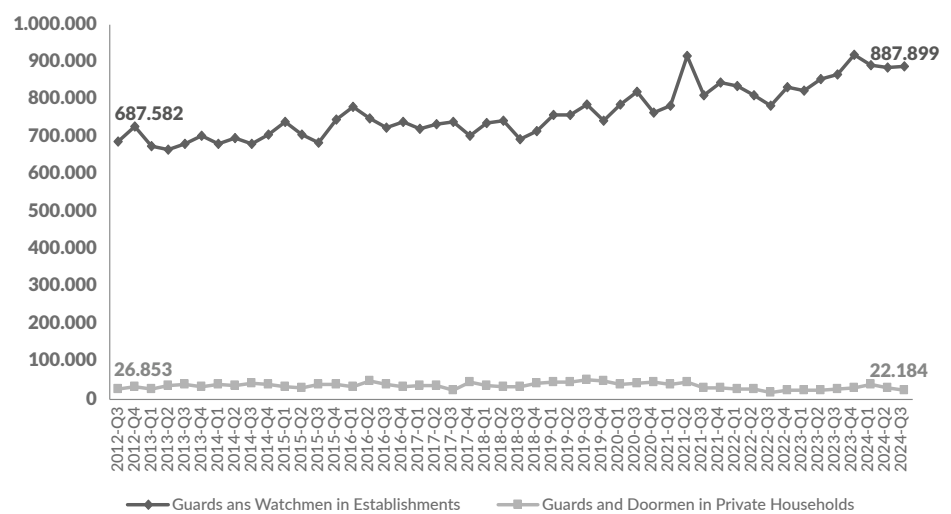


Figure 2. Guards in establishments and in private households, 2012-2024.

Source: Author’s elaboration based on ENOE 2012–2024 and Secretariat of Economy (2025).

Regarding the “guards in households” occupation, it is likely that the actual figures are much higher than those reported by ENOE, considering that ENVIPE 2023 showed that 1.6% of households nationwide reported hiring private security, equivalent to approximately 619,863 households (INEGI, 2023a).

Who Are the Individuals Working in Private Security?

As in other occupations related to the security and justice sectors, men outnumber women. In 2024, among guards in establishments, 83.4% were men and 16.6% women; among guards in households, 98.4% were men and 1.55% women (INEGI, 2024). Male predominance in the sector is evident, though not as extreme as in some countries like Argentina, where in 2011 an estimated 92% were men, combined with “low levels of formal education” (Page & Glanc, 2024, p. 347).

This gender difference is noteworthy, especially given that according to the 2023 National Census of State Public Security, by the end of 2022, of the 149,939 individuals working in private security, 24.2% (36,333) were women. In principle, female participation appears lower in private security than in public security institutions, where 38% of personnel are women (INEGI, 2023b). This may be due to social benefits, which tend to be higher in public security positions than in private ones (particularly informal private security), and which are among the main incentives for women to join these occupations.

On a positive note, the same census shows that 33% of managerial positions in private security are held by women. This contrasts with public security, where out of thousands of positions, only 33 women hold the rank of commissioner and 353 the rank of inspector (INEGI, 2023b), a significantly smaller proportion occupying high-ranking roles.

Regarding age, ENOE shows evidence of minors working as private security guards. Although the percentage does not exceed 1%, such cases reveal life trajectories marked by vulnerability at a very early age.

Older adults are also employed in this sector: 17.2% of guards in establishments are 60 years or older, with some individuals over 80 still working. Among guards in households, 25.5% are 60 or older (INEGI, 2024).

As age increases, labor informality also rises. The most extreme case is among guards in households, where informality affects 90% of those aged 75 or older.

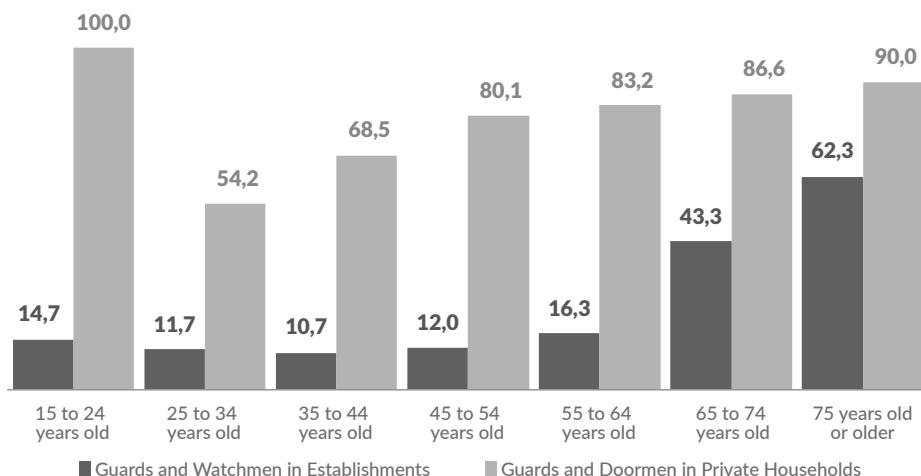


Figure 3. Labor informality among security guards by age (%), 2024..

Source: Author's elaboration based on ENOE 3T-2024 and Secretariat of Economy (2025).

Guards in establishments reported an average of 9.82 years of schooling, most having completed basic education (24% primary, 23.2% secondary) and fewer having completed upper secondary education (17.8%). However, 5.4% indicated they cannot read or write a simple message, and 3.1% reported no schooling at all. Guards in households have even lower levels of education, averaging 8.65 years of schooling.

There is a clear relationship: lower educational attainment corresponds to higher levels of labor informality in private security. Among guards in households, those with 0 to 3 years of schooling experience a 99% informality rate.

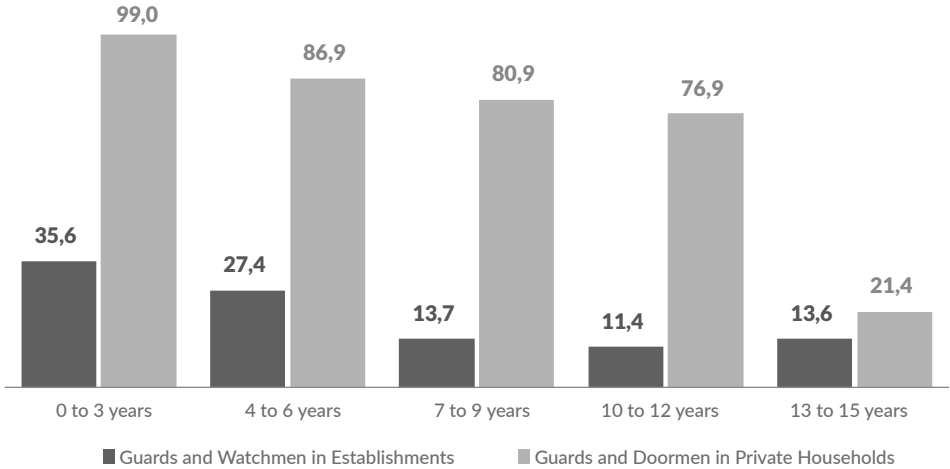


Figure 4. Labor informality among security guards by years of schooling (%), 2024.

Source: Author's elaboration based on ENOE 3T-2024 and Secretariat of Economy (2025).

Another relevant finding is that some guards report being enrolled in school. This likely indicates that private security work may be temporary, helping them subsidize expenses while they pursue studies that might later allow them to access better employment opportunities.

Regarding marital status, most guards live with a partner: 29.5% are married, 11.3% live in consensual union, and 36.6% are single. This is relevant considering the expenses they must cover with their private security income, especially when supporting dependents. While some have no children (15.5%), most have between one and three (22.9%), and some reported four or more.

In terms of contracts, 80% of guards in establishments reported having a written contract, of which 19.4% stated it was temporary or for specific tasks. Among guards in households, only 22.4% reported having a written contract, consistent with the high levels of informality in this occupation.

Regarding benefits, survey results show that among guards in establishments, 85.4% receive a year-end bonus, 76.2% paid vacation leave, and 21% profit sharing. However, 10% reported receiving no benefits at all. The situation is more severe among guards in households, where 36.7% reported receiving no benefits.

With respect to weekly hours worked, very few work 40 hours or fewer. Most have long workdays, and 36.5% work 72 hours or more per week. This

implies 12-hour shifts or longer, for six or even seven consecutive days. ENOE data show that 16.8% work seven days a week, and 46.4% work six.

Regarding place of residence, ENOE data show that 1.3% of guards in establishments had recently moved to their current residence, similar to national figures, but for guards in households, the proportion rises to 3.1%. This suggests recent migrants joining the private security workforce, an important finding given the vulnerability hypothesis, which includes migration status (Mora et al., 2023). It also aligns with the view that “[...] the place where individuals reside or work can directly influence their chances of finding formal employment” (Espejo, 2022, p. 5). When asked why they moved, most respondents reported moving to reunite with family; second, due to insecurity and violence; and third, to seek employment.

Regarding workplaces, ENOE shows that most guards in establishments work in support services and schools. Guards in households are typically found in residential areas monitoring access to gated streets, using gates or barriers, or working inside buildings, either in guard stations with video surveillance or outdoors. However, as other studies have shown, such guards are becoming increasingly common and can be found nearly everywhere, even in unexpected locations (Page & Glanc, 2024).

As observed, vulnerabilities emerge clearly when analyzing the socio-economic characteristics and labor conditions of this population working in private security services.

Security Guard Income

On average, security guards earn low wages, even though income has increased over time. For guards in households, conditions are worse across most states.

In the fourth quarter of 2023, guards in establishments earned an average of MX\$6,130, whereas guards in households earned MX\$4,730. Both are low considering the prevailing costs of basic needs. By the third quarter of 2024 the pattern changed: guards in establishments earned MX\$6,941.6 on average, while guards in households earned MX\$7,872.7. This shift is largely due to states such as Nuevo León and Baja California Sur, where earnings for guards in households increased significantly, likely linked to high-income residential areas with higher security needs.

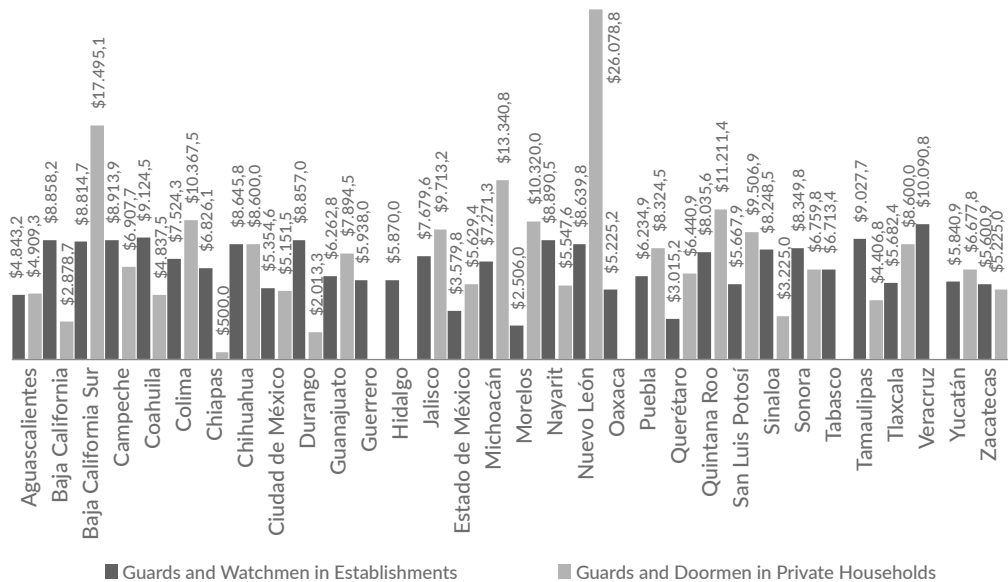


Figure 5. Monthly income of guards in establishments and guards in private households.

Source: Author’s elaboration based on ENOE 3T–2024 and Secretariat of Economy (2025).

Note: Income data for guards in households are not available (N/A) in Veracruz, Tabasco, Guerrero, Hidalgo, and Oaxaca.

Income in Mexico contrasts with those in other countries. In Argentina, “[...] the monthly base salary for general guards working 40 hours per week, without seniority, in August 2017 was 10,975 pesos (638 USD)” (Page & Glanc, 2024, p. 349).

Examining wages for guards in establishments across states reveals substantial variation. The highest earnings are in Veracruz (MX\$10,090.8), whereas in the State of Mexico, Querétaro, and Morelos, wages fall below MX\$4,000 per month.

Among guards in households, the highest wages are found in Nuevo León (MX\$26,078.8), Baja California Sur (MX\$17,495.1), and Michoacán (MX\$13,340.8). In contrast, Baja California, Durango, and Chiapas report wages below MX\$3,000 per month, so low they are insufficient for basic living.

Beyond wage differences across categories of private security, differences between formal and informal employment are also notable. In 2024, ENOE reported that informal guards in establishments earned an average of MX\$6,110.8, while those formally employed earned MX\$11,298.6 per month (INEGI, 2024).

International research shows that low wages are sometimes accompanied by penalties. In Argentina, “[...] private security companies do not pay salaries on time, do not fully comply with collective bargaining agreements, and guards report unjustified deductions” (Page & Glanc, 2024, p. 357). It is likely that similar practices occur in Mexico, especially among more vulnerable populations working under informal or illegal arrangements. In household-guarding scenarios where a group of neighbors hires a guard, there is also the possibility that these neighbors fail to pay dues on time, resulting in delayed or incomplete salaries.

As for how these earnings are used, “[...] private guards’ income and consumption are mostly dedicated to covering basic needs such as food, health, and housing” (Page & Glanc, 2024, p. 357). Yet, considering ENOE-reported wages, these incomes are clearly insufficient.

Labor Informality

In addition to the vulnerabilities, low wages, and illegal conditions under which a significant portion of private police officers in Mexico work, there is the phenomenon of labor informality, which affects this population to an even greater extent.

ENOE data show that in the third quarter of 2024, labor informality among guards in establishments was 15.4%, whereas among guards in private households it reached 80.9%. This exceeds the national labor informality rate, which during the same period was 54.6%.

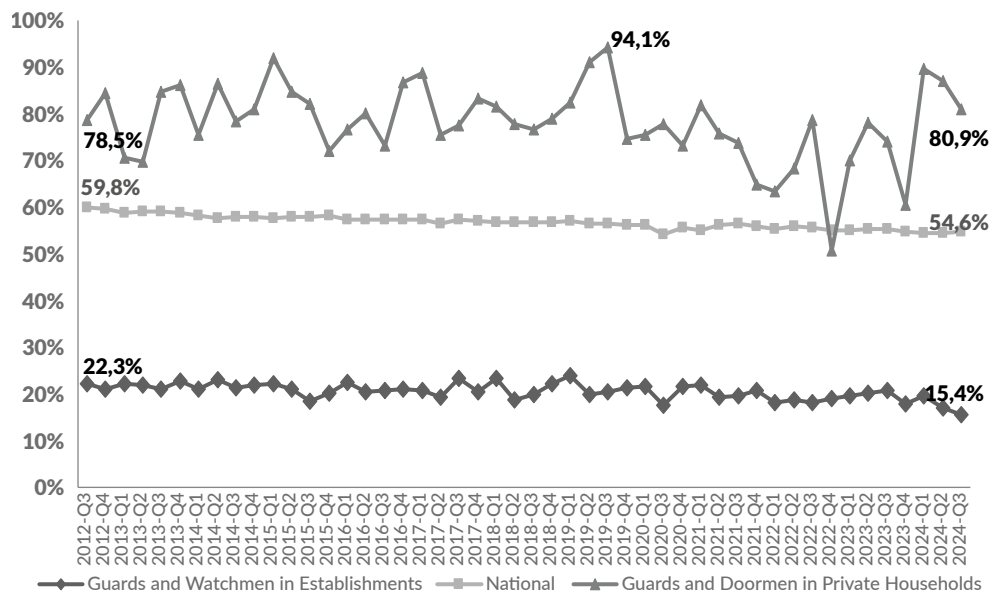


Figura 6. Labor informality rate, national and private security guards in Mexico (2012–2024)

Source: Author's elaboration based on ENOE 2012–2024 and Secretariat of Economy (2025).

The graph highlights that historically, labor informality among guards in households has been higher than the national rate (with the exception of the fourth quarter of 2022). A notable case is the third quarter of 2019, when labor informality affected nearly all guards in households. According to the organization ASUME, “[...] in residential areas, the cheapest services are paid, and this is where informality is highest. People are placed as watchmen without training and often without even a uniform” (cited in Barragán, 2020, p. 1).

On average, labor informality among private police forces in Mexico stands at 48.1% (INEGI, 2024), higher than estimates in other countries. “In Argentina, 45% of workers are in informal employment” (Page & Glanc, 2024, p. 346). This is certainly alarming given the precarious conditions under which this vulnerable population survives.

Labor informality in Mexico has decreased over time, and this trend is also visible among “guards in establishments,” whose informality rate fell from 22.3% in 2012 to 15.4% in 2024. However, among “guards in households,” informality increased from 78.5% to 80.9% during the same period. Additionally, the graph shows no stability over time, with sharp changes from one quarter to the next. The third quarter of 2019 stands out again as the historical peak, with informality reaching 94.1%.

Comparing across states, it becomes evident that in some of them the problem is far more severe. These findings contribute to the scarce subnational analyses of informality (Espejo, 2022) and help understand the spatial dimension of the phenomenon. The situation of guards in households is particularly striking, with informality reaching 100% in 13 states (these results may reflect sample size limitations). The states with the lowest informality rates were Guerrero (28.9%), Michoacán de Ocampo (21.2%), and Baja California Sur (13.6%) (INEGI, 2024).

Among guards in establishments, the most critical situations in 2024 were found in Yucatán (32.9%), Chiapas (30.9%), and Puebla (29.4%) (INEGI, 2024).

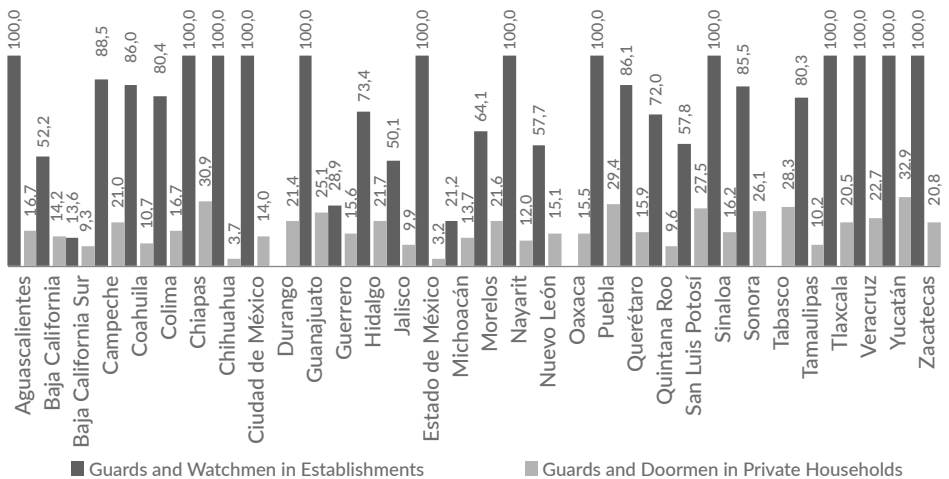


Figure 7. Percentage of security guards and labor informality by state, 2024.

Source: Author’s elaboration based on ENOE 3T–2024 and Secretariat of Economy (2025).

At the other end of the spectrum, informality among guards in establishments is below 10% in Baja California Sur, Chihuahua, and the State of Mexico. The State of Mexico stands out with the lowest informality rate (3.1%).

However, among guards in households, the lowest rate was observed in Guerrero with 28.9%, meaning that at least one in four individuals in this occupation works informally.

“[...] Local specificities can provide relevant information for diagnosing socioeconomic issues, developing public policies, and monitoring them” (Espejo, 2022, p. 7). As shown in this analysis, there are significant variations in informality across states; therefore, potential solutions could also be directed toward these specific territorial contexts.

The Construction of the Public Agenda on Informality in Private Police Forces

Despite the direct impacts of labor informality, both on private police forces and on society, this issue has been addressed only tangentially in the public agenda. Although governments, academia, and civil society organizations have expressed concern about advancing toward a solution to this problem, or at least this is what public narratives suggest, it remains an unresolved issue in the country.

Federal and local governments have focused primarily on authorizing and registering companies, but they have not implemented specific actions to reduce informality in the sector, even though the General Law of the National Public Security System states that “[...] private security services are auxiliary to the public security function” (Art. 122).

In practice, private security organizations are the ones conducting diagnostics to understand the problem, its characteristics, and possible solutions.

The president of the National Council of Private Security (CNSP, for its Spanish acronym), referring to the “[...] reform that prohibits outsourcing in private security companies” (Venegas, 2022, p. 1), noted that personnel continued to be hired under this scheme, “[...] engaging in subcontracting practices that

evade taxes, operate informally, and create labor precariousness for private police officers” (Venegas, 2022, p. 1).

Regarding the magnitude of the issue, the general coordinator of *Agrupaciones de Seguridad Unidas por un México Estable* (ASUME), in addition to acknowledging the registration challenges faced by regulatory authorities, estimates that “[...] for every company that is registered, there are five that are not” (cited in Barragán, 2020, p. 1). He adds that illegality can extend beyond informal companies themselves: “[...] some companies have even been established to provide services to individuals who are outside the law” (cited in Barragán, 2020, p. 1).

Informality is primarily associated with society’s demand for cheaper security services, but to an even greater degree, it reflects responsibilities not fulfilled by governments and their regulatory institutions. Proposed improvements focus mostly on government regulation and oversight.

From this perspective, it is argued that incentives for companies to register are insufficient. The Director of Interinstitutional Affairs of the Mexican Association of Private Security Companies (AMESP, for its Spanish acronym) has stated that there are obstacles to registration, one of them being the large number and diversity of requirements. A study identified 114 unique requirements to register a company (cited in Barragán, 2020).

Some countries have adopted measures to reduce the problem. In Uruguay, the number of public officials dedicated to inspections was increased to conduct more oversight visits to private police forces. This was one of the demands made by the Chamber of Private Security Companies to prevent unfair competition generated by informality (Losa, 2018). In Colombia, a system of fines and sanctions has been implemented that applies both to guards who offer services and to those who hire them (Pérez, 2018, p. 133).

In Mexico, local governments have opted for awareness campaigns targeting those who hire private security services. In some localities, authorities warn about the risks of informality or irregularity. The website of the Secretariat of Citizen Security of Mexico City states: “Do not hire problems,” referencing the Private Security Law for the Federal District (now Mexico City), which specifies: “[...] Private security service providers shall be jointly liable for the commission of violations when they hire individuals or entities that do not have permission, license, or authorization from the Secretariat” (Art. 58). This affects not only the company but also the client.

Verification visits are also carried out to inspect companies. According to the National Census of State Public Security, a total of 6,599 visits were conducted in 2022 (INEGI, 2023b). However, inspection efforts vary across

states, and as in other countries, they tend to focus primarily on formal companies.

To a lesser extent, some narratives highlight the vulnerability of those working in private security. It is noted that informal employment schemes “[...] have disregarded labor rights, resulting in marked precariousness in job positions within this industry” (Barragán, 2020, p. 1).

It is acknowledged that “[...] the guards who experience the most precarious working conditions are those employed in condominiums, mass events, and residential complexes, where there is no oversight regarding training or whether companies operate legally” (Venegas, 2022, p. 1). However, such narratives centered on the social rights of workers in the sector are among the least addressed in the public agenda.

Conclusions

Labor informality within private police forces in Mexico is a persistent social problem that undermines the quality of life of individuals, both those who provide security services under precarious working conditions, and those who hire these services, as well as society at large.

The data analyzed here show that private security has increased. ENOE estimates reveal that nearly one million people currently work in this sector, far exceeding the figures reported in the National Census, and it is likely that the actual number of individuals employed in private security is even higher.

Alongside the growth of private security, labor informality remains an ongoing problem that, although it has decreased, still affects thousands of people, particularly those facing vulnerabilities associated with gender, age, and educational attainment, which paradoxically become exacerbated when individuals lack access to dignified employment. Informality affects people's economic conditions and triggers other social problems that disproportionately impact the most vulnerable populations. It is essentially a cycle that deepens inequalities.

The literature and the findings of this research highlight the need to bring greater visibility to these vulnerabilities, which are rarely emphasized in institutional or societal narratives or in public policies. In this regard, beyond governmental initiatives and actions that mainly focus on regulating and supervising formal companies, it is crucial to direct attention to those companies,

groups, or individuals operating informally. Social policy may be key to mitigating these inequalities.

Beyond regulation, which has traditionally shaped policy in this field, there is a need to implement support processes that ensure the labor rights of individuals in informal employment are recognized and that their human rights are upheld. Such actions, in addition to addressing social injustice, would generate positive externalities by improving the quality of security services provided to society.

In sum, labor informality in private security remains an issue marked by significant gaps in knowledge. From academia, it is essential to deepen the understanding of this social problem and explore potential solutions.

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Rural Women of Hidalgo, Mexico: Between Labor Informality and Subsistence during the Pandemic, 2022*

[English Version]

Mujeres rurales de Hidalgo, México: entre la informalidad laboral y la subsistencia en pandemia, 2022

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Abstract

Objective: To identify the strategies of rural women of Hidalgo, Mexico, who work informally in municipal markets of Pachuca de Soto to support their families.

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Methodology: Ethnographic interviews were conducted with 21 women between February and April 2022. They were between 20 and 63 years of age, married or living in a common law union, and with children of various ages. The data were organized and analyzed based on feminist theories of economics and from a feminist point of view. The items analyzed were a) perception of work under informal conditions of during the COVID-19 pandemic; b) the personal and social impacts of the strategies to face the pandemic and support their families; and c) types of participation of household members in domestic and care work. **Results:** Confinement measures during the pandemic intensified gender inequalities and the time participants spent in poverty. **Conclusions:** Care and domestic work for family subsistence was a palliative to alleviating poverty; however, participants' economic, patrimonial, and health conditions became precarious, and their poverty increased.

Keywords: gender division of labor; equal opportunities; women's work; rural women; pandemic (obtained from the UNESCO Thesaurus).

Resumen

Objetivo: identificar las estrategias desplegadas por mujeres rurales de Hidalgo, México, que trabajan en la informalidad en mercados municipales de Pachuca de Soto para sostener la vida familiar. **Metodología:** se realizaron entrevistas de tipo etnográfico a 21 mujeres con edades entre 20 y 63 años, casadas o viviendo en unión libre, y con hijas e hijos de diversas edades, entre febrero y abril del 2022. Los datos se organizaron y analizaron a partir de las teorías feministas de la economía y del punto de vista. Los elementos de análisis fueron: a) percepción del trabajo en condiciones de informalidad durante la pandemia por COVID-19; b) impactos personales y sociales de las estrategias utilizadas para enfrentar la pandemia y sostener la vida familiar; y c) tipos de participación de las y los integrantes de los hogares en el trabajo doméstico y de cuidados. **Resultados:** las medidas de confinamiento frente a la pandemia recrudecieron las desigualdades de género e intensificaron el tiempo de pobreza de las participantes. **Conclusiones:** el trabajo de cuidados y doméstico para la subsistencia familiar actuó como un paliativo para mitigar la pobreza; sin embargo, se precarizaron sus condiciones económicas patrimoniales y de salud, e incrementó su pobreza.

Palabras clave: división sexual del trabajo; igualdad de oportunidades; trabajo de las mujeres; mujer rural; pandemia (obtenidos del tesoro UNESCO).

Resumo

Objetivo: identificar as estratégias empregadas por mulheres rurais de Hidalgo, México, que trabalham na informalidade em mercados municipais de Pachuca de Soto para sustentar a vida familiar. **Metodologia:** realizaram-se entrevistas etnográficas com 21 mulheres entre 20 e 63 anos, casadas ou vivendo em união estável, e com filhos e filhas de diversas idades, entre fevereiro e abril de 2022. Os dados foram organizados e analisados a partir das teorias feministas da economia e da teoria do ponto de vista. Os elementos de análise foram: a) percepção do trabalho em condições de informalidade durante a pandemia de Covid-19; b) impactos pessoais e sociais das estratégias utilizadas para enfrentar a pandemia e sustentar a vida familiar; e c) tipos de participação dos membros do domicílio no trabalho doméstico e de cuidado. **Resultados:** as medidas de confinamento diante da pandemia agravaram as desigualdades de gênero e intensificaram a pobreza de tempo das participantes. **Conclusões:** o trabalho doméstico e de cuidado para a subsistência familiar funcionou como um paliativo para mitigar a pobreza; contudo, suas condições econômicas, patrimoniais e de saúde tornaram-se mais precárias, aumentando sua pobreza.

Palavras-chave: divisão sexual do trabalho; igualdade de oportunidades; trabalho das mulheres; mulher rural; pandemia (obtidos do tesouro UNESCO).

Introduction

Health strategies to control and prevent the spread of COVID-19 caused significant economic losses that affected the population in metrics of poverty, social vulnerability and job insecurity to a greater extent. According to *Social Panorama of Latin America 2021*, of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2022), the loss of employment and reduction in labor income during the pandemic affected the lower income strata and informal occupations because they were exposed to greater occupational instability.

According to ECLAC (2020), the Latin American region, was characterized by large gaps in labor market and showed a high proportion of informal jobs. In Mexico, the National Institute of Geography and Informatics (INEGI, 2018) defines informal employment as "unprotected work in agricultural activity, unprotected domestic service, and non-subordinate workers who, despite working for formal economic units, do so without social security" (p. 5).

In the COVID-19 pandemic, the interruption of non-essential economic activities was one of the sanitary measures taken to control the spread of the virus, however, the planting, harvesting, and sale of food did not stop.

This paper analyzes the subsistence strategies of women from rural contexts who work in agricultural activity, without social protections, in the municipal markets of Pachuca de Soto, Hidalgo.

Other reasons for the choice of the sector are that women, youth, indigenous people, Afro-descendants, and migrants are considered over-represented populations of informal workers (ECLAC, 2020). For example, the unemployment rate in 2021 was 11.8% for women compared to 8.1% for men (ECLAC, 2022).

In the country, according to the *National Survey of Occupation and Employment, New Edition* (ENOEN), carried out by the National Institute of Geography and Informatics (INEGI, 2022) in the first quarter of 2022, people in informal employment (31 million) increased by 1.8 million compared to 2021. The same survey showed that informal occupations during the same period showed an increase of 0.6 points for men from 18.1 to 18.7 million, and 1.2 points for women from 11.1 to 12.3 million.

In the previous characterization, there was a worsening of social inequalities because of the lack of employment and/or informal labor conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted gender inequalities. Gender and social divisions of labor caused women to be on the front lines of the crisis, taking on the task of resolving the difficulties of sustaining and preserving everyday life as their own social role (Segato, 2018). Poor women and women with children were the most affected during the pandemic (ECLAC, 2021, 2022).

ECLAC (2021, 2022) stated that the burden of unpaid care work tripled as there was a higher demand for care. Historically, there has been a greater concentration of women in informal work and in small businesses, so they have difficulties receiving basic services, and have a diminished financial capacity to cope with crises. Regarding patriarchal cultural patterns, there has been a higher exposure of women in cohabitation with aggressors or potential aggressors. Women had less power and less participation in decision-making processes to respond to the pandemic.

These issues and other differentiation categories that specifically shape the living conditions of women, mainly in rural contexts, generated situations of greater vulnerability for them. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2020), the informality of women is higher than that of men; in the agricultural sector it is 91.6% compared to 83.4% in men. According to the ILO (2020) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2020) in addition to these negative impacts, women are strongly affected by facing the risk of food insecurity, nutritional insecurity, and time poverty. Women have a considerable load of activities or demands that reduces their ability to distribute their time (Kes & Swaminathan, 2006) and, restricts their capacity for taking action. These women may face obstacles to participating in economic activities such as farming, fabrication, trading and general labor, or being self-employed or otherwise employed in those sectors associated with high and medium-high risk levels.

The reduction in income can lead household members to sell goods to cover their basic needs and, in the context of the pandemic, to deal with the COVID-19 disease. Because of power imbalances from patriarchal structures, women's assets, and crops may be the first to be consumed as was observed in this study and in others (Olivera *et al.*, 2021; Ramírez-Quirós, 2020). Of women living in the countryside on the American continent, only 30% own agricultural land (Organization of American States [OAS], 2020).

On many occasions the participation of rural women in agricultural activities has no economic remuneration and, there is little or no recognition of the crops produced thanks to women's efforts: fresh food, value chain crops, and crops for export (Singaña, 2022). However, studies in several Latin American countries (Arroyo, 2020; García, 2021; Gómez *et al.*, 2021; González, 2020; Pajín, 2020; Singaña, 2022) show that during the pandemic many women from rural contexts began to obtain their food from small stores or near their homes, or stopped their production cooking or doing handicrafts to sell to cover the demand of caring for the home. The damage of this work overload meant sickness, physical exhaustion, and emotional discomfort. It also increased gender violence in their

homes, mobility restriction, a negative impact on their productivity, and fear of contagion from potential customers buying products.

This reveals the accommodation and resistance strategies of women from rural contexts in facing the various challenges during the pandemic in supporting their family life. These strategies are crucial to talking about the capacity of agency and showing that vulnerability as part of the same political resistance as a body (Butler, 2014). Following Picchio (2010), this research is based on this recognition at a macro level, domestic and care work as fundamental for social reproduction, and, on an individual level, is a vital part of human life. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to identify the strategies to support family life by the rural women of Hidalgo, Mexico, who work informally in municipal markets of Pachuca de Soto.

Methodology

The design was qualitative and the epistemic component was the feminist point of view. Its main approach is that the position and condition of women in the social structure gives them a privileged perspective in an epistemic component regarding the understanding and interpretation of social reality, and in the construction of situated knowledge (Haraway, 1995; Harding, 2010). The feminist theories of economics are fundamental to seeing the link between lives as an individual and social process, and working conditions in the economic production process; but also, to showing how jobs contribute to different human needs, meaning, sustainability and quality of life (Carrasco & Díaz, 2018; Picchio, 2005).

Data Collection Techniques

The ethnographic or non-directive interview was used. According to Guber (2011) a social relationship that allows understanding the meaning of social life and discourses that emerge from daily life informally in direct observation and participation.

Items of Analysis

The topics addressed in the interviews were limited to the following items:

- a. Perception of work in conditions of informality during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- b. Personal and social impacts of the strategies carried out by women in facing the COVID-19 pandemic and supporting family life.
- c. Types of participation of household members in domestic and care work.

Information Analysis Techniques

The information from the audio recordings of the interviews was processed according to the Kvale proposal (2007): transcription, coding, condensation, categorization, and interpretation. The reliability and authenticity of the information was guaranteed using audio recorders for the interviews, and field diaries to record direct and participatory observations.

Sample Configuration and Strategy for Participant Identification

Qualitative research seeks people who show relevant theoretical particularities. Therefore, intentional non-probabilistic sampling was carried out (Patton, 1990). The strategy for choosing participants was to go directly to the municipal markets of Pachuca de Soto, Hidalgo: Primero de Mayo, La Surtidora, Benito Juárez and Barreteros.

Participants

Twenty-one women from rural contexts from different municipalities of the state of Hidalgo who work in contexts of informality in those municipal markets participated. They were between 20 and 63 years of age, and at the time of the fieldwork, most of them were married or living in a common law union, and with children of different ages.

Procedure

The fieldwork was carried out between February and April 2022. Participants were informed of the goal of the research, collaboration was requested, and they were asked for their oral consent to audio-record the interviews. The most convenient days and times for the interviews and observations were agreed on by the participants. The interviews lasted between 40 and 80 minutes.

This procedure respects the UNESCO principles of *Declaration of Bioethics and Human Rights* and does not represent any risk to the physical, psychological or social integrity of the participants.

Work Context

According to the 2020 *Population and Housing Census* (INEGI, 2020), there were 3,082,841 people in Hidalgo, of which 1,601,462 are women and 1,481,379 are men. Of the overall population, 57% live in urban areas and 43% in rural areas. There are 4,514 rural and 176 urban localities in the state. In Pachuca de Soto, the capital of the state and municipality where the municipal markets are located, 314,331 people live. Pachuca borders the municipalities of Mineral del Monte and Mineral del Chico to the north; Zapotlán de Juárez and Zempoala to the south; Epazoyucan and Mineral de la Reforma to the east; and San Agustín Tlaxiaca to the west.

According to data from the 2019 *Economic Census* (Government of Mexico, 2019), retail commerce was the sector with the highest concentration of economic units in Pachuca de Soto.

Results and Discussion

From the female point of view, and from the perspective of feminist theories of economics, this subsection analyzes, interprets, and discusses the results based on the aforementioned items.

Perception of Work in Conditions of Informality during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The worsening of social and gender inequalities is exposed by the participants, who also warn of several institutional deficiencies pre-existing the COVID-19 pandemic, which put social survival and quality of life at risk.

There are few sales, one becomes desperate and tries to look for other options because the children and even the husband who does not have a job depend on oneself. I have looked for jobs, but in some places, they do not accept me because of my age. In other places, they ask me for work history. What I have done the most is self-employment, working on my own [...] I become desperate, because it is not enough, and indeed when the pandemic started sales were very low, right now, there are days that there is not much, others more or less [...] The pandemic is one thing, another thing is my age and it's no longer so easy to get a job. I had a strategy, originally I sold only tortillas by hand, then the cost of gas increased, the cost of dough increased, my sales went down because there were other people in stands near me, then well, I distributed the small sales, and sometimes there were even problems with other women, and well, it went down, then I made the decision [she left the tortilla sales business, because as she said] it does not work, the gas and the investment, then I went to work cleaning houses. It did not work either, well, money was not enough because it was not every day, then I started selling appetizers, so that was my strategy [...] to sell appetizers in the government offices [...] and that has worked for me, not enough but those who work do buy from us. (Personal communication,¹ April 25, 2022).

As a result of the capitalist economic model in its neoliberal phase, there has been talk of a systematic multidimensional crisis (Bartra *et al.*, 2013), a survival crisis (Carosio, 2010) that has deepened inequalities where life is reproduced. The testimony of the participant shows difficulties in acquiring salaried employment, as a deficit in accumulating capital throughout her life. Her age is considered unsuitable for productive performance; she has few opportunities to get work experience and that is linked to her low level of education. It is collective gender discrimination that, intertwined with ethnicity, social class, and life cycle, evidence precariousness in the lives of these women, and undermine their possibilities for expanding their economic capacity.

¹ 58-year-old woman from Zempoala. Tortilla and snack seller in Mercado Primero de Mayo.

The digital gap was also exposed. According to the research: *Digital Gender Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Rotondi *et al.*, 2019), women in rural contexts face a major disadvantage in accessing information and communication technologies because of lower coverage of these services in those areas and also because of their gender.

No, there is no way, there is no way to sell, to sell online, no, I don't know about that, there are vegetables, potatoes and other seeds, so I don't know how to sell online. (Personal communication,² February 19, 2022).

Patriarchal structures are also reproduced in relation to the ownership of cell phones, as mention before. However, age is a variable that can affect the participation of women in this sector in the digital dynamic. During the pandemic, the conditions described affected rural women, if one considers that the social functions that they assumed as their own support life and family stability.

The deficient of institutional regulatory mechanisms to produce resources and better distribution for the population that works in informality in agricultural sector have also affected the social reproduction capacity.

Well, it has been very complicated because, as we work in the street, they have taken our things many times, they have moved us to other places, and it is complicated. There is not much work and, as people stayed in their homes, there is not much activity, we do not sell much. There are inspectors or there are people who avoid trade and are the ones who take our things. Here in the market, they tolerate us, there has been no problem with them, they do not really say anything, but we are still careful not to leave garbage, use face coverings and antiseptic gel, or not block the paths, so they trust us, although it generates more expense, there is no real problem with them. The problem has been with the Presidency, the one that does not leave us. [...] We started (she and her children) going out to other places, at the beginning, we were just here, and when the pandemic started and they did not let us get there, then we started in other municipalities; we go to El Arenal, to Ixmiquilpan, and Santiago de Anaya. We are looking everywhere, and obviously it is expensive and tiring, but if there is nothing here, we have to look other places, we have to help the children, the husband who is sick, and that is what has helped, going to different places, putting ourselves in the streets, in

² 62-year-old woman from Mineral del Chico. Legume and seed seller in Mercado Primero de Mayo.

neighborhoods where there are no problems. (Personal communication,³ March 5, 2022).

The capitalist economic model in its neoliberal phase has caused that reproducing conditions of possibility in life, use and maximize the few opportunities that exist in contexts of deep inequality. The patriarchal model makes limiting a family's livelihood to a woman's possibilities easier. "Reproduction," according to Dobrée (2018), is not limited to the performance of the most common domestic tasks, but to the means the deployment of several strategies to achieve the basic survival of the family unit, as it can be seen in the previous testimony. In this way, and in contexts of deep inequalities and during the COVID-19 pandemic, women mitigate the consequences of structural exclusions through their work.

Personal and Social Impacts of the Strategies Carried Out by Women to Face the COVID Pandemic and Support Family Life

"Neoliberalism" is more than a specific type of economic policy or relationship between the State and the economy. It is the hegemonic discourse of a civilizational model of modern society and a rationality that configures all aspects of human existence in an economy. It has transformed individuals and social forms, and changed a certain type of people (Lander, 2000; Nijensohn, 2018) who experience the effects of this model by themselves.

Well, I'm just tired. Thank God I don't have any disease that needs medication. Compared to the pandemic, now everything is more tiring, my work has increased, my back already hurts, my feet hurt, sometimes my head too because of worries. [...] Right now, my concerns are not having enough money, sales are low and a lot doesn't sell. That is one of my concerns, sometimes I get desperate and I want to look for other options. I do look for them, but I have looked for other jobs, but they give me the same, they offer me a salary almost like the one I earn now, so I choose to stay because I own my business, I manage it and I am more aware of my daughter, I choose to stay, as I am. It gives me time to do more things at the same time. (Personal communication,⁴ March 12, 2022).

³ 62-year-old woman from San Agustín Tlaxiaca. Fruit and vegetable street seller in several markets in Hidalgo.

⁴ 58-year-old woman from Zempoala, resident of Pachuca for 12 years. Tortilla Seller in Mercado La Surtidora.

Working conditions in neoliberal capitalism and in the current health context led the research team to analyze the precariousness of both work and individuals' physical and subjective states. Lorey (2018) states that as work becomes more precarious, people as a whole, including their bodies and intellectual abilities, become a workforce. Precariousness becomes the engine of productivity.

As can be seen, the effects of work overload and the tensions for the difficulties of her economic situation reflect in the participant's body. Poverty ensures the reproduction of conditions of possibility for their lives, with the cost paid in their physical health and emotional well-being. Thus, there is a process of self-precarization (Lorey, 2018) in the lives of these women.

One cannot stop working, nothing has changed, one has to solve, feed [...] fearful or not, I kept going out to sell in houses, knocking on doors. Yes, it is difficult, one gets more tired, my feet hurt, they swell, my hip aches, lots of pains, but we have no choice, we have to work. (Personal communication,⁵ March 19, 2022).

According to Lorey (2018), in the regime of precariousness, the individualization of risk, and emotions of fear or anxiety, self-management and self-responsibility are the main aspects that a subjective figure needs that enables and stabilizes the neoliberal government through precariousness and insecurity. Conceivably, the physical and affective economy has devastating effects on people's lives (Cano, 2018).

These self-precarization processes, parallel to the dispossession of economic, material and/or patrimonial goods from women in rural contexts, would be part of new enclosures, new ways of accumulation of dispossession (Federici, 2020) that neoliberalism needs for the reproduction of capital. To create similar States and institutions, neoliberalism has led to an individualizing and restructuring of the social welfare State, where women end up mitigating this shrinking of State services such as social security and health.

The market closed, and then my husband got sick with COVID and I had to take care of him, and since there was no income, we sold a plot of land that my father inherited years ago to support us [...] right now, I'm back in the market, hopefully the pandemic will end and more people will buy from us. (Personal communication,⁶ March 20, 2022).

⁵ 55-year-old woman from Tulancingo. Vegetables seller in Mercado Benito Juárez.

⁶ 63-year-old woman from Acaxochitlán. Cactus and vegetables seller in Mercado La Surtidora.

Dobrée (2018) states that the reproductive field in which women are protagonists, becomes one of the few places in which to protect the lives denied by capital and, in current turbulent times, of a neoliberal capitalism that is leading to barbarism.

The reproductive conditions of life depend on using and maximizing the few opportunities and/or resources in contexts of deep inequality. In this way, the participants' circumstances create conditions of possibility and the existence of capitalism (Carrasco, 2016). These circumstances use a patriarchal model that, by hiding the relationship of exploitation and dispossession, makes limiting the women's livelihoods possible.

Types of Participation of Household Members in Domestic and Care Work

This subsection shows how participation in domestic and care work is still a feminized activity in the sector.

My little daughter, who is in third grade, supports me all the time, even if she has classes. If she sees I have an order she helps me if she can, if she does not have to turn the camera on for her online class, she helps me with my tortillas or soups, she heats the sauce. At home, she supports me if she has time when she is on vacation, she supports me in everything. When she is in class, she supports me how she can, she cleans her room, the table, she does support me. (Personal communication,⁷ April 9, 2022).

This illustrates how from an early age the daughter begins to participate in the work of domestic activities at the same time she conducts other activities, like attending school. Online classes allowed this situation. However, the important thing is the cultural transmission around the behaviors that the girl learns through her mother.

Domestic care is an issue that has not had social prestige because is associated with the feminine and considered unproductive as it is not economically compensated. However, caregiving is a social activity that enables people to fulfil their basic human needs: physiological, material, cultural, and symbolic, affective and spiritual (Hinkelammert & Mora, 2009).

Well, mainly, my grandmother is the one who makes breakfast, so we can eat, together with my mother [...] they take turns because my grandmother is old, I

⁷ 29-year-old woman from Pachuca. Tortillas and snacks seller in Mercado 1° de Mayo.

try every day to clean, to sweep, [...] we have to take care of my grandfather, we have to wash him, [...] and my grandmother, too. They are elderly people, and we also have to take care of them because my grandfather took care of us, and because if we do not take care of them, who would do it? That is why, we have to work harder. (Personal communication,⁸ April 2, 2022).

The previous testimony leads to several points of reflection. The interdependence that is sustained between people is fundamental for our life to have continuity (Dobrée, 2018); we take care, but we are also taken care of. We care, but we also need care. However, the unequal division of unpaid work caring for children, the sick, and older adults, among others, are reasons why women live a greater poverty compared to men, due to multiple tasks, jobs and energies for the production of goods and the physical functioning of human beings, as well as care. These conditions impact women's autonomy and hinder the expansion of their human capacities and their personal development and greater participation in other social scenes.

However, sustaining the lives of the members of the family and with affiliations and links makes reflecting on the notion of "dependence" important. This dependence has been negatively valued by assumptions and values related to western masculinity, and by capitalist principles of *homo economicus*.

Neoliberal capitalism conjures a certain type of individual that requires consider themselves autonomous and independent. Structural factors, such as division of labor by gender, make participating in public scenes without being limited by domestic and care work easier for economic agents in liberal and capitalist societies because of freedom of time and availability of labor (Carrasco *et al.*, 2019). As Riger (1997) states, understanding the situation hinges on recognizing that people act depending on their relative position in social structure; while men interact in social systems out of the closest social group, interactions for women are directed within the group. The author states that this dichotomous reading is inadequate because they do not have the same value in the capitalist economic model.

However, from the feminist perspective of this research, relationships and interdependencies are emphasized as the main values in human experience and to sustain life, and a false separation between the private and public becomes evident. Guzmán (2005) states that the private is the place from which other productive and relational spaces access the public, and where surplus value and economic wealth are also created (Alberti *et al.*, 2014).

⁸ 38-year-old woman from Pachuca. Legumes and food seller in Mercado Barreteros.

Discussion

Care is an organizing principle in human and non-human life. The sustainability of life, according to Dobrée (2018) is inextricably linked to care. To have life, taking care of it is necessary. Care is needed to live well. At all times people demand care, even more under unfavorable conditions. This is when recognition of interdependent relationships becomes fundamental (Carrasco *et al.*, 2019).

Within economic, political, social and health contexts fostered by COVID-19, because of gender and structural inequalities, women come out to sustain life. In a careless and chaotic world today, who cares? whom do they care for? in what conditions is care proffered? who cares for the person who cares? what does caring mean? are relevant questions when analyzing the sustainability of life. This research analyzes testimonies of rural women who work selling food in markets of the city of Pachuca, Hidalgo, Mexico, who are responsible of caring for their family members.

By the theories of a feminist point of view and economics, women deal with structural inequalities in the labor market. Age, work experience, gender and even the use of technology affects and makes their work and productive opportunities precarious. In this context of multiple inequalities, women work longer shifts to deal with institutional mechanisms that discriminate against them for being street vendors in local markets.

The strategies used by women are not inconsequential to in their bodies nor their health. Fatigue, worries, and stress are experienced in their bodies. In neoliberalism, as a political system and social organization, the precariousness of women's work contradictorily becomes the engine of their individual productivity. This survival mechanism affects their emotional state, intensifies their working days, as well as their concerns and stress, since they assume the responsibility of providing sustenance and care work in their homes.

When analyzing the collaboration of other family members in caregiving tasks, the division of care work falls on the women in the family, and is structured through existing gender norms. Thus, the daughters are the ones who help mothers in cooking for sale and taking care of grandparents or sick male relatives. Mothers assume that daughters help means a manner of family reciprocity and reinforces the notion of female altruism in households.

The findings are consistent with the Latin American trend of increasing participation of rural women in non-agricultural economic activities and multi-activities. Women have intensified their workloads, mainly the most precarious of structural changes such as structural adjustment policies and recurrent economic crises that, since the 1990s, have impoverished households

and increased gender inequalities (Benería, 1995; Chant, 1994; Levrin, 1987). From this perspective, in contexts of uncertainty and high risk, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the work of rural women from different generations has been key to sustaining and, in many cases, supporting the lives of family members. However, this responsibility assumed by mothers and/or heads of families also intensified the fatigue of older women, and the early incorporation of young daughters into the world of work.

Although several studies have investigated the role of productive assets in gender-differentiated decision-making in rural households (Agarwal, 1997; Deere, 2011; Deere, 2020), in this research, the restrictions by women in productive assets, the role of technology and its management was highlighted as a main factor that influenced the effectiveness of subsistence strategies implemented by Hidalgo women in pandemic contexts. These findings shed light on the structural challenges differentiated by gender and a generational cohort which were exacerbated during the pandemic.

Conclusions

The experiences of women in caring and sustaining household life in a pandemic era, full of precariousness and uncertainties, provide knowledge in understanding social reality. Thus, to counteract the precariousness of women's work in all its dimensions, the need to de-feminize care work, to politicize the reproductive sphere, and make care something prestigious is clarified. These measures point to ethical and policy options that address the gender and social inequalities of rural women.

The health risks and uncertainty associated with excessive work exposed during the Covid-19 pandemic led to considering care, labor, technological and support needs differentiated generationally and by gender, in governmental intervention plans to address the needs of the less favored and mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic.

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Job Quality in Colombia: A Sectoral and Regional Analysis by Gender in 2025*

[English Version]

Calidad del empleo en Colombia: un análisis sectorial y regional por género en 2025

Qualidade do emprego na Colômbia: uma análise setorial e regional por gênero em 2025

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Abstract

Objective: To assess job quality in Colombia for the year 2025, considering gender differences and its distribution across regions and branches of economic activity.

Methodology: Using data from the Great Integrated Household Survey (GEIH) for June 2025, and following the methodological approaches proposed by Hidalgo and Tarapuez (2022), and Chen and Mehdi (2018), both objective and subjective job quality indexes were calculated by gender. Additionally, estimates were produced for economic activity branches according to the *International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities* (ISIC) and for Colombia's 23 main cities and metropolitan areas.

Results: The objective job quality in Colombia is low, with better outcomes in the public administration and mining sectors. Medellín, Manizales, and Bogotá show the highest scores, while Sincelejo and Riohacha present the lowest. However, subjective perception of job quality is high and does not align with actual working conditions. **Conclusions:** The study reveals that subjective job quality in Colombia exceeds objective measures, evidencing a mismatch between perception and reality. Sectoral and gender-based differences are identified, as well as persistent urban disparities and methodological limitations, providing updated evidence to inform public policy and academic debate.

Key words: quality of working life; gender; job quality; job satisfaction; labor well-being (obtained from the UNESCO Thesaurus).

Resumen

Objetivo: evaluar la calidad del empleo en Colombia para el año 2025, considerando las diferencias por género y su distribución según las regiones y ramas de actividad económica. **Metodología:** utilizando los datos de la Gran Encuesta Integradora de Hogares (GEIH) de junio 2025, y los enfoques metodológicos propuestos por Hidalgo Tarapuez (2022) y Chen y Mehdi (2018), se calcularon los índices de calidad del empleo objetivo y subjetivo por género. Adicionalmente, se estimaron los datos para las ramas de actividad económica según *Clasificación industrial internacional uniforme de todas las actividades económicas* (CIIU), y para las 23 ciudades principales y áreas metropolitanas de Colombia. **Resultados:** la calidad objetiva del empleo en Colombia es baja, con mejores resultados en administración pública y minas. Medellín, Manizales y Bogotá tienen los puntajes más altos, mientras Sincelejo y Riohacha muestran las peores condiciones. Sin embargo, la percepción subjetiva es alta y no corresponde con la realidad laboral. **Conclusiones:** el estudio revela que la calidad subjetiva del empleo en Colombia supera la objetiva, evidenciando tensiones entre percepción y condiciones reales. Se identifican diferencias sectoriales y de género, brechas urbanas persistentes

y limitaciones metodológicas, que aportan bases actualizadas para políticas públicas y debate académico.

Palabras clave: calidad de vida laboral; género; calidad del trabajo; satisfacción en el trabajo; bienestar laboral (obtenidos del tesoro de la UNESCO).

Resumo

Objetivo: avaliar a qualidade do emprego na Colômbia para o ano de 2025, considerando as diferenças de gênero e sua distribuição entre as regiões e ramos de atividade econômica. **Metodologia:** utilizando os dados da Pesquisa Integrada de Domicílios (GEIH) de junho de 2025 e os enfoques metodológicos propostos por Hidalgo e Tarapuez (2022) e por Chen e Mehdi (2018), calcularam-se os índices de qualidade objetiva e subjetiva do emprego por gênero. Além disso, foram estimados os dados para os ramos de atividade econômica segundo a Classificação Industrial Internacional Padrão de Todas as Atividades Econômicas (CIIU/ISIC) e para as 23 principais cidades e áreas metropolitanas da Colômbia. **Resultados:** a qualidade objetiva do emprego na Colômbia é baixa, com melhores resultados na administração pública e no setor de minas. Medellín, Manizales e Bogotá apresentam os maiores índices, enquanto Sincelejo e Riohacha exibem as piores condições. No entanto, a percepção subjetiva é elevada e não corresponde à realidade laboral. **Conclusões:** o estudo revela que a qualidade subjetiva do emprego na Colômbia supera a qualidade objetiva, evidenciando tensões entre percepção e condições reais. Identificam-se diferenças setoriais e de gênero, persistentes desigualdades urbanas e limitações metodológicas, que fornecem bases atualizadas para políticas públicas e debate acadêmico.

Palavras-chave: qualidade de vida no trabalho; gênero; qualidade do trabalho; satisfação no trabalho; bem-estar laboral (obtidos do tesoro da UNESCO).

Introduction

Job creation remains a challenge for all economies, particularly for developing ones, where medium and high levels of unemployment persist. To this, the debate surrounding job quality has been added, involving variables such as job stability, income level, and social security coverage, among other factors that contribute to improving workers' quality of life (Gómez-Salcedo *et al.*, 2017; Pineda & Acosta, 2011). This interest has emerged as a response to the increasing labor regulations in high-income countries and has been transferred to developing nations as part of the economic integration processes associated with Free Trade Agreements (Pineda & Acosta, 2011).

Furthermore, the study of job quality is not alien to institutional frameworks. For instance, the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2023) includes factors that promote workers' well-being, such as social security, contractual relationships, and social affiliations. This approach moves beyond the concept of "employment," which limits the analysis merely to job positions and remuneration.

In this sense, several authors have developed methodologies to measure job quality, such as the synthetic index proposed by Farné (2003). This index considers four analytical dimensions (income, type of contract, social security, and working hours), each with its respective weighting. As a result, the index allows for the generation of analytical categories in which higher indexed values correspond to better job quality, classifying workers into three categories: low, medium, and high.

Worth noting is that this methodology has been questioned due to the lack of a solid theoretical framework to support it, as well as the absence of a conceptual basis for the weighting system (Lasso & Frasser, 2015). One element identified as missing is the inclusion of social representation; however, authors such as Hidalgo and Tarapuez (2022) have expanded the model by incorporating this component, which they consider essential for achieving a more comprehensive approach to the study of job quality.

Likewise, Chen and Mehdi (2018) developed a methodology to calculate a job quality index that considers aspects such as job prospects, career development, leave policies, and social environment, among others. These components are more closely aligned with the analysis of workers' social well-being.

Consequently, the objective of the present study is to assess job quality in Colombia for the year 2025, considering gender differences and their distribution across regions and branches of economic activity. To this end, the study seeks to answer three research questions: (1) What is the variation in job quality at the national level by gender? (2) How does job quality vary by economic sector when

disaggregated by gender? (3) How is job quality distributed across the country's main cities, and what differences can be observed between men and women?

To address these questions, two types of job quality were estimated. First, objective job quality was calculated using the methodological framework proposed by Hidalgo and Tarapuez (2022). Second, subjective job quality was estimated following the methodology proposed by Chen and Mehdi (2018). This dual approach contributes to the literature in two ways: these methodologies have typically been analyzed separately, not jointly; and this study provides three distinct levels of analysis: by gender, by economic sector, and by urban center.

This article is structured as follows: the second section presents theoretical references and empirical studies on job quality from a global and national perspective. The third section describes the methodological strategy employed. The fourth section presents and describes the results obtained, followed by the discussion section. Finally, the sixth section offers the concluding remarks of the study.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptualization surrounding job quality is ambiguous, even though it has been theorized since the second half of the twentieth century. During the initial phase of this process, "job quality" was conceived as a subjective construct in which worker satisfaction was assumed to be the foundation of the concept. This approach was built on various evaluation criteria assessing the worker's perception of how their job impacts their quality of life (Land, 1975; Staines & Quinn, 1979; Wnuk-Lipinski, 1977).

However, this subjective perspective faced several criticisms. Among them, Seashore (1974) emphasized the need to move beyond the idea that job quality was merely a subjective factor of the employee. He also proposed defining objective criteria that would allow for determining the quality of job positions.

According to this view, the subjective approach lacks rigor because individuals tend to involve factors of convenience, ignorance, self-deception, and social pressure that bias their opinions (Seashore, 1974). Therefore, the author argued that such measurement should incorporate both individual and social factors that reflect objective components. These elements must be supported by theoretical and empirical evidence, taking into account aspects such as sectoral differentiation and the need to include subjective assessments without allowing them to outweigh objective perspectives.

Although there is consensus on the need to incorporate objective factors in measurement, no agreement exists on which specific factors should be included (Galvis-Aponte *et al.*, 2017; Warr, 1987). This has led to different positions on the matter, such as those proposed by Lawler (1975), who stated that any measure of job quality should consider at least four factors: (1) validity, understood as the inclusion of components associated with job quality; (2) sufficiency, referring to the completeness and representativeness of the indicators; (3) objectivity and verifiability of the information; and (4) the ability to distinguish significant differences between employment situations. These factors allow for a comprehensive review of the concept.

Gallie (2007) argues that job quality is linked to the employment structure; therefore, it must be assessed across economic sectors, as these involve differentiating conditions. The author also highlights the need to include factors such as employees' participation in workplace discussions, autonomy, and access to social security. This coincides with the arguments of Farné and Vergara (2007), Gómez-Salcedo *et al.* (2017), and Pineda and Acosta (2011), who associate these factors with job formality, thereby adding an additional dimension to the understanding of job quality.

Along these lines, Farné (2009) proposed a comprehensive analysis of the concept through the construction of a synthetic index that incorporates both objective and subjective dimensions. The author emphasized variables such as job stability, income, social protection, and contractual conditions, noting that these variables enable the evaluation of workers' integration into the labor market and how such integration affects their well-being. This contribution is fundamental as it provides a comparative perspective for Latin America and demonstrates how job quality constitutes a determining factor in processes of equity and social cohesion.

Moreover, various approaches highlight income as a key factor in the analysis, given that job quality should generate quality of life, which in turn is associated with individuals' capacity to meet their monetary, environmental, and physical needs (Pérez-Valbuena, 2013). Consequently, the literature agrees that an adequate level of income is required to satisfy such needs (Burchell *et al.*, 2014; Chen & Mehdi, 2018; Gómez-Salcedo *et al.*, 2017; Hidalgo & Tarapuez, 2022; Pineda & Acosta, 2011; Wagner, 1997).

In summary, theoretical and empirical evidence indicate that measuring job quality should respond to a construct that integrates objective factors, such as labor and extra-labor benefits, workers' associative capacity, and income, and subjective factors related to employees' perceptions of their work. Thus, since the ILO (2003) introduced the concept of "decent work," four dimensions have been involved: employment, social security, labor rights, and social dialogue.

Accordingly, the ILO (2023) reported that despite economic recovery after the pandemic, structural problems persist in the Latin American and Caribbean labor markets. The report highlights the limited growth of formal employment compared to the high incidence of informal work, which particularly affects women and rural populations. It also notes a slowdown in the creation of quality jobs, stagnation in real wage growth, and marked gender inequality in labor participation and remuneration. These findings reveal the region's ongoing challenges regarding inclusion, productivity, and job sustainability.

In this regard, Fernández-Franco *et al.* (2022) analyzed the situation of salaried and self-employed workers by aggregating data on remuneration and worker qualification. They then developed a scale to measure job quality, demonstrating that wages in Latin America remain lower than those in countries such as the United States, even for highly qualified positions. They further showed that this situation contributes to the region's economic lag and is exacerbated in small and medium-sized enterprises, which form the backbone of Latin American economies.

Similarly, Basantes-Garcés (2022) established an index to measure job quality in micro and small enterprises in Ecuador, based on the synthetic index proposed by Farné (2003). Using a multiple linear regression model, the author measured job quality and compared it over time to assess labor precariousness. This model highlights variations in the labor market and offers recommendations for improving productivity, which in turn could lead to the creation of jobs with decent working conditions.

Regarding job quality in Colombia, Gómez-Salcedo *et al.* (2017) proposed a multidimensional approach using a fuzzy indicator and data from the *Great Integrated Household Survey* (GEIH), considering variables such as gender and educational level. They introduced a new methodology for measuring job quality, theoretically linking it to the life cycle of work quality, and found lower quality indices among workers under 30 years old. This result indicates that young people are not contributing to pension or social security systems, creating pressure on subsidized schemes and exacerbating current social problems.

Lasso and Frasser (2015) evaluated job quality in relation to social well-being through the theory of consumption and economies of scale. They constructed equivalence scales to analyze social well-being according to household characteristics directly related to age groups. Their findings revealed that the lowest job quality indices are concentrated in youth employment, confirming the existence of a labor life cycle. The authors also emphasized that consumption and economies of scale vary with household size, potentially improving or limiting the level of social well-being achieved.

In the Colombian context, the literature has shown different approaches to measuring and understanding job quality, highlighting both progress and persistent limitations. Farné and Vergara (2015) analyzed the link between economic growth and labor flexibilization during 2002–2011 and found a slight improvement in indicators due to increased income and expanded social security coverage, though qualitative deficits still limited the impact of growth on labor well-being.

From a different methodological perspective, Cortés *et al.* (2024) proposed a measurement based on workers' preferences, incorporating subjective dimensions that complement traditional objective indicators and give greater relevance to employees' perceptions of their working conditions. Similarly, Mora *et al.* (2016) developed synthetic indices applied to the Afro-Colombian population, revealing structural inequalities in stability, income, and access to social security that disproportionately affect this group.

Additionally, other studies have focused on urban environments and the relationship between human capital and job quality. Mora and Ulloa (2011) examined Colombia's main cities and concluded that although improvements were observed between 2001 and 2009, they were insufficient to close existing gaps, noting that education translates into better job quality only for salaried workers. Likewise, Hidalgo and Tarapuez (2022) constructed objective and subjective job indices based on ILO's decent work pillars, identifying a gap between workers' perceptions and the structural conditions of the labor market.

Moreover, Ramírez (2022) proposed a Job Quality Index (JQI) composed of five dimensions: underemployment, training, wage benefits, social protection, and work-life balance, providing an integral tool for monitoring precarization processes and guiding public policy in the country. These contributions enrich the discussion by showing the diversity of approaches and empirical results on job quality in Colombia.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that although the theories for measuring objective and subjective job quality have been widely criticized, regarding the percentage weights assigned to each group, this methodology continues to be used as the main tool for assessing job quality. Consequently, researchers can adapt it through empirical foundations that have significantly contributed to emerging theories such as the labor life cycle.

Methodology

For this research, data from the GEIH for June 2025 were used, as this month shows less seasonality compared to the rest of the year (Pineda & Acosta, 2011). The database was filtered to include only employed individuals over 18 years of age. Additionally, only observations containing information on labor income and area of residence were included; that is, observations with incomplete information were removed. Finally, retired individuals were excluded from the sample, resulting in 12,154,098 valid observations, of which 46.03% were women.

The sample includes information from Colombia's 23 main cities and metropolitan areas, as well as the national index, disaggregated by branch of economic activity and gender. Table 1 presents the variables used for the objective and subjective job quality indicators. Table 2 shows the interpretation scale for the quality indicators.

Table 1. *Description and Descriptive Statistics of Variables.*

Dimensions	Indicator	Criterion Used	Variable
Objective Quality			
Income adequacy	Hourly labor income	Less than one minimum wage	Low income
		Between 1 and 3 minimum wages	Basic basket income
		Between 3 and 5 minimum wages	Medium income
		More than 5 minimum wages	High income
Job security and stability	Contractual relationship	Type of contract	Written, indefinite-term contract
			Written, fixed-term contract
			Service provision contract (OPS)
			Verbal or no contract

Dimensions	Indicator	Criterion Used	Variable
Social security and protection		Contributions to health, pension, and occupational risk insurance	Full coverage
		Health (contributive regime) and occupational risk contributions	Partial coverage
		Health (subsidized regime) and occupational risk contributions	Partial coverage
		Health (beneficiary) contributions	Partial coverage
		No contributions to any system	No coverage
Contractual benefits	Vacations	Entitled to paid annual leave	Vacations
	Christmas bonus	Receives Christmas bonus	Christmas bonus
	severance fund contributions	Entitled to severance fund contributions	severance fund contributions
	Paid leave	Includes paid leave	Paid leave
Social dialogue and representation	Union or professional association representation	Affiliated with a trade union and/or professional association	Unionized or affiliated Not unionized or affiliated
Subjective Quality			
Job subjective Quality	Perceived job quality and stability	Job satisfaction	Satisfied with current job
			Satisfied with benefits and compensations
			Satisfied with current working hours
		Job stability	Perceived job stability

To achieve the research objective, weightings were defined following the methodologies of Hidalgo and Tarapuez (2022), as well as Chen and Mehdi (2018) for measuring job quality, as shown in Table 2. This table presents both objective and subjective components and the percentage assigned to each variable. For objective quality, the components of income, stability, and access to social security were prioritized, jointly representing 70%, while extra-labor benefits and

associative or union representation accounted for 30%. The table also includes the interpretation scale of the indices.

Table 2. *Dimensions of Job Quality.*

Variable	Employees	
	Score Distribution	Score Assignment
Objective Quality		
Low income	30%	0%
Basic basket income		10%
Medium income		20%
High income		30%
Written, indefinite term	20%	20%
Written, fixed term		15%
Service provision (OPS)		10%
Verbal or without contract		0%
Full social security coverage	20%	20%
Partial coverage		15%
Partial coverage		10%
Partial coverage		5%
No coverage		0%
Paid vacations	5%	5%
Christmas bonus	5%	5%
severance fund contributions	5%	5%
Paid leave	5%	5%
Unionized or affiliated	10%	10%
Not unionized or affiliated		0%
Subjective Quality		
With current job	30%	30%
With benefits and compesations	20%	20%
With working hours	20%	20%

Variable	Employees	
	Score Distribution	Score Assignment
Perception of job stability	30%	30%
Interpretation Scale	(%)	
Very low	0 – 20	
Low	21 – 40	
Medium	41 – 60	
High	61 – 80	
Very high	81 – 100	

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Hidalgo and Tarapuez (2022, p. 88), and Chen and Mehdi (2018, p. 10).

Results

Dynamics of Job Quality at the National Level by Gender

For June 2025, Colombia had 23,752,953 employed individuals, earning an average monthly income of COP 1,925,286. However, 50% of the population earned COP 1,423,500 or less. Likewise, 58% of the employed population were men, and 31.9% of workers were concentrated in Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali. Meanwhile, 36.74% of the employed population worked in the wholesale and retail trade sector, and only 10% were employed in manufacturing industries.

Using the proposed methodological strategy, objective and subjective job quality indicators were calculated at both the national and gender levels (Table 3). Following, the results for both indicators are presented for men and women. Regarding the objective job quality indicator, men showed slightly lower-quality jobs than women, with scores of 0.29 and 0.30, respectively. However, this difference is not significant. According to the proposed interpretation scale, both groups fall under the low objective job quality category.

Table 3. *Average Job Quality at the National Level.*

Objective Quality			Subjective Quality		
Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
0,29	0,30	0,30	0,81	0,81	0,81

Source: Authors' elaboration based on GEIH data (2025).

Differences in Job Quality by Economic Sector and Gender

Table 4 shows the results disaggregated by branches of economic activity, following the *International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities* (ISIC), Revision 4, adapted for Colombia. Significant variations can be observed among the different branches in terms of objective job quality. The best results were found in public administration, defense, education, and health, with an index of 0.57, which exceeds the mining and quarrying sector (0.41) by 0.16 point

For the remaining branches, objective quality scores ranged between 0.14 and 0.40, evidencing widespread labor precariousness among Colombian workers. This situation is most severe in artistic, entertainment, and recreation activities, where a score of 0.14 was recorded, likely related to the self-employment nature of these occupations.

Table 4. *Job Quality by Economic Sector.*

Economic Activity	Objective Quality			Subjective Quality		
	H	M	T	H	M	T
Artistic, entertainment, recreation, and other service activities	0,15	0,13	0,14	0,78	0,79	0,79
Professional, scientific, and technical activities	0,36	0,21	0,29	0,84	0,72	0,78
Public administration, defense, education, and health	0,60	0,55	0,57	0,87	0,87	0,87
Agriculture, livestock, hunting, forestry, and fishing	0,19	0,28	0,23	0,79	0,73	0,76
Wholesale and retail trade	0,23	0,25	0,24	0,80	0,80	0,80
Construction	0,15	0,52	0,34	0,74	0,90	0,82
Mining and quarrying	0,44	0,37	0,40	0,84	0,92	0,88

Economic Activity	Objective Quality			Subjective Quality		
	H	M	T	H	M	T
Manufacturing industries	0,33	0,27	0,30	0,85	0,82	0,83
Electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning supply	0,41	0,41	0,41	0,84	0,83	0,83

Source: Authors' elaboration based on GEIH data (2025).

Note: M= men; W= women; T= total population.

Subjective job quality evidences that Colombian workers, regardless of their economic activity, perceive their jobs as being of high quality, with scores ranging from 0.75 to 0.89 across all sectors. Once again, mining and quarrying, public administration, and defense show the highest perceived job quality.

Job Quality by City and Metropolitan Area

Table 5 presents the results for the 23 cities where GEIH data are representative. Results reveal that Bogotá exhibits relatively high objective and subjective job quality; meanwhile, Manizales and Medellín stand out for scoring high in both measures. Conversely, Sincelejo, Riohacha, and Cúcuta show the most precarious labor conditions nationwide.

Table 5. *Job Quality by City and Metropolitan Area.*

City	Objective Quality			Subjective Quality		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Armenia	0,29	0,29	0,29	0,85	0,84	0,84
Barranquilla	0,29	0,29	0,29	0,83	0,81	0,82
Bogotá	0,40	0,40	0,40	0,85	0,82	0,84
Bucaramanga	0,31	0,31	0,31	0,83	0,86	0,84
Cali	0,35	0,32	0,33	0,80	0,77	0,78
Cartagena	0,26	0,28	0,27	0,82	0,84	0,83
Cúcuta	0,19	0,24	0,21	0,71	0,72	0,71
Florencia	0,29	0,27	0,28	0,80	0,76	0,78
Ibagué	0,31	0,31	0,31	0,83	0,84	0,84
Manizales	0,38	0,38	0,38	0,86	0,86	0,86
Medellín	0,38	0,39	0,39	0,86	0,87	0,86

City	Objective Quality			Subjective Quality		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Montería	0,21	0,23	0,22	0,86	0,86	0,86
Neiva	0,28	0,32	0,30	0,83	0,80	0,82
Pasto	0,23	0,25	0,24	0,70	0,71	0,71
Pereira	0,36	0,35	0,36	0,82	0,81	0,82
Popayán	0,24	0,27	0,26	0,71	0,69	0,70
Quibdó	0,23	0,29	0,26	0,80	0,79	0,80
Riohacha	0,19	0,22	0,21	0,79	0,81	0,80
Santa Marta	0,26	0,28	0,27	0,85	0,85	0,85
Sincelejo	0,15	0,25	0,20	0,70	0,75	0,73
Tunja	0,33	0,33	0,33	0,82	0,80	0,81
Valledupar	0,21	0,23	0,22	0,84	0,82	0,83
Villavicencio	0,27	0,26	0,27	0,78	0,78	0,78

Source: Authors' elaboration based on GEIH data (2025).

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate these relationships for the 23 analyzed cities. According to the interpretation levels shown in Table 2, the heatmap's color intensity increases with higher levels of objective and subjective job quality.

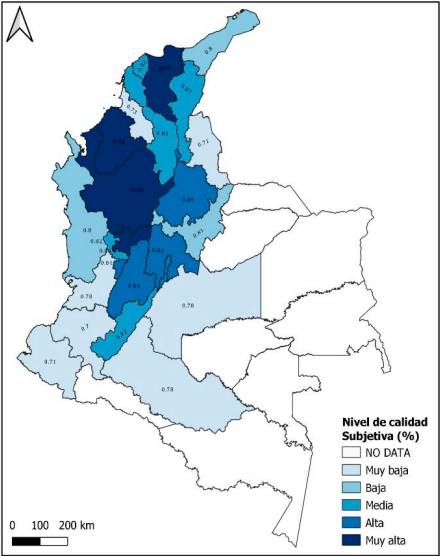


Figure 1. Objective Job Quality by City.

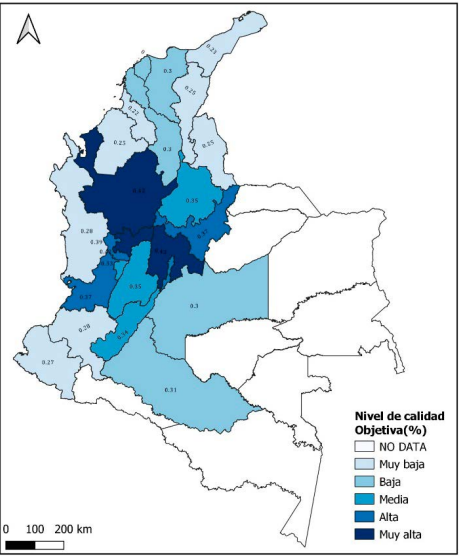


Figure 2. Subjective Job Quality by City.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on GEIH data (2025)..

Finally, workers in cities with greater labor precariousness were observed to show high or very high subjective job quality indices. In other words, employees perceive their jobs as higher quality than their actual contractual conditions indicate, suggesting limited recognition of their true labor situation. This may be explained by the heavy dependence of these cities on highly informal service sectors and high unemployment levels, except for Santa Marta, where unemployment is below the national average. In this context, the perceived difficulty of entering the labor market leads workers to accept and tolerate jobs of lower objective quality.

Discussion

This research provides a differentiated approach by combining the analysis of objective and subjective job quality with three dimensions that rarely have been explored together: (1) gender disaggregation, (2) sectoral comparison, and (3) regional disparities among cities. While most previous studies have focused on national averages or case studies of major cities, the present study demonstrates that internal differences within Colombia's labor market are key to understanding job quality. Indeed, although no substantial differences between men and women are observed at the aggregate level, when results are disaggregated by economic sector, significant gender gaps emerge that were previously concealed in national analyses.

Previous studies in Colombia have sought, since the early 2000s, to construct indicators capable of explaining the dynamics of a labor market characterized by high levels of informality and structural inequality. For example, Farné and Vergara (2015) found that increases in income and expansion of social security coverage slightly improved job quality indicators, although persistent qualitative deficits limited the impact of economic growth on labor well-being. Similarly, Mora and Ulloa (2011), in their study of major cities between 2001 and 2009, found insufficient progress in closing structural gaps, a finding consistent with this study's results, which reveal ongoing gender inequalities and precarious labor conditions despite modest improvements in some sectors.

More recently, Cortés *et al.* (2024) proposed a measurement model based on workers' preferences, incorporating subjective dimensions alongside traditional objective indicators. This is also reflected in the present research, where perceived job quality consistently exceeds objective measures across all cities and sectors. Similarly, Hidalgo and Tarapuez (2022) identified discrepancies between objective

and subjective indicators, consistent with the gender and sectoral gaps revealed in this study. Ramírez (2022), in turn, proposed an integral job quality index comprising five dimensions (working conditions, underemployment, wage benefits, social protection, and work-life balance), which aligns with this study's multidimensional approach. Likewise, Mora *et al.* (2016) documented structural inequalities affecting Afro-Colombian workers, findings that echo the territorial and sectoral disparities identified here, particularly in cities such as Sincelejo and Riohacha.

The case of professional, scientific, and technical activities is illustrative: the 15-percentage-point gap in objective quality favoring men suggests the existence of structural barriers that limit women's access to higher-quality jobs in highly skilled sectors. This finding expands upon and problematizes the results reported by Hidalgo and Tarapuez (2022), who developed a national overview but did not reveal the magnitude of sectoral differences. The inclusion of a gender perspective in this study therefore refines the analysis, showing that national indicators may obscure significant inequalities within key sectors of the economy.

Conversely, in sectors characterized by physical labor, such as construction and agriculture, livestock, forestry, and fishing, women displayed higher objective quality indicators. This apparent paradox can be explained by differentiated labor insertion: men are concentrated in operational, often informal, positions, whereas women tend to occupy administrative or support roles within these sectors, which leads to better objective indicators. This finding reinforces the need to consider the economic sector as a whole, as well as the internal segmentation of jobs by gender and by role performed.

Regarding subjective job quality, the results indicate that both men and women perceive their jobs as being of high or very high quality, even in contexts of low objective quality. This finding is consistent with the theoretical approaches of Lewis (1954) and Perry (2007), who argue that informality may, in some cases, represent a form of choice and that satisfaction can stem from factors other than formality or stability. However, the study also reveals a divergence in job quality perceptions between men and women, in line with Gómez-Salcedo *et al.* (2017), who found that since 2015, women's perceptions of job quality have become more critical than men's. This contrasts with Farné and Vergara's (2007) earlier findings, which reported more favorable female perceptions, suggesting that recent sociocultural shifts and increased public debate around gender inequalities may have fostered greater awareness among women regarding their labor conditions.

The territorial analysis complements these discussions by showing that job quality is strongly conditioned by each city's economic structure. Cities with greater productive diversification and higher concentrations of formal employment, such as Bogotá, Medellín, Manizales, and Bucaramanga, exhibit the

best objective and subjective job quality indicators. These findings partially align with Mora and Ulloa (2011), who emphasized that larger metropolitan areas offer better employment opportunities. However, this study adds nuance by showing that in major cities like Cali and Pereira, objective job quality tends to favor men, contrary to the trend observed in most other Colombian cities.

In contrast, cities such as Sincelejo, Riohacha, Cúcuta, Valledupar, Montería, and Pasto exhibit low objective job quality indices, ranging between 0.20 and 0.34, reflecting their dependence on highly informal sectors, such as commerce and tourism. The limited productive diversification in these regions restricts formal job creation and negatively impacts workers' quality of life, creating additional social pressures on local governments. This finding expands on Farné and Vergara's (2015) discussion by revealing that economic growth in Colombia is not evenly distributed across territories and that local sectoral characteristics play a decisive role in explaining variations in job quality.

These findings have important implications for public policy. Evidence shows that aggregate indicators can mask deep inequalities between men and women, between economic sectors, and among cities, therefore requiring targeted, differentiated interventions. To increase women's participation in sectors where they remain underrepresented, policies should promote access to highly skilled occupations, particularly in scientific and technical fields, where structural entry barriers persist. At the sectoral level, labor formalization and specialized training programs are recommended for artistic, recreational, and service-related industries, along with incentives for companies that offer formal contracts and improved working conditions to reduce structural precariousness. At the regional level, promoting economic diversification and productive development in intermediate cities is crucial to strengthening their capacity for generating formal and quality employment.

Finally, this study contributes to the national literature by showing that job quality in Colombia cannot be understood solely through aggregate indicators; rather, a true understanding of job quality requires a differentiated analysis by gender, sector, and territory. In doing so, this study goes beyond the methodological replication of previous studies and offers a broader, more detailed, and more critical perspective on contemporary labor dynamics, one that provides valuable insights for both academia and public policy design.

Conclusions

The analysis of job quality in Colombia, based on objective and subjective indicators, shows that these two approaches do not always coincide, reflecting tensions between contractual conditions and workers' perceptions of stability and satisfaction. Although subjective job quality tends to be higher than objective measures, this study demonstrates that such a gap stems from self-assessment factors and cultural elements previously identified in the literature. These findings reaffirm classic insights such as those of Seashore (1974), while providing updated evidence that this phenomenon persists in the Colombian labor market.

Regarding gender, the results reveal slight advantages for women in certain sectors, which can be explained by their insertion into administrative occupations within physical or operational branches, where men are more concentrated in precarious roles. This finding adds a novel perspective to the debate. Whereas previous studies, such as Mora *et al.* (2016) and Ramírez (2022), documented structural inequalities disadvantaging women, the present analysis shows that, under specific sectoral conditions, women may access jobs of better objective quality. Likewise, the evidence by city confirms that economic diversification favors job quality, as seen in Bogotá, compared with territories more dependent on informal sectors such as Sincelejo. This outcome reinforces Mora and Ulloa's (2011) argument concerning regional determinants, while providing an updated perspective that highlights persistent urban gaps.

The main contribution of this study lies in combining objective and subjective measurements of job quality with a disaggregated approach by gender, economic sector, and city, thus moving beyond the simple replication of previous methodologies. While studies such as Hidalgo and Tarapuez (2022) or Ramírez (2022) developed integral indices, this research integrates comparative and territorial dimensions, offering a more refined understanding of labor dynamics and providing useful inputs for both public policy design and academic discussion.

Nevertheless, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The analysis relies on cross-sectional data, preventing the examination of labor trajectories or intertemporal mobility in job quality. Moreover, although objective and subjective dimensions are integrated, perception-based information comes from self-reported survey data, which may introduce bias and restrict exploration of cultural, family, or individual factors underlying subjective evaluations of work. These limitations open opportunities for future studies aimed at deepening the understanding of labor quality in Colombia.

Looking ahead, advancing toward longitudinal studies that examine labor transitions and their relationship with job quality is necessary, as well as applying intersectional approaches incorporating variables such as ethnicity, age, and educational level. Complementary qualitative research exploring workers' narratives in informal sectors could further enrich the understanding of subjective job quality and its determinants. Additionally, future studies should analyze the impact of labor formalization policies, particularly in intermediate cities where structural challenges are most evident.

Finally, the study highlights the importance of deepening sectoral gender analysis, especially in highly precarious branches such as artistic and personal service activities, where gender gaps persist and targeted policies on formalization and social protection are urgently needed.

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Effectiveness of Care Provided by Psychology Trainees in University Counseling Centers*

[English version]

Eficacia de la atención ofertada por psicólogos en formación en centros de atención universitarios

Eficácia do atendimento oferecido por psicólogos em formação em centros de atendimento universitários

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Abstract

Objective: To evaluate the clinical effectiveness of psychological interventions provided by student trainees at university care centers, under the teaching-service model. **Methodology:** A quantitative, descriptive design was used, with the Outcome Questionnaire (OQ-45.2) administered before and after the therapeutic process. An initial sample of 167 participants was obtained but only 98 cases with both measurements were analyzed. The mean age was 37 years (SD = 14.1), and 59.2% were female. **Results:** A significant decrease in the OQ-45.2 total score was observed, from a mean of 65.23 to 53.77 points ($p < 0.001$), it showed clinical improvement, although the threshold required for a reliable change (17 points) was not reached. The subscales also showed reductions: symptomatic distress (-5.25), interpersonal relationships (-1.91), and social role performance (-1.3), all statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). The main reasons for consulting were related to family difficulties and psychosocial factors (62.2%), then, by mental disorders (37.7%) anxiety and stress as the most common. Most

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patients had no psychological (73.5%) or psychiatric (91.8%) reports, and 16.3% were on medication. The most common therapeutic approach was psychodynamic (44.9%).

Conclusions: The psychological care services provided by students led to significant improvements in patients' mental health. This demonstrates the relevance of the teaching-service model as a clinical training strategy and a community contribution.

Keywords: mental health; psychopathology; health service (obtained from the UNESCO thesaurus).

Resumen

Objetivo: evaluar la eficacia clínica de las intervenciones psicológicas brindadas por estudiantes en formación en centros de atención universitaria, bajo el modelo de docencia-servicio. **Metodología:** se utilizó un diseño cuantitativo, descriptivo, con aplicación del instrumento *Outcome Questionnaire* (OQ-45.2) antes y después del proceso terapéutico. Se tuvo una muestra inicial de 167 consultantes, de la cual, se analizaron 98 casos que completaron ambas mediciones. La edad promedio fue de 37 años (DE = 14,1) y, con relación al género, el 59,2% fueron mujeres. **Resultados:** se evidenció una disminución significativa en el puntaje total del OQ-45.2, al pasar de una media de 65,23 a 53,77 puntos ($p < 0,001$); lo que indica una mejoría clínica, aunque sin alcanzar el umbral requerido para un cambio confiable (17 puntos). Las subescalas también evidenciaron reducciones: malestar sintomático (-5,25), relaciones interpersonales (-1,91) y desempeño del rol social (-1,3), todas con significancia estadística ($p < 0,001$). Los principales motivos de consulta se relacionaron con dificultades familiares y factores psicosociales (62,2%), seguidos de trastornos mentales (37,7%), siendo los más comunes los relacionados con ansiedad y estrés. La mayoría de los usuarios no tenía antecedentes psicológicos (73,5%) ni psiquiátricos (91,8%), y el 16,3% estaba en tratamiento farmacológico. El enfoque terapéutico más frecuente fue el psicodinámico (44,9%). **Conclusiones:** los procesos de atención psicológica brindados por estudiantes generaron mejoras significativas en la salud mental de los usuarios. Esto evidencia la pertinencia del modelo docencia-servicio como estrategia de formación clínica y aporte comunitario.

Palabras clave: salud mental; psicopatología; servicio de salud (obtenidos del tesoro UNESCO).

Resumo

Objetivo: avaliar a eficácia clínica das intervenções psicológicas realizadas por estudantes em formação em centros de atendimento universitário, sob o modelo de docência-serviço. **Metodologia:** utilizou-se um delineamento quantitativo e descritivo, com aplicação do instrumento Outcome Questionnaire (OQ-45.2) antes e depois do processo terapêutico. A amostra inicial foi composta por 167 usuários, dos quais 98 completaram ambas as medições e, portanto, foram analisados. A idade média foi de 37 anos (DP = 14,1), e 59,2% eram mulheres. **Resultados:** observou-se uma redução significativa no escore total do OQ-45.2, passando de uma média de 65,23 para 53,77 pontos ($p < 0,001$), o que indica melhora clínica, embora sem atingir o limite necessário para uma mudança confiável (17 pontos). As subescalas também apresentaram reduções: desconforto sintomático (-5,25), relações interpessoais (-1,91) e desempenho do papel social (-1,3), todas com significância estatística ($p < 0,001$). Os principais motivos de consulta estiveram relacionados a dificuldades familiares e fatores psicossociais (62,2%), seguidos por transtornos mentais (37,7%), sendo os mais comuns aqueles associados à ansiedade e ao estresse. A maioria dos usuários não possuía antecedentes psicológicos (73,5%) nem psiquiátricos (91,8%), e 16,3% fazia uso de tratamento farmacológico. A abordagem terapêutica mais frequente foi a psicodinâmica (44,9%). **Conclusões:** os processos de atendimento psicológico realizados por estudantes geraram melhorias significativas na saúde mental dos usuários. Isso evidencia a pertinência do modelo docência-serviço como estratégia de formação clínica e contribuição comunitária.

Palavras-chave: saúde mental; psicopatologia; serviço de saúde (obtidos do tesouro UNESCO).

Introduction

To ensure quality education in the health sciences and to guarantee competent and standard training in various disciplines, the Colombian government has established clear and demanding regulatory actions. The Decrees 2376 of 2010 and 780 of 2016 have established that all undergraduate students in health-related programs must be trained under a standardized medical model. This model, known as “teaching-service”, is commonly implemented on university psychological counseling centers and supported by a pedagogical structure based on progressive assignment of clinical responsibilities. Students begin with direct observation and gradually adopt an active role in leading therapeutic processes.

This strategy not only promotes comprehensive clinical training but also allows future professionals to gain significant experience before practicing independently (Marín *et al.*, 2023). However, applying the model without specific adjustments to psychological practice has drawn criticism regarding its relevance, especially concerning the quality of service and its impact on patients (Soni and Kumar, 2024).

These concerns have led to reflection on the need to evaluate not only formative outcomes but also clinical effects of the interventions provided by psychology trainees. Recent research shows that many university students access psychological services for the first time within these institutional settings (Almeida *et al.*, 2021), and that structural and attitudinal barriers affect the continuity and effectiveness of therapeutic process (Kim & Lee, 2023).

The current research is framed within a line of research focused on treatment effectiveness which is understood as the ability of a psychological intervention to produce significant changes in the patient’s well-being (Echeburúa *et al.*, 2010). Recent studies have validated instruments such as OQ-45.2 for monitoring therapeutic progress in university populations (Boswell *et al.*, 2013). It is highlighting for its sensitivity in noticing improvements even in brief interventions.

Several studies have shown that brief and focused approaches, both cognitive-behavioral and psychodynamic, can be effective, mainly with young adult university students (Schleider *et al.*, 2025). Furthermore, it has been documented that the most significant advances usually occur before the eighth session, which has led to a reconsideration of the optimal duration of psychotherapy (Painepán & Kühne, 2012).

Despite these findings, much of the literature has focused on postgraduate contexts, with clinically more advanced students (García, 2004; Labrador *et al.*, 2010). In contrast, this research addresses clinical procedures carried out by undergraduate students who are in the early stages of their professional training.

Previous studies have pointed out limitations in the effectiveness of these settings, with low levels of therapeutic goal attainment (Londoño *et al.*, 2017) and high dropout rates (Rondón *et al.*, 2009). However, recent research has highlighted the importance of relational factors such as the therapeutic alliance and social support in adherence to and success of university psychotherapy (Flückiger *et al.*, 2018).

This research was conducted at the Psychosocial Support Centers, CAPS and CAPL (for its Spanish acronyms), of Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios (UNIMINUTO) and the Corporación Universitaria Lasallista, where care is provided by senior psychology students during their clinical internship under the teaching-service model. These students receive constant professional supervision and apply brief interventions with real patients, allowing them to assess both the clinical impact of their interventions and the quality of the training process in a real-world setting.

Methodology

This research is framed within an empirical-analytical, non-experimental paradigm, with a descriptive scope and pre-test and post-test measures. The sample consisted of 167 participants over 18 years; all were users of university psychological services under the “teaching-service” model: the Psychosocial Care Center (CAPS) of Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios (UNIMINUTO) and the Centro de Atención Psicológica Lasallista (CAPL) of the Corporación Universitaria Unilasallista. However, for the research purposes 98 of these participants were included, as they met the requirement of completing the second administration of the instrument.

The instrument was *Outcome Questionnaire* (OQ-45.2) developed by Lambert *et al.* (1996). It is a 45-item self-administered scale used to measure clinical outcomes in psychotherapy. For the research purposes, the Latin American, specifically Chilean, standardized version by Correa *et al.* (2006) was used in contrast to the research in Colombia led by Londoño *et al.* (2017). This tool enables the evaluation of the results in the therapeutic process across three areas: 1) symptoms of distress, 2) interpersonal relationships, and 3) social role, and a sociodemographic factor.

The data obtained from the OQ-45.2 instrument were analyzed using the SPSS v27 statistical package and manual analysis with Excel tools. This allowed for descriptive and correlational analyzes, taking into account the sociodemographic characterization variables and the results of the OQ-45.2 instrument.

Data collection was conducted under the supervision of researchers assigned to mentor clinical psychology interns, who managed patient information in an encrypted format according to the professional code of ethics and the relevant ethical considerations approved by the institutional committee. The instrument was administered by research interns and clinical psychology interns from CAPS and CAPL of the respective university psychological care centers. They were responsible for tabulating and providing the information to the centers. Exclusion and inclusion criteria were taken into account, such as the participants' legal age and adherence to treatment.

Results

Sociodemographic Characteristics

Table 1 describes sociodemographic characteristics related to gender, marital status, schooling level, place of origin, ethnicity, disability, relationship with the institution, and program.

At first, 167 patients from the university psychological counseling centers of two universities (CAPS, CAPL) participated, and the OQ-45.2 instrument was administered to them. And 98 of the participants, 59%, were evaluated a second time, completing phases A (pre-intervention) and B (post-intervention) of the research. This final sample of 98 was primarily composed by female (59.2%), followed by male (40.8%). The average age of the participants was 37 years (SD 14.1 between 18–62 years). Most consultants were single (54.1%), the highest schooling level was mainly secondary school (36.7%), and about residence was mostly in the municipalities of Caldas (38.8%) and Medellín (21.4%). Only 2.0% belonged to the Afro-descendant community, and 97.9% did not report any particular ethnic group. Two individuals (2.0%) reported having a disability, and 97.9% did not report disabilities. The majority of participants were external to the universities (58%) and, to a lesser extent (41.8%), students or employees belonging to the universities. About schooling level (taking into account that a large number of patients were at the lower secondary level), the majority were psychology students (88.8%), followed by 9.2% who had not completed their undergraduate degree, and 1.0% belong to the government and 1.0% of art and digital entertainment.

Table 1. *Sociodemographic Data.*

Variables	N	%
Genre		
Woman	58	59,2
Man	40	40,8
Marital Status		
Single	53	54,1
Married	15	15,3
Divorced	12	12,2
Free union	10	10,2
Widow	8	8,2
Schooling Level		
No schooling	3	3,1
Primary	17	17,3
Secondary	36	36,7
Technical	7	7,1
Technological	4	4,1
University	17	17,3
Graduate	14	14,3
Place of Residence		
Caldas	38	38,8
Medellín	21	21,4
Bello	13	13,3
La Estrella	9	9,2
Itagüí	7	7,1
Envigado	5	5,1
Sabaneta	3	3,1
Amaga	1	1,0
Copacabana	1	1,0
Disability		
Disability	2	2,0
No disability	96	97,9
Ethnic Group		
Afro-descendant	2	2,0
No ethnic group	96	97,9
Person		
External	57	58,2
Internal	41	41,8
Program		

Variables	N	%
Psychology	87	88,8
Administration	1	1,0
Not applicable	9	9,2
Art and digital entertainment	1	1,0

Distribution of Mental Health Diagnoses Among Participants.

Based on the final sample of participants (n=98), table 2, it was found that, among both university psychological care centers and according to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10), 62.2% of cases overall corresponded to factors influenced by health status and contact with health services for other determinants. Within that group, diagnoses with potential health risks stand out at 46.9%, especially problems related to the support group, including family determinants. 15.3% corresponds to individuals providing health services, highlighting problems related to lifestyle (Z72) and life's difficulties (Z73). Finally, mental and behavioral disorders represented 37.7% of the overall total. Neurotic disorders, stress-related disorders, and somatoform disorders 29.6%, followed by mood (affective) disorders at 7.1%, personality and behavioral disorders in adults 1%.

Table 2. *Distribution of Mental Health Diagnoses Among Participants.*

Main categories of ICD-10	n	%
<i>Mental and behavioral disorders</i>		
Neurotic disorders, stress-related disorders, and somatoform disorders		
F41. Other anxiety disorders	16	16,3
F42. Obsessive-compulsive disorder	2	2,0
F43. Severe stress reaction and adjustment disorders	11	11,2
Total main category	29	29,6
Mood (Affective) Disorders		
F32. Depressive episode	2	2,0
F33. Recurrent depressive disorder	2	2,0

F34. Persistent mood [affective] disorders	3	3,0
Total main category	7	7,1
Personality and behavioral disorders in adults		
F60. Specific personality disorder	1	1,0
Total main category	1	1,0
Global total	37	37,7
Factors influencing health status and contact with health services		
People at potential risk to their health for socioeconomic and psychosocial determinants		
Z55. Problems related to education and literacy	1	1,0
Z58. Problems related to the physical environment	1	1,0
Z60. Problems related to the social environment	6	6,0
Z61. Problems related to negative life events in childhood	3	3,0
Z62. Other problems related to parenting	1	1,0
Z63. Other issues related to the primary support group, including family determinants	34	34,7
Total main category	46	46,9
Health services contact for other health determinants		
Z70. Consultant related to sexual attitude, orientation, or behavior	1	1,0
Z72. Lifestyle-related problems	6	6,0
Z73 Problems related to managing life's difficulties	6	6,0
Z74. Problems related to the caregiver for a dependent person	1	1,0
Z76. People in contact with health services for other determinants	1	1,0
Total main category	15	15,3
Global total	61	62,2

General Pre-Test and Post-Test Analysis.

Table 3, a mean of 65.23 on the OQ pre-test was identified (SD = 17.948; range 28–106), below the functional population/dysfunction cutoff (PC = 73). This suggests that the participants' quality of life is no higher than that of the general population. Regarding the post-test, the OQ Total score averaged 53.77 points (SD = 15.603; range 24–101); it decreased by 11.46 points, which would mean losing the minimum score required to achieve a reliable change index (RCI). This is derived from the adaptation and validation research of the Spanish OQ-45.2 instrument by Von Bergen and De la Parra (2002), it shows that if "[...] the patient's score decreased by 17 points or more, the change is clinically significant ($p < 0.05$)" (p. 174).

Table 3. Pre-test and Post-Test General Analysis.

	Pre-test		Post-test				Test Statistics				
	M	SD	Min	Max	M	SD	Min	Max	z	p	n²
QQ-45 Total	65,23	17,948	28	106	53,77	15,603	24	101	-7,083	<0,001	0.256
Stress or Symptomatic Distress	38,61	13,254	15	69	33,36	13,059	13	70	-6,745	<0,001	0.232
Interpersonal Relationships	16,55	6,156	4	29	14,64	6,821	4	41	-5,886	<0,001	0.177
Social Role Performance	10,83	4,358	3	22	9,53	5,243	3	40	-5,615	<0,001	0.161

Participants' Mental Health History and Type of Therapy.

Figure 1 shows that the majority of participants had no prior psychological (73.5%) or psychiatric (91.8%) record. Regarding current mental health treatments, only 1% had psychiatric support, 100% were in ongoing therapeutic processes by the teaching-service model, and only 16.3% were currently receiving pharmacological treatment.

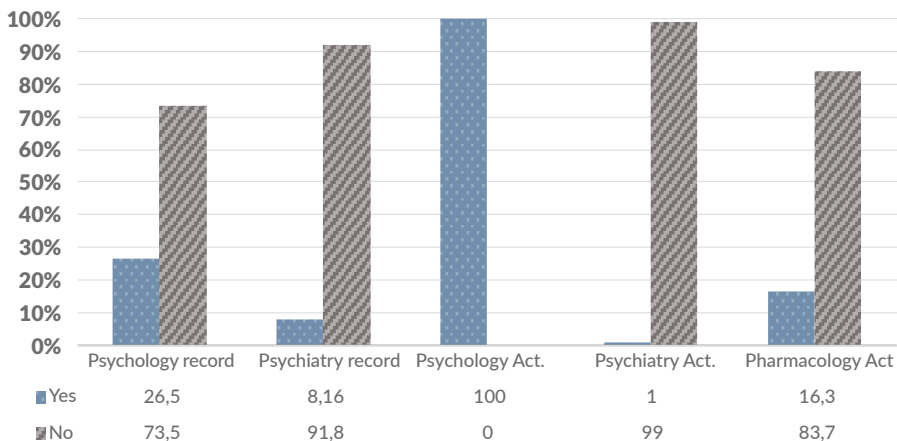


Figure 1. Characteristics Related to Participants' Mental Health History.

Regarding the intervention approaches (table 4), students in clinical practice showed a preference for developing psychodynamic interventions (44.9%), cognitive-behavioral interventions (37.8%) and Gestalt interventions (17.3%).

Table 4. *Characteristics of the Therapeutic Intervention.*

Variables	n	%
Type of Therapeutic Intervention		
Psychodynamics	44	44,9
Cognitive Behavioral	37	37,8
Gestalt	17	17,3

Discussion

Regarding sociodemographic aspects, the demand for psychotherapy services is mainly female, in accordance with Santibáñez *et al.* (2009), Narváez and Aguirre-Loaiza (2016) and Colón *et al.* (2020). This trend not only persists but has been confirmed by recent research showing that female university students show higher levels of anxiety, academic stress, and willingness to seek psychological support compared to male (Weber *et al.*, 2022). Multiple factors have been attributed to this phenomenon, including more avoidant attachment styles in men and higher anxiety in women, which directly influence the motivation to seek assistance (Weber *et al.*, 2022). Recent systematic reviews have shown that, although both genders value the therapeutic relationship, women show a more positive attitude toward psychotherapy and a greater willingness to initiate it (Kim & Lee, 2023). In Latin American contexts, this difference is further reinforced by sociocultural variables such as chauvinism, the stigma surrounding men's mental health, and social pressure to avoid emotional expression, which contribute to low male demand for psychological care centers (Jassir *et al.*, 2021). It is concluded that psychotherapy in most studies, including this sample, has been mainly composed of women, a pattern that remains consistent in contemporary research.

About age, the majority of participants were between 20 and 40 years old, with an average age of 37 years. These data are consistent with the ones reported by Alcázar (2007) and Colón *et al.* (2020), Narváez and Aguirre-Loaiza (2016) and Labrador *et al.* (2010). It also aligns with the age-group analysis by age range

in the National Mental Health Survey conducted in Colombia, where “the most requested therapy is psychotherapy:” 58.3% (7 to 12 years) and 72.7% (18 to 44 years) (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 2015, p. 319). Thus, it can be concluded that psychotherapy is mostly sought by adults who regularly use these services and are aware of some emotional distress.

A multicenter study conducted at Latin American universities found that young adults aged 25 to 39 show the highest adherence to and continuity in psychotherapeutic processes, motivated by emotional distress, relationship difficulties, or symptoms of anxiety and depression. International studies have confirmed that this age group shows greater psychological awareness and a greater willingness to seek help compared to adolescents or older adults, which may be related to higher emotional literacy, economic independence, and access to university or workplace mental health services (Almeida *et al.*, 2021). Thus, it is concluded that psychotherapy is primarily sought by young adults, who regularly access these services and show a greater awareness of emotional distress and the need for intervention.

In pre- and post-test, some studies have few participants; however, this research exceeds the population average, with a total of 98 participants in the pre- and post-tests. Other studies report between 21 and 25 participants (Santibáñez *et al.*, 2009; Painepán & Kühne, 2012). This is a relevant and new finding, given that continuity in therapeutic processes at such a high volume is not common.

Recent literature has pointed out that one of the main challenges in clinical-academic settings is just the high dropout rate or discontinuity in therapeutic processes, especially among young adults, due to academic overload, a lack of perceived need, or stigma toward mental health factors (Buizza *et al.*, 2019). Modern studies highlight that less than 40% of those who begin psychotherapy in university services manage to complete it, which positions this sample as an indicator of exceptional adherence (Negash *et al.*, 2020). This level of sustained participation suggests not only an effective response from psychologist trainees, but also a supportive environment that facilitates the therapeutic bond and promotes retention, key elements for clinical and educational success.

Characteristics Associated with Participants' Mental Health History

The findings regarding the characteristics associated with participants' mental health history (figure 1) are both relevant and innovative, since the studies reviewed only show the reason for consultation or diagnostic impression, without mentioning any involvement in the support process by another specialty (Narváez and Aguirre-Loaiza, 2016; Colón *et al.*, 2020; Talley & Clack, 2006; Alcázar, 2007; Labrador *et al.*, 2010).

Recent research has underscored the need to integrate information on the articulation between psychotherapy and other levels of mental health care, especially when seeking to understand the complexity of the clinical approach in university settings. In fact, contemporary studies indicate that most students who access university psychological services do so as their first point of care, without any prior history of psychiatric or pharmacological treatment, suggesting both an underutilization of the comprehensive mental health system and an opportunity for early detection in these settings (Osborn *et al.*, 2022). It has been documented that less than 10% of university psychological service patients are simultaneously under psychiatric care, it aligns with the findings of this research and underscores the importance of strengthening interinstitutional networks to provide comprehensive care (Vergara, 2023).

These findings show two main reasons for seeking assistance at both support centers. These correspond, in terms of the ICD-10, to two broad categories: determinants influencing health status and contact with health services (62.2%), and mental and behavioral disorders (37.7%). For the first category, Pérez and Gómez (2017) find the most prevalent reasons to frame the relational factor, within difficulties in the family, romantic relationship, and peer contexts. This also has a special connection to the OQ-45.2 results on the “interpersonal relationships” subscale, it was the only subscale to reach the minimum cutoff point.

Additionally, the OQ-45.2 scores support this trend, as the interpersonal relations subscale was precisely the only one to reach the minimum clinical cutoff in the sample, it indicates significant difficulties in the social domain. These findings align with recent studies that highlight how, in university settings, relational distress is one of the main predictors of psychological distress, especially among young adults experiencing relationship breakups, unresolved family conflicts, or difficulties in social adjustment (Liu *et al.*, 2025). Moreover, it has been emphasized that relational and contextual factors, although not formal psychiatric disorders, can have an equal or even greater functional impact than established clinical diagnoses, reinforcing the importance of their early detection and timely therapeutic intervention (Acoba, 2024).

Regarding the second category, “mental and behavioral disorders,” this study most frequently indicates “neurotic disorders” related to stress (29.6%). This is related with studies such as Labrador *et al.*, 2010; however, only that study is mentioned, which is somewhat limited for making inferences and generalizations about diagnostic prevalence.

Characteristics of the Therapeutic Intervention

For the OQ-45.2 Total pre-test, a mean of 65.23 (SD = 17.948; range 28–106) was identified, which is below the cutoff point that distinguishes between functional and dysfunctional populations (PC = 73). This indicates that participants experience a level of quality of life comparable to that of the general population. Regarding the post-test, the OQ-45.2 Total score had a mean of 53.77; according to the adaptation and validation study of the OQ-45.2 in Spanish by Von Bergen and De la Parra (2002), if “[...] a patient’s score has decreased by 17 points or more, the change is clinically significant ($p < 0.05$)” (p. 174). This was also described by Correa *et al.* (2006).

This criterion was also described by Correa *et al.* (2006), who validated the OQ-45.2’s sensitivity in detecting significant changes during the therapeutic process. Recent research states the OQ-45.2’s utility as a tool for monitoring clinical progress in university settings, highlighting its sensitivity in observing improvements, even in patients without a formal clinical diagnosis, as well as its ability to assess specific areas of dysfunction (Boswell *et al.*, 2013). These findings suggest that, although patients did not initially report high levels of discomfort, the psychological support process did generate positive effects on their quality of life and on the reduction of perceived emotional distress.

Paineplán and Kühne (2012) state that psychotherapy serves as a very good indicator of symptomatic improvement. It is effective after 12 sessions; moreover, after eight sessions, patients no longer showed clinical indicators. This particular finding is consistent with this research, in which therapeutic sessions ended at session eight and statistically significant results were obtained on all three scales by at least 15%. It is suggested that, for long-term effects, it is important to allow for therapies with no time limit.

It is suggested that, for long-term effects, it is important to allow for therapies with no time limit. Recent evidence has also highlighted the efficacy of brief psychotherapy in university settings, especially on goal-oriented, problem-solving, or crisis intervention approaches, showing significant improvements from the fourth to the eighth session (Howard *et al.*, 1986). However, several authors agree that, for longer-lasting effects and greater consolidation of psychological change, it is necessary to make the time limits of therapies more flexible, promoting open-ended frameworks that respond to the complexity of the case rather than solely to administrative or institutional criteria (Cifuentes, 2023). This consideration is key if the goal is to foster deep transformational processes and prevent relapses in those experiencing persistent symptomatology or long-standing relational difficulties.

Regarding the subscale scores, the pre-test for “1) Symptomatic Distress” yielded a mean of 38.61 points (SD = 13.254; range 15–69), which does not reach the cutoff point of 43; this indicates a tendency toward the absence of symptoms in the final sample. And in the post-test, the mean score was 33.36 points (SD = 13.059; range 13–70); it decreased by 5.25 points, indicating that the minimum score required to achieve the RCI (Reliable Change Index) of 12 points was not met. Regarding “2) interpersonal relationships,” in the pre-test a mean score of 16.55 points (SD 6.156; range 4–29) was found, which exceeds the cutoff point of 16 and indicates a tendency in the population to experience difficulties in relationships with partners, family, and others. And in the post-test, the mean score was 14.64 points (SD = 6.821; range 13–70); it decreased by 1.91 points, indicating that the minimum score required to achieve the RCI of 9 points was not met.

For the “3) social role” subscale, the pre-test shows a mean of 10.83 (SD 4.358; range 3–22); this figure does not reach the cutoff point of 14 and indicates a tendency in the population to experience adjustment to roles in their various life domains. And in the post-test, the mean score was 9.53 points (SD = 5.243; range 3–40); it decreased by 1.3 points, indicating that the minimum score required to achieve the RCI of 8 points was not met. And regarding the instrument’s sensitivity, Correa *et al.* (2006) indicate validity and reliability in its application, even in patients with a record of hospitalization.

The above is reaffirmed by Santibáñez *et al.* (2009), who indicate that post-intervention cutoff points improve significantly on the symptom scale by at least 5 points below the cutoff; on the interpersonal relationships scale, by at least 5 points; on the social role scale, by 6 points; and finally, on the total scale, by at least 12 points among 17 participants.

Conclusions

The findings allow us to answer the initial question of whether a therapeutic process could positively influence the outcomes on the OQ-45.2 scale. The cutoff points for the three subscales showed symptomatic reduction, including the total scale. Regarding the therapeutic approach, this research reveals a preference among students for developing interventions from a psychodynamic perspective.

Additionally, the recurring reason for seeking care is associated with health status and contact with health services, with eight sessions there is a reduction of symptoms associated with clinical indicators. Most of the clients had no prior psychological history.

From a broader perspective, it is suggested to continue advancing the development of studies that, by comparative methods such as Jacobson and Truax's (1991), allow for a deeper exploration of the results of clinically significant change. The above is described for the purpose of improving the mental health at both centers, based on their pre- and post-intervention outcomes, as well as the quality of the psychological support service provided under the teaching-service model.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the results of this research brought to light specific needs and characteristics of the population. These findings provide key inputs for future research and for the development of mental health promotion and intervention strategies.

Based on these findings, the importance of strengthening the continuity of therapeutic processes beyond academic cycles is recognized. Retaining participants and enabling longitudinal follow-up would let to get more robust and reliable data, as well as the exploration of the sustained effects of the interventions over time.

These results encourage reflection on the clinical training of psychologists in training within the teaching-service model and demonstrate the potential to generate a positive and measurable impact on their patients' mental health. This experience represents a valuable opportunity to develop clinical competencies from an ethical, humanistic, and evidence-based perspective.

Finally, the need to incorporate prevention and mental health promotion strategies within the university environment is raised, prioritizing early interventions to address emotional distress before it becomes chronic. The data obtained provide a solid foundation for designing interventions more aligned to the psychosocial realities of the student population.

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A New Post-Pandemic Perception of Nursing in the Social Sphere*

[English Version]

Una nueva percepción de enfermería post-pandemia en el ámbito social

Uma nova percepção da enfermagem pós-pandemia no âmbito social

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Abstract

The nursing profession is highly esteemed, as a result of collective effort and advances in science and technology. **Objective:** To examine the perception of nursing in the post-

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pandemic period within the social sphere. **Methodology:** A qualitative, descriptive approach grounded in Moscovici's theory of social representations was used. The study took place in a public-sector institution. The number of participants was determined by data saturation, considering the following criteria: being family members of patients cared for in the institution, being between 20 and 60 years old, and agreeing to participate by signing informed consent. The instrument consisted of an interview guide with fourteen open-ended questions, which were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Using a chromatic coding technique, the most salient data were selected and organized into categories. **Results:** Findings were discussed in accordance with the theory and qualitative research method: conceptualization of the theory, empirical data, comparison, and logical reasoning. Results were presented by category, which included: perception of nursing during the pandemic, performance during the pandemic, social prestige, professional identity, professional visibility, professional development, professional competence, and nursing professionalism. **Conclusions:** The study shows how the perception of nursing has changed in the context of post-pandemic interventions related to the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Keywords: nursing; nursing supervision; pandemics; SARS Virus; social perception (obtained from DeCS/MeSH).

Resumen

La profesión de enfermería tiene una alta estima, resultado del esfuerzo desarrollado en conjunto con los avances científicos y tecnológicos. **Objetivo:** mostrar la percepción que se tiene de la enfermería post-pandemia en el ámbito social. **Metodología:** enfoque cualitativo, descriptivo, fundamentada en la teoría de representaciones sociales de Moscovici. El escenario fue en una institución del sector público. El número de participantes se determinó por saturación de datos, considerando los criterios: ser familiares de pacientes atendidos en dicha institución, tener entre 20 y 60 años, y aceptar participar, mediante consentimiento informado firmado. El instrumento fue una guía de entrevista de catorce preguntas abiertas, grabadas y transcritas textualmente. Con apoyo de la técnica cromática, se seleccionaron los datos más sobresaliente y se ordenaron por categorías. **Resultados:** los hallazgos se discutieron conforme a la teoría y al método de investigación cualitativa: conceptualización de la teoría, dato empírico, contrastación y razonamiento lógico. Se presentaron los resultados por categorías, las cuales son: percepción de enfermería durante la pandemia, desempeño durante la pandemia, prestigio social, identidad de la profesión, visibilidad profesional, desarrollo profesional, competencia profesional, y profesionalismo de enfermería. **Conclusiones:**

se muestra cómo ha cambiado la percepción de enfermería durante las intervenciones post pandemia por el virus SARS-CoV2.

Palabras clave: enfermería; supervisión de enfermería; pandemias; virus del SRAS; percepción social (obtenidos del tesoro DeCS/MeSH).

Resumo

A profissão de enfermagem possui alta estima, resultado do esforço desenvolvido em conjunto com os avanços científicos e tecnológicos. **Objetivo:** mostrar a percepção da enfermagem no período pós-pandemia no âmbito social. **Metodologia:** abordagem qualitativa, descritiva, fundamentada na teoria das representações sociais de Moscovici. O cenário do estudo foi uma instituição do setor público. O número de participantes foi determinado pela saturação de dados, considerando os critérios: ser familiar de pacientes atendidos na instituição, ter entre 20 e 60 anos e aceitar participar mediante assinatura do termo de consentimento informado. O instrumento consistiu em um roteiro de entrevista com quatorze perguntas abertas, gravadas e transcritas textualmente. Com apoio da técnica cromática, selecionaram-se os dados mais relevantes e organizaram-se por categorias. **Resultados:** os achados foram discutidos conforme a teoria e o método de pesquisa qualitativa—conceituação teórica, dado empírico, contrastação e raciocínio lógico. Os resultados foram apresentados por categorias, que incluíram: percepção da enfermagem durante a pandemia, desempenho durante a pandemia, prestígio social, identidade profissional, visibilidade profissional, desenvolvimento profissional, competência profissional e profissionalismo em enfermagem. **Conclusões:** evidenciase como a percepção da enfermagem mudou durante as intervenções pós-pandemia relacionadas ao vírus SARS-CoV-2.

Palavras-chave: enfermagem; supervisão de enfermagem; pandemias; vírus SARS; percepção social (obtidos do DeCS/MeSH).

Introduction

The history of nursing must have two main purposes. On the one hand, it must contribute, identify and explain the particularities of nursing that are the product of the historical processes in which it has been immersed; and, on the other hand, to highlight the place of the profession in history (Sacristán, 2022).

The professional practice of nursing is currently highly esteemed globally. All this becomes from the efforts of professionals who have developed with scientific and technological advances, preserving their humanistic essence with patients (Pío *et al.*, 2020).

Therefore, and to determine the current perception and social image of the functions of the profession, this research reveals the visibility and perception of nursing in the social field. Thus, it is made known what the social image of this profession is at the current time and context, and, therefore, the multiple consequences for the practice and training of human capital. The findings showed the real context of the profession, so it is projected as an option of vocational choice among young people, and the stated objective is to show the perception of nursing in the post-pandemic stage in the social field.

From a social point of view, there are judgments that are based on observation and/or discrimination, and try to find an explanation for people's behaviors once all data has been collected (Franco, 2020). Perception is the individual and cognitive mechanism that human beings perform. It consists of receiving, interpreting and understanding the signals that come from the outside, encoding them from the sensitive activity (Salcedo *et al.*, 2022).

As a result of the quality and high level of academic training, both scientific and humanistic, the profession has found its place in the society; it has made it necessary, valid and evolving. This consolidates it as an autonomous profession and with a promising future vision in academic teaching and performance in research (Pío *et al.*, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic showed a scenario full of personal and scientific uncertainties, it invites us to reflect on how the professions linked to the role of providing health care have been modified, and how they had a more visible performance (Ramacciotti & Testa, 2021). The professional approach of nursing has prevailed in the care area, and it is evident that they are essential professionals in the sustainability and viability of the health system (Martínez *et al.*, 2022).

With the pandemic, nursing began to take a vital place in the news; they included thanks and tributes to the nursing staff from the citizen collective (Adissi, 2023). It is of great interest to describe how the profession is represented by the media and how it was broadcast. An important sample could be observed on

how nursing actions were perceived, they made the image evident to the society (Martínez *et al.*, 2022).

In the post-pandemic context, new ideas arise around the maintenance of the health system. There is a perception that the Covid-19 emergency encouraged further training to optimize and improving nursing practice that highlights its professionalization (Danel *et al.*, 2022).

Nurses have an academic background especially suited to the growing challenges of the 21st century. Their educational training emphasizes the integration of physical and psychosocial health care needs that reaffirms their professional competence (Reynolds, 2020). As the role of nursing was institutionalized, a range of factors is included that is not only linked to hierarchical power, but also to professional training and the work process of nursing care (Pereira *et al.*, 2020).

In Mexico, nursing as a discipline has evolved due to professionalization processes, such actions have generated opportunities for its constant growth. Nowadays, the use of different methodologies and theoretical approaches, the richness of the practice of care is shown, but also its complexity (Ramírez *et al.*, 2019).

The specialization gives nursing the opportunity to enrich knowledge in a specific area of their academic profession, since care in health and technological development currently demand specific skills (Coras & Arcaya, 2021).

However, nursing is based on scientific evidence for the resolution of health problems, and it forms two areas of development: managerial care and research teaching. Within the clinical field data emerged as scientific support for the care practices (Aguirre, 2020).

The repercussions of the pandemic on nursing training were incentives to reflect on teaching methods, stimulating and enabling the development of fruitful health practices that favored safe and quality nursing care training (De Araújo *et al.*, 2023).

The pandemic was a challenge not only of communication, but also of constant training to show leadership, decision making and teamwork, and made their skills in the field evident. This is essential in comprehensive care (Valderrama, 2023).

Nurses' assistance during the pandemic has been relevant since it demands a strengthening nursing position in health as a discipline and profession with its own proposal for facing socio-natural disasters (Campillay *et al.*, 2021).

The current context provides us a wide view, reconstructing the way in which the nursing role is performed. Creating healthy workplaces is the key to motivating cultural transformation, and it is essential to provide highly efficient health care (Flórez, 2022). Nursing professionals have shown an academic training

according to the challenges of the century. The educational preparation of nurses emphasizes the integration of the patient's physical, emotional, and psychosocial health care needs (Reynolds, 2020).

The nursing professional has all the skills and is highly qualified not only in clinical area, but also in managing resources, personnel and policies, and being based on scientific evidence for decision-making (Lascano *et al.*, 2022). They also encourage to respond current and future challenges.

The world needs nursing to lead global health, since in this health crisis has promoted health improvement and living conditions of the population (Sánchez, 2020). Their performance has been recognized, thus, their participation in hospital management and quality teams is needed to face difficult situations such as the pandemic, because professionals denote belonging, commitment, responsibility, service and ability to lead (Saltos *et al.*, 2022).

The professionals require awareness in their scientific-technical capacity to lead greater professional autonomy to propose and lead processes, policies and action plans; and to investigate the identified critical nodes on which changes are necessary to rethink the profession (Campillay *et al.*, 2021).

Global nursing has launched the fight against the disease, in patients care and in preventive actions as part of the professional seal, as nursing practice demands constant and sustained development.

Methodology

This research was developed with the qualitative approach towards the deep description of the phenomenon to understand and explain it through methods and techniques from its conceptions and epistemic foundations (Sánchez, 2019). This research is considered as a descriptive investigation, since in this it is necessary to avoid making inferences about the phenomenon, the main thing is the observable and verifiable characteristics (Guevara *et al.*, 2020).

The development of the research was based on Serge Moscovici's theory of social representations, it directly shows a relationship between discursive (communicative) reality and factual reality, imagination and action, it works as a link between the internal and external universe of individuals. Through

communication processes, an interpretative map of the world and its interaction in it is glimpsed (Rubira-García & Puebla-Martínez, 2018).

It was conducted in a public sector institution. 46 participants were determined by data saturation. Their choice was based on following criteria: to be relatives of patients treated in said institution, 20 years up and under 60 years. Minors, people who were not affiliated users of the institution, and patients and staff working in the institution were excluded. The instrument for gathering information was an interview guide of fourteen open-ended questions.

Regarding the research procedure, data consisted on the perspectives and points of view of the participants, and it was carried out in several steps. First the interview technique was applied, the interviews were recorded, and later all the communications of participants were transcribed verbatim. Second, the analysis of data from the interviews was entirety which made it possible to identify the important aspects. With the chromatic technique most outstanding was selected, labeling these fragments by colored cards. Third, the findings were categorized according to the most relevant ideas. Fourth, the data were grouped in order of importance by a format into categories and subcategories. Finally, the findings were discussed with Moscovici's theory of social representations, conceptualizing the categories and subcategories, and contrasting the empirical data with the theoretical foundation to get logical reasoning according to the qualitative research method and, finally, to the presentation of the results by categories.

The ethical aspect was regulated by the *General Health Law on Health Research* (1984) with the written informed consent of the interviewee. To ensure the participation of social actors during the data collection process, the informed consent was made known verbally and written and its signature was requested prior to the interview.

To protect the privacy of the individual, the social actors of the research were labeled with a letter and a number, as shown in the following example (E-1). The research was classified without risk, since these are studies without intentional interventions or modifications in physiological, psychological and social factors of participants. Finally, the research project was sent to the ethics committee for approval, according to registration number 001/2023.

Results and Discussion

For the presentation of the results, the findings were grouped by categories: perception of nursing during the pandemic, performance during the pandemic,

social prestige, identity of the profession, professional visibility, professional development, professional competence, and nursing professionalism.

Perception of Nursing during Pandemic

During pandemic, nursing staff adapted to various challenges. The speed of pandemic generated and started an initial chaos when attending to the emerging call of a large-scale public health problem (Eslava, 2021). The nursing performance during pandemic had a great participation, as it was understood and projected in the following ideas:

They dealt with all the new aspects of the health situation, and I think their professionalism was highly revealed, so we were living in a pandemic. (E-20, personal communication, 2021).

With the pandemic, [the nursing performance] was more noticeable, but I think it was not because of fear but because of the risk they faced. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

The relatives of the patients mentioned that the participation of nursing during the pandemic was more evident. A change became evident, showing the profession's essential role to provide interventions to the patient diagnosed with Covid-19. It also provides assurance by preventing and observing complications in a timely manner, and evaluating the patient's response to treatment (Lahite *et al.*, 2020). Some participants expressed that nursing has always projected a positive image and that it has been maintained, as shown below:

It is the same perception, I think, so far with more respect, because they are the ones who are day to day and put more effort into their work. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

According to social comments, the perception of nursing had been maintained for a long time, and it was not visible until now. However, thanks to its performance during the SARS-CoV2 pandemic, a perception was projected with great extension, compared to the past. Therefore, the dissemination carried out in relation to the positive nursing intervention is important, now it is more visible.

It became evident that some participants during the pandemic had no change to their perception of nursing work. From the perspective of social perception,

the human by nature is a highly sensory being and, in the same way, a social being, in this way we analyze the interpersonal relationships we create that allows us to act based on past experiences (Franco, 2020). Some participants acknowledge that the perception they had of nursing work before and during the pandemic has been maintained, as shown in the following:

What I have seen, for me is the same, because it is the same responsibility when doing their work [...] for me it is still the same perception, there is no difference than before. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

Thus, the social image of a person or a group remains because the identity associated with a profession; it not only depends on what professionals think of it, but on how society sees this group. This rejection to changing ideas is linked to ignore the level of responsibility and skills of the nursing staff, and the support to always acting.

Performance during the Pandemic

Ethics in the performance of nursing functions is significant for the importance of its social commitment, thus, in a pandemic situation it was the guarantor of patient rights, safeguarding the integrity of the subject of unsafe activities in the hospital field (Lahite *et al.*, 2020). That crucial work is also recognized by participants, who mention nursing performance during the pandemic as follows:

That they are great heroes, because they dedicate everything for their work. Their performance involves everything they have to do in their profession. (E-8, personal communication, 2021).

The daily performance makes the difference of a nurse care to her patient. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

In this regard, the participants mentioned that nursing became more visible with the pandemic. Gómez (2022) expresses that

[...] the virus known as coronavirus transformed the lives of many human beings, in that sense, nursing played fundamental roles in confronting a lethal

virus. Once again, it is confirmed that it is an essential discipline and profession for the development of society and preserve life. (p. 191).

It is worth mentioning that, thanks to the media, nursing was given more recognition. Through news programs on radio, television and social networks, it was shown how they performed in providing good care to patients who were infected. Because of this, the way in which society recognizes the profession can be seen. Performance in nursing is vital and well-known, which bring prestige in this field.

However, there are still pending developments within the profession, and the patients' relatives state that:

Everything spreads by word of mouth, good advertising is always said, I believe that's where good performance in any profession can be reflected. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

It would be more worthwhile for the great work of nursing to be explained, so that we, like the outside world, do not see it as nothing more than the one who gives the injection and takes my pressure; that is nothing, to the great capacity that they have to do. (E-1, Personal communication, 2021).

There is interest of social actors when they suggest ways to give visibility and dissemination of the activities carried out by nursing staff. It is important that nursing still projects its work and professional competence to find its place within the media, where the social function of nursing can be seen.

The expression of interest by participants encourages us to promote the dissemination of nursing work, since it shows greater empathy and sensitivity towards the recognition of the profession. It works as a stimulus for the constant development of professional skills and competences.

Social Prestige

Nursing practice currently has great esteem globally because of the effort of professionals who have adapted and developed with scientific and technological advances preserving their humanistic essence (Pío *et al.*, 2020). About the importance of professional nursing work, family members of patients state that:

It is an important job [...] in this case, within the institution, in the services, I think they are the core of hospitals. (E-1, Personal communication, 2021).

There is a general public's appreciation of nursing, as it creates a safe environment and participates in health policies, educates and promotes it; it is globally recognized as the discipline of care. It also plays a main role with its science-based innovations under the fundamental contribution of Florence Nightingale (Gavilanes *et al.*, 2022). The responses of the social actors indicate that:

It is a very dignified job because they are people who are exposed to many diseases. With this pandemic, I think they are exposed more than they should be, they are in contact with sick people. I admire them for everything they've been through. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

I respect them because it is hard and very heavy work because a lot of time is spent with patients. I respect and admire them for all of them. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

This reflects the feelings of the participants. However, in the theory of social representations it is established that memory is kept in motion, taking objects, people and events, which labels with a name. In this way, it becomes familiar with the strange through the integration of new information, it allows clarifying the relationship between groups, individuals and their environment (Manrique, 2022).

Thus, nursing staff, through their actions, have proven to have a high professional and humanistic value, which was reflected in their roles during the patients care. Thus, the performance during the health emergency, the autonomy of the profession has been recognized. In this way, it was shown how a collective experience can determine the prestige to a sector.

Identity of the Profession

The identity of a profession is conceptualized as the set of qualities that allow the subject to feel part of a professional team. In the same way, professional identity is understood from the sociological perspective, of what the professional is within the structured overview (Franco, 2020). Thus, "identity" is understood as a cycle of socialization that gives the subject access to discover his or her own particularity. From different perspectives, this is a social construction, therefore,

a distinction coexists, it is accentuated when archetypes are found in common in a relationship (Olave, 2020). When talking to the interviewees, they mention some unquestionable aspects for the identification of nursing staff:

Nurses' attire is distinctive, they bring their uniform, the nursing staff bring their cap and the suit; their sweater and the colors, the shoes too. From the clothing I do recognize them, they are nurses. (E-1, Personal communication, 2021).

Not everyone can practice, you have to have the skill, you have to have the skill to be able to treat different cases. (E-23, personal communication, 2021).

Therefore, and according to Vergara (2008), to study social representations from the structuralist field is relevant to consider that a social representation is constructed and performed in a set of reflective nature; that is, one where its members evaluate their belonging and issue criteria to recognize who belongs to the group and who does not.

The interviewees mention some characteristics that they consider notorious of professional nursing work. Not only is their professionalism and recognized ability, but also the humanistic aspects as significant in themselves, considering them values and indicators that give identity to the professional.

The participants consider the skills and competencies relevant and typical of nursing, since they believe that they must have specialized characteristics when performing nursing functions.

Professional Visibility

The nursing profession has been characterized by providing care with a high critical and reflective level of social reality, giving visibility through research and the application of theoretical models that ensure quality care. This allows growth as a profession, and a transformative impact on the health system (Gutiérrez & Gallard, 2020). However, the lack of knowledge of their professional work is pointed out, as reflected in the following communication:

There is a lack of information, the information of saying that nursing is a very broad career, so big that they learn too much, we know that they can do many things, the only we need is for their work to be recognized and made known. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

As described by the participants and in contrast to the theory of social representations, these are going to constitute cognitive structures in which certain elements are identified as stereotypes, opinions, beliefs and norms that usually keep a positive or negative attitude. Once the value systems and principles that define the collective consciousness have been interpreted, the limits that individuals set for interacting with the world are established (Chourio, 2012). In this way, when people generate their opinion regarding the training of nursing professionals, they can share stereotypes or beliefs far from reality, which are accepted collectively. That is why, the work performed by nursing staff must be given visibility, so that the population has greater certainty of professional performance with respect to other members of the health team. These actions seek to renew the identity of nursing, creating new paradigms that give a real representativeness to the profession.

Professional Development

Throughout the development of nursing as a profession, one of the main duties to society is to carry out their work with up-to-date, high-quality standards. To do this, it is necessary to continue preparing at a scientific and practical level, and reinforcing their skills and knowledge (Pío *et al.*, 2020). To talk about professional development, in this research, family members of patients were questioned and mention that:

Nowadays, a bachelor's degree is required, I feel very qualified for this generation.

(E-1, Personal communication, 2021).

In regarding knowledge, there is no doubt that they are trained and it is seen that there is a good response from the staff [...] nursing does dominate knowledge. About professionalism, they have a good response towards the patient. E-23, personal communication, 2021).

They must be competent, that is why, they have a training, and by having a uniform and a badge, it means that they have a preparation and must be competent in their performance. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

As reflected before and according to the theory of social representations, these are founded by social groups, at the same time that their action governs; in addition, they explain how the social converts an idea into representation and how

it is transmitted to the social (Materán, 2008). When talking about professional development in nursing, the interviewees relate efficiency when carrying out the corresponding activities of the group, with prior professional preparation and acquisition of knowledge through academic training.

Nurses carry out their activities based on scientific knowledge, and have the foundations for their actions; however, patients' relatives relate the image of a uniform to their social development.

Professional Competence

Professional competence is conceptualized as a set of skills. In the field of nursing, the ability to unequivocally plan and organize care to facilitate equity in access to health services is demonstrated through the efficient application of knowledge (Mazacón *et al.*, 2020). Speaking about competence in the context of nursing, participants when interviewing them mention the following:

I consider them competent; the follow-up they give to their patients speaks very well of them. They approach it with personal commitment, and well, that's a point in their favor. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

I think they are competent, so far, I have not found any or have not been touched by a nurse who treats me and who does not know what to do. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

They know many things about any topic you talk to them or any question you ask them; they know how to answer it. (E-11, personal communication, 2021).

The above is consistent with the theory of social representations, as described by Serge Moscovici (1979), who states that these are a form of socially shared knowledge and its individual and psychological nature is considered. They arise in a context of daily exchanges of social thoughts and actions between the agents of a social group (Dioses & Torres, 2023).

Competence in the field of nursing is related to the skills that the health professional owns, the interviewees recognize that the nursing staff is competent to carry out their activities and the corresponding care.

Nursing Professionalism

In the last century the profession has faced challenges that laid the foundations to consolidate the practice from an ethical point of view. Hence, the importance of developing individual professional skills for the achievement of nursing performance (Aguirre, 2020). From such an overall view, some participants mention nursing professionalism as follows:

I think they need to be up to date with advances in science. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

They should not stop learning to make their work more constant. (E-1, personal communication, 2021).

According to the theory of social representations, the transformation of an abstract idea is mentioned; the individual seeks to make the object by forging a vision of the object itself, which is consistent with his vision of the world (Manrique 2022).

Nursing, throughout the pandemic, was subject to change due to its actions. Currently, this work is carried out with methods supported by scientific evidence, the result of these updates. To such changes, the care and work provided by the staff is seen by the relatives of patients, who describe them as professionals with vast knowledge; in addition, they mention the importance of keeping their knowledge updated.

Conclusions

At the conclusion of this research, it can be mentioned that thanks to the cooperation of the participants, it shows how nursing opinion and perception has changed during the interventions in the SARS-CoV2 virus pandemic. The visibility of this profession was more evident; the media were very important so that society could make nursing work visible, and thereby, expand the panorama of how it develops its activities. This contributed to strengthening nursing's public image from the social field. Likewise, due to the pandemic, it was observed that the projection increased, since the nursing staff was the one who interacted the most with the patients who were infected by SARS-CoV2. The importance of this profession was shown to society, since it is essential within health area.

With Moscovici's theory of social representations, participants were shown to have diverse ideologies. This made it possible to analyze the image of nursing

to develop a broad knowledge, and thereby observe its image before society. According to the meanings obtained through social representations, it is shown that for the participants, nursing work projects humanism, trust and loyalty.

It is very important to convey to the population what nursing really is professionally, only in this way will it be possible to perfect and improve society's perception of this group. Therefore, appropriate recognition through the different communication channels is necessary, and also continuing to develop strategies related to visibility.

The limitation presented during the development of the research was that the participants did not want to collaborate in person because of the SARS-CoV2 virus, which delayed the development of the interviews.

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Precariousness of the Human Condition in the Context of Violence in Colombia: Letting the Youth Die*

[English version]

Precariedad de la condición humana en el contexto de la violencia en Colombia: un dejar morir a la juventud

Precariedade da condição humana no contexto da violência na Colômbia: deixar morrer a juventude

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Abstract

Objective: To deduce and critically examine the moral framework that enables the justification and exercise of violence in Colombia, following the hermeneutic analysis of the network of notions that sustain it: the logic of means and ends, the emphasis on individualism,

biopower, state racism, recognition, and disdain. Two questions are addressed: the one posed in the epigraph and its formulation within the Colombian context. **Methodology:** The study employed the epistemological approaches and methodological resources of Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology and Honneth's critical hermeneutic analysis,

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which are complementary and mutually supportive. **Results:** The answers unfold the idea proposed in the title: the climate of violence experienced by Colombian society—one in which broad sectors of youth participate— creates precarious conditions for the conduct of life, as it intensifies relations of contempt experienced as moral offense. **Conclusions:** Ricoeur's hermeneutics and critical theory constitute appropriate mechanisms for revising the anthropological conception and the ethics of violence that underlie the theoretical frameworks allowing its justification, frameworks that have led a portion of the impoverished youth population into exclusion and into the disdain of society and of themselves. Furthermore, these theories offer guidelines for the transformation of thought and action.

Keywords: violence; moral logic of means and ends; individualism; biopower; recognition and disdain (obtained from the UNESCO Thesaurus).

Resumen

Objetivo: deducir y someter a crítica el esquema moral que permite justificar y ejercer la violencia en Colombia, siguiendo el análisis hermenéutico de la red de nociones que lo sostienen: la lógica de medios y fines, el énfasis en el individualismo, biopoder, racismo estatal, reconocimiento y menosprecio. Se da respuesta a dos preguntas: al interrogante del epígrafe, y a su formulación en el contexto colombiano. **Metodología:** se hizo uso de los enfoques epistemológicos y recursos metodológicos propios de la fenomenología hermenéutica de Ricoeur y del análisis crítico hermenéutico de Honneth, complementarios y solidarios entre sí. **Resultados:** las respuestas despliegan la idea planteada en el título: el ambiente de violencia que vive la sociedad colombiana y en el que participan amplios sectores de la juventud genera condiciones de precariedad en el desempeño de la vida porque intensifica relaciones de desprecio vivenciadas en términos de agravio moral. **Conclusiones:** la hermenéutica de Ricoeur y la teoría crítica constituyen mecanismos apropiados para la revisión de la concepción antropológica y la ética de la violencia, que subyacen a los marcos teóricos que permiten su justificación y tienen sumergido a un sector de la población juvenil pobre a la exclusión, y al desprecio de la sociedad y de sí mismos. Además, estas teorías ofrecen pautas para la transformación del pensamiento y la acción.

Palabras clave: violencia; lógica moral de medios y fines; individualismo; biopoder; reconocimiento y menosprecio (obtenidos del Tesoro UNESCO).

Resumo

Objetivo: deduzir e submeter à crítica o esquema moral que permite justificar e exercer a violência na Colômbia, seguindo a análise hermenêutica da rede de noções que o sustentam: a lógica de meios e fins, a ênfase no individualismo, o biopoder, o racismo estatal, o reconhecimento e o menosprezo. Respondem-se duas perguntas: a do epígrafe e sua formulação no contexto colombiano. **Metodologia:** utilizaram-se as abordagens epistemológicas e os recursos metodológicos próprios da fenomenologia hermenêutica de Ricoeur e da análise crítica hermenêutica de Honneth, complementares e solidárias entre si. **Resultados:** as respostas desenvolvem a ideia apresentada no título: o ambiente de violência vivido pela sociedade colombiana, no qual participam amplos setores da juventude, gera condições de precariedade no desempenho da vida, pois intensifica relações de desprezo vividas em termos de agravo moral. **Conclusões:** a hermenêutica de Ricoeur e a teoria crítica constituem mecanismos adequados para a revisão da concepção antropológica e da ética da violência que sustentam os marcos teóricos que permitem sua justificação e que mantêm um setor da juventude pobre mergulhado na exclusão e no desprezo da sociedade e de si mesmos. Além disso, essas teorias oferecem diretrizes para a transformação do pensamento e da ação.

Palavras-chave: violência; lógica moral de meios e fins; individualismo; biopoder; reconhecimento e menosprezo (obtidas do Tesouro da UNESCO).

How would a moral culture have to be constituted that could give those affected, despised, and excluded the strength to articulate their experiences in the democratic public sphere, rather than to live them out in countercultures of violence? (Honneth, 2011, p. 145).

Introduction

This article reformulates and addresses the question posed in the epigraph by Honneth (2011), applied to the Colombian context: *How is moral culture constituted in Colombia, one that proves incapable of granting the affected, the despised, and the excluded the strength to articulate their experiences in the democratic public sphere rather than to live them out in countercultures of violence?*

It examines the prevailing moral thought framework and the subjective representation of violence in our society of contempt, which immerses us in complicity toward a problem that should be approached consciously and responsibly. Thus, the theoretical and ideological frames of reference employed as criteria for its justification and acceptance are exposed and critically examined. The study clarifies the underlying scheme that sustains the belief that the atmosphere of violence is impossible to transform, as it is viewed as a valid mechanism for conflict resolution.

Following the approach of social philosophy, it is argued that this cultural atmosphere subjects youth to precarious existential conditions, insofar as it denies them recognition—that is, it condemns them to contempt and moral offense—while simultaneously denying them the possibility of realizing the conditions for a life worthy of the respect and esteem owed to every human being.

Colombia is permeated by a moral framework that accepts violence, one that must be unveiled, clarified, and subjected to criticism. This same framework allows violence to be naturalized and legitimized, and has become a driving force behind the death of a broad sector of the country's youth. Such a framework is structured by a network of notions adopted uncritically and unconsciously. Based on these ideas, the article develops: first, the environment of thought that legitimizes violence; second, the moral framework that supports the ethics of violence; and third, the analysis of the types of relations of contempt that arise in this social environment, producing conditions of moral offense and existential precariousness, leading finally to some concluding reflections.

The analysis focuses on the situation of young people who are part of armed groups and live their lives within contexts of violence and disdain, finding therein the most viable way to resolve their existential, economic, and labor conditions.

Vulnerability is made explicit in their inclination to join groups such as guerrillas, state forces, paramilitary organizations, criminal gangs, neighborhood gangs, and *barras bravas* (violent football fan groups), among others.

Youth represents the most exposed generation and the one that pays the highest toll in lives lost, within an environment of passivity and permissiveness. The nation abandons young people from the poorest classes to mutual killing, since there is neither critical awareness nor social sensitivity, nor public policy focused on this issue. Although it seems clear that the main source of violence lies in poverty and lack of opportunities —*structural violence* (Galtung, 1969)— it becomes necessary to clarify and rigorously interpret the subjective representation that manifests itself in the cultural atmosphere.

This article is framed within social philosophy and coherently employs the epistemological approaches and methodological resources of this field, particularly those developed by Ricoeur (2001) and Honneth (2010). The method is analytical/hermeneutical, as it involves a descriptive and hermeneutical analysis of the notions underlying the system of thought, applied to the country's situation, with sociological studies also consulted. The theoretical and ideological frameworks are connected to the characteristics of the moral structure of contempt that lead to moral offense and a precarious existence.

The *Registro Único de Víctimas* (Unidad para las Víctimas, 2024) reports 9,826,986 victims of the armed conflict as of 2024, of which 1,281,097 are Black or Afro-descendant and 657,319 are Indigenous. Among those aged 12 to 28, there are 3,228,222 victims. According to the *Comisión de la Verdad* (2022), 6,402 poor young civilians were killed while in a state of defenselessness. Ángela Muñoz (2024), in *Afectación de los derechos humanos de niños, niñas y adolescentes en el marco del reclutamiento*, reports that since 2013, more than a thousand children and adolescents have been recruited by various armed groups across territorial regions. However, the situation has been critical since 2002. UNICEF and the ICBF (2023) report a 58% increase in recruitment between 2021 and 2023, and in 2024, the *Defensoría del Pueblo* again issued an alert.

“Letting the Colombian Youth Die”

Colombian society neglects the protection of young people's lives, despite this generation representing a crucial sector for the nation's development. The highest percentage of deaths occurs among the poorest populations, many of whom participate in various armed groups. Some reports indicate that approximately

17,600 people belong to illegal groups (comprising 4 major groups and 23 criminal gangs) (*Revista Cambio*, 2023), of which 70% are young men under the age of 30.

The armed forces are also victims of war (Velásquez & Torres, 2023); they comprise about 480,000 members, with a high proportion of youth directly involved. The army reported a total of 18,800 soldiers killed as a result of the war (Infobae, 2021). The proportion of the population exposed to the rigors of violence—and whose life projects are reduced to such practices—is alarmingly high. These statistics must also include young people involved in urban criminal groups. The outlook for this sector is bleak, as they are perceived through a lens of contempt, exclusion, and discrimination.

Violent practices are based on notions deeply rooted in the social imaginary: the various groups deploy arguments derived from instrumental logic, whereby violence is regarded as an appropriate means for achieving multiple objectives, social justice, defense of institutions, the pursuit of wealth, the acquisition of economic means of survival, and entry into the labor market.

Underlying these imaginaries is the belief that violence against members of other groups is legitimate because they are “lives not worth preserving” and “deaths unworthy of mourning,” in Butler’s (2021) terms. Labels such as *criminal*, *hitman*, *guerrilla member*, or *delinquent* negate the value of those lives. This imaginary decisively influences society.

Naturalization consists of the belief that violence is a natural characteristic of human beings and therefore cannot be controlled. According to López (2017), it involves a habituation to acts of aggression in their various forms, which “[...] take root in culture, spread silently [...] and end up being justified” (p. 23). “Colombian society has adapted to the violence exercised against it by assimilating it, integrating it into its structures” (López, 2017, p. 118), making it part of the social order; even in popular speech, it is sometimes considered an identifying trait of Colombians.

However, it is necessary to take a critical stance toward these essentialist positions that paralyze alternative ways of thinking and acting. Blair (2009) defines “violence” as the use of force with the intention of harming another, and therefore as a specifically human act: “I understand ‘violence’ as the set of power relations where power is mediated by weapons and whose ultimate goal is the physical destruction of the adversary” (p. 19). Its use has become generalized through the consolidation of a culture of violence, as Sánchez (1991) pointed out in *Pasado, presente y futuro de la violencia en Colombia*, showing not only the plurality of its forms but also its impact on the development of various types of political violence beyond the maintenance of power by arms or revolutionary struggle for its conquest.

Naturalization is tied to the generalization of a culture of violence, often based on confusion between the concepts of *aggressiveness*, *conflict*, and *violence*. “Aggressiveness” (Ricoeur, 1990) is an innate human inclination; “conflict” is a characteristic of intersubjective relations among beings with diverse interests and claims; and “violence” designates a specific type of relationship characterized by the power to harm another. Not every conflict manifests through violence, nor does aggressiveness necessarily materialize in it.

Naturalization leads to the normalization of violence, both based on the instrumentalist ethic of means and ends, already criticized by Benjamin (2012) in his essay *Para la crítica de la violencia*, where he posed the problem in radical terms: “Is violence moral in principle, even when it is a means to just ends?” (p. 70). The philosopher questioned the acceptance of the premise that “[...] violence can only be sought in the realm of means and not in that of ends” (p. 169), which confined the discussion to whether the means serve “[...] just or unjust ends” (p. 169).

An affirmative answer always proves tolerant of violence and has made it a normal tool for achieving goals, as Butler (2021) explains:

What seems most important, however, is that the tool is already part of the practice, which presupposes a world conducive to its use; the use of the tool constructs or reconstructs a particular kind of world and activates a sedimented legacy of use. (p. 34)

In other words, naturalization and normalization are connected with the individualistic ethic of preserving one’s own life at all costs, of acquiring resources, accumulating wealth, and defending power, all of which permeate the social environment. This phenomenon has been legitimized through laws and institutions, turning it into a legal and official praxis encouraged by the State, which validates certain forms of violence, especially those exercised by its own forces. Ricoeur (1990) asserts: “What a topology of violence cannot forget is that the State is the focal point of a concentration and transmutation of violence” (p. 210).

The State concentrates violence through the military system and control over weapons. In Colombia, however, the situation is more critical because the State has relinquished total control of violence, leaving it in the hands of private groups that kill one another. It shows permissiveness toward forms of violence that lead to the deaths of poor young people, particularly Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and rural populations. The State has not only fostered violence through its official armed forces but has also allowed death to operate through dark, extralegal forces.

Nevertheless, legitimization does not appear solely through state mechanisms; its acceptance sometimes permeates academic sectors, as evidenced in acts of violence occurring during youth-led social mobilizations.

Thus, the question remains pressing: *What is the framework of thought within which violence in Colombia is understood, such that society remains insensitive to the death of its own youth?* Paraphrasing some of the questions posed in the *Final Report of the Truth Commission*, whose purpose was to clarify the crimes committed during the war, one might ask: Why did the country not stop to demand that the State end the war and negotiate peace? Where were Congress, the political parties, the ministers, and the educators? Why did we allow all this to happen? Where were we when it did? What role did the media play?

De Roux (2022) calls upon us to assume our share of responsibility, and the task for academics lies in their capacity to elucidate the frameworks of thought that underlie and coexist with such practices. In the same address delivered during the presentation of the report, De Roux (2022) highlighted the impact of the armed conflict on youth:

“[...] the lines of boys and girls taken to war [...] the search for disappeared children, the mass graves, the Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, the thousands of women [...] humiliated and massacred.” (Canal Capital, 2022, 19'26") [own translation]

Ethics of Violence

The ethic of accepting violence is supported by the following interrelated ideas: a utilitarian conception of life and society; biopower; the distinction between lives that are valuable and lives that are not worthy of mourning; state racism; contempt for others and for oneself; and self-subjection.

Utilitarian Logic of Means and Ends

In *La crítica a la razón instrumental*, Horkheimer (1965) denounced the instrumentalist logic of means and ends as a form of thought characteristic of the modern capitalist mentality. Enlightenment rationalism had defined it as an essential feature of how people relate to one another and treat things. Within this logic, nature, things, and living beings are turned into useful means for attaining ends.

Horkheimer (1965) denounced the instrumentalization of nature, of things, and of the human being himself, who becomes a means to egoistic ends.

In the context of the capitalist economy, the individual becomes a means for the acquisition of wealth and the attainment and preservation of power (Horkheimer, 1965). This relational logic is interwoven with a self-understanding of the person as eminently individualistic and selfish: an individual capable only of thinking and fighting for his or her own interests, fulfilled insofar as he or she is an individual, autonomous, and independent being. This conception became a widely accepted and enduring self-understanding, an apparent self-evident truth that is scarcely subjected to critique. Yet such an anthropological view ignores and forgets another aspect bound up with our way of being in the world: our relational character and interdependence. The person is a being whose autonomy both requires and is traversed by the autonomy of others, someone in need of others and who cannot be reduced to instrumental logic.

According to Ricoeur's anthropology (Ricoeur, 2006), the human being is relational and interdependent, able to realize existence only amid social bonds and the company of others, and who recognizes this interdependence in everyday life, where relations of companionship, struggle, solidarity, and competition are established, among others. In daily living we practice capacities for empathy and solidarity, we go beyond purely instrumental relations, and we can apprehend others as ends in themselves and as persons worthy of empathy, respect, and solidarity. Despite critiques of the instrumentalist system, it has not yet been forcefully challenged; an individualistic and egocentric self-understanding persists. There is an insufficient search for new ways to understand what we are as a species. Precisely Butler, Honneth, and Ricoeur contest the individualist and instrumentalist outlook as the only viable model for understanding social conflicts. They develop new ways of conceiving human relations through the concepts of recognition and the peaceful struggle for reciprocal recognition.

Lives Worth Preserving and Deaths Unworthy of Mourning. Biopower and State Racism

In *La fuerza de la no violencia* (2021), Butler argues that the acceptance of violence is grounded in a demographic differentiation between lives that deserve to be preserved and deaths that are not worthy of mourning. Society is stratified into populations that do not deserve to live—because they do not play a prominent role or belong to groups perceived as obstructing social ties and degrading the social environment—and populations that must be protected, those who inhabit the world as *mournable lives*: “[...] indeed, to be in the world as a mournable

life is to know that one's death would be mourned. But it is also to recognize that one's life would be protected because of its value" (Butler, 2021, p. 130). Underlying these imaginaries is an inequality between lives that are valuable and lives that are expendable, between lives worthy of esteem and lives deserving of contempt. A society that establishes such structural differences moves against the cultural process toward intersubjective recognition; recognition that enables the flourishing of individuals and the development of communities. As Honneth (1997) noted:

To achieve successful self-realization, the human being is destined for the intersubjective recognition of his capacities and operations. If at any stage of development such a form of social assent is excluded, this opens a psychic void in the personality, into which negative reactions of feelings of shame or anger penetrate. For this reason, the experience of contempt is always accompanied by affective sensations that can indicate to the individual that he is being deprived of certain forms of social recognition. (p. 220) [own translation].

It can therefore be stated that, amid war among various groups—with high youth participation—a society of contempt is promoted, leading to the tearing apart and progressive deterioration of social life, which hinders both the flourishing of personal life and the development of communities.

This ideological framework rests on political and demographic foundations of inequality. Society constructs a structure of thought that provides criteria for distinguishing between a population worthy of protection and one that is not. In *Defender la sociedad*, Foucault (2000) develops the concepts of biopolitics and state racism to interpret these phenomena. There, he describes the "biopolitical" as a regulatory power aimed at "producing life" or "letting die" different populations selected by sovereign power. These are agencies and forms of power that do not operate directly from the center but within a

[...] post-sovereign context to control populations as living beings, to direct their lives, to make them live, to make them die. This form of biopower regulates, among other things, the so-called livability of life and determines the relative life potentials of populations. This kind of power is documented in mortality and birth rates that reveal forms of racism that belong to the biopolitical. (Foucault, 2000, p. 132) [own translation].

“Biopower” thus becomes a mode of power regulation that provides criteria for selecting and segregating population groups, appearing less openly and explicitly while exerting subterranean forces of power within social imaginaries and thought. Foucault addressed the problem through “state racism”, understood as the sedimentation of censorship and the exclusion of groups: “This is the first function of racism: to fragment, to create censures in the biological continuum taken up by biopower” (Butler, 2021, p. 244). Exclusion through the representation of a group authorizes other sectors to act against that group and to “let it die”, given that it is considered a source of threat to the rest of society. These are lives that do not deserve protection.

The notion of “state racism” (Foucault, 2000) is applicable to how youth are viewed. There exists a kind of racism that leads to perceiving the poor population under 30 as a social threat and danger. This is the population that lacks opportunities, faces unemployment, protests, becomes more vulnerable to participating in various forms of armed forces, and is immersed in conditions of suffering, violence, and contempt, for themselves and for others. In Foucault’s (2000) terms, this discourse

[...] is linked to a perception and a binary partition of society and of men: on one side some, and on the other, others; or the unjust and the just, masters and those subjected to them, the rich and the poor. (p. 74) [own translation].

The “letting die” of this population at the hands of an internal war of all against all is an implicit strategy—perhaps even an unconscious one—for exercising control over the mortality and survival of that group. Expressions defending violence, rejecting peaceful solutions, showing complacency toward conditions of precariousness, and accepting a wartime environment all bear witness to this. “Letting die” functions as a mechanism used to resolve a social problem for which no other solutions based on solidarity, respect, and recognition are sought.

For Foucault (2000), state racism is a discourse that emerges with the development of racist thought at the hands of the State and succeeds the idea of race wars, tied to evolutionary theories of the struggle for life, where the strongest prevails. From the nineteenth century onward, racist thought and state racism are formulated and transcribed through a biological discourse that becomes “biological social racism”:

[...] the other race, ultimately, is not the one that came from elsewhere, that triumphed and dominated for a time, but the part that infiltrates permanently and

relentlessly into the social body or, more precisely, is constantly recreated within the social fabric and from it. (p. 65) [own translation].

Since then, a binary social structure has taken shape, shifting the conflict between external and internal races toward “[...] the splitting of a single race into a super-race and a sub-race” (Foucault, 2000, p. 65), a structure organized through the centralization of power in the race of the “good,” the “pure,” the “decent,” the “upright,” etc., as is expressed today in Colombia (Velásquez, 2021). A form of state racism is configured that functions surreptitiously as a regulatory principle of society and as a mechanism of discrimination.

The country has not been immune to this transition from race wars to biological and state racism. From the race wars characteristic of our history, it has moved to a state racism exercised by an elite that arrogates to itself the right to protect the integrity, superiority, and strength of its own group, at the expense of excluding other sectors composed of the poor, Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant communities, peasants, and workers. This problem is expressed as follows in Foucault’s work (2000):

Lastly, it will be said that there are two races when there are two groups that, despite cohabiting, are not mixed because of their differences—perverse asymmetries due to privileges, customs and rights, the distribution of fortunes, and the mode of exercising power. (p. 77) [own translation].

The racial schema we inhabit creates phantoms to safeguard the structure that sustains it. The figure of the young person as a strong and daring subject—who functions as a victimizer but never as a victim—persists; this representation is internalized as a self-understanding among young people, who come to see themselves as a source of external threat and fear, while ostensibly invulnerable within. The reciprocal representation each has of the other and of self is that of a strong subject, capable of evil and killing, where the weapon is the instrument of aggression and death that confers power. Each denies both his own fear and fragility and those of others. Their self-understanding is fractured and false.

But if the understanding promoted by state racism is distorted, so too is the submission of broad social sectors. There is a certain complicity arising from the absence of clarity and critique of these discourses. Voices can be heard promoting violence: the most conservative political sectors champion a fight to the death against drugs, criminal gangs, the FARC dissidents, and the ELN. For them, problems are solved by means of weapons, because those who die are social

groups whose lives neither deserve safeguarding nor merit mourning, they are deemed worthy of contempt. They know well that the dead are drawn from poor populations, since Colombia's upper classes do not take part in that war. There exists a class-based form of state racism.

It is worth recalling the words of a scion of this political caste, E. Gómez Hurtado, at a *Centro Democrático* assembly: "I am tired of hearing about peace." Likewise, consider María Fernanda Cabal's remarks about the young people who took part—some violently—in the civil mobilization of May: "They are not young people, they are terrorists"; "Mr. Minister, the ESMAD police officer is a human being who deserves dignified and superior treatment because he risks his life, but we already know that you prefer vandals and misfits. What a disgrace for Colombia, this government!" (Infobae, 2018, p. 1).

There are further responsibilities. The academic community must exercise society's critical conscience, questioning the structures of thought that underlie this social atmosphere. The younger generation has grown up in an environment that naturalizes violence and has learned to legitimize it. Hence the need for critical and hermeneutic engagement. Honneth and Ricoeur, moreover, open avenues for understanding conflict, social violence, social pathologies, and peaceful struggles for recognition, perspectives whose meanings help unveil the rending suffered by Colombian society and youth.

Recognition and Disdain

Inter-subjective disdain and the self's subjection are two salient features of the internal relations within violent groups. They suffer from an exaltation of asymmetrical relations that contradict symmetrical relations of reciprocity, if one adopts the philosophical configuration of these concepts developed by Honneth and Ricoeur. The key point is this: the forms of violence in which young people from various armed groups are involved do not constitute a genuine struggle for recognition; rather, they are a violent struggle that exacerbates relations of disdain and subjects youth to extreme conditions of precariousness and a tearing of their human condition. It also obstructs the possibility of setting ideals of self-realization and community development—two interwoven factors—which authorizes us to speak of a deepening of social pathology (Honneth, 2011).

This philosopher focused his recent decades of research on the figures of disdain that coexist, in tension, with the figures of recognition and that, through struggle, drive progress toward achieving better living conditions. The process of recognition is the path traversed in the search for horizontal relations of reciprocal

understanding, amid respect for dignity and the appreciation of intersubjective values. It is a trajectory of efforts aimed at building relationships of interpersonal recognition, as beings worthy both of rights and duties and of esteem. The movement of recognition is grounded in the moral motive of the human need to be recognized, one that accompanies the selfish struggle of competition for survival. Moreover, it unfolds in the two figures of recognition and disdain, where intuitive experiences of injustice and contempt due to violations of empathy and respect become motives that drive the struggle to overcome disparagement.

The typified forms of recognition are as follows. First, recognition in primary relations of love and friendship, which leads to trust; its corresponding form of disdain takes the shape of mistreatment and the violation of physical integrity, as well as disapproval or rejection. Second, recognition within legal and institutional relations, where disdain appears as dispossession of rights, exclusion, and violation of integrity. Third, recognition of each person as a member of a community of shared values, in which case disdain appears as an insult and a violation of dignity and honor (Honneth, 1997). In the tension between recognition and disdain, the former constitutes a precious good and a *telos* to be achieved, while disdain is the negative experience to be overcome, since it is a basic source of suffering, deterioration of the human condition, and social pathologies. As the philosopher asserts:

[...] we have understood that the recognition of the dignity of individuals or groups constitutes the essential element of our concept of justice [...]. I will attempt to outline the normative content of recognition in such a way that, through a differentiation of the forms of moral harm, various forms of recognition emerge. These conceptual clarifications will allow me, in the final stage, to present a proposal that enables us to understand distributional conflicts more reasonably and more appropriately as struggles for recognition. (Honneth, 2010, p. 12) [Own translation].

According to these authors, persons and social groups need to be made visible, attended to, and approved by others, in line with the three levels of recognition, each manifesting a distinct normative content because each has different moral implications according to the expectations of what is considered desirable and preferable in intersubjective relations (Honneth, 2010). Each dimension is expressed in practical life amid social conflicts, where persons and groups make

demands with a view to developing the link between self-consciousness and intersubjective recognition. There is a form of:

[...] moral progress that unfolds along a gradation of three patterns of recognition of increasing complexity, between which an intersubjective struggle arises each time among individuals to assert the claims of their identity. (Honneth, 2010, p. 20) [own translation].

Recognition is realized in progressively more complex dimensions as the fruit of conflict. In his more mature theory, Honneth starts from the negative side of “disdain,” which consists in starting from a phenomenological analysis of moral harms where the idea plays a central role that circumstances experienced as unjust offer an appropriate key to explain at least the internal connection between morality and recognition (Honneth, 2010, p. 23), contexts in which those affected establish the evaluative criteria for experiences of disdain.

The recognition/disdain process is framed within the aspiration of persons to self-realization under favorable life conditions. For the theories of Honneth and Ricoeur imply abandoning the supposed irresolvable contradiction between the individual and society. While they acknowledge this opposition as an inescapable source of conflict, they maintain that the human being is, above all, a person who inhabits spaces of multiple subjectivities in relation, all of them bearing claims to recognition, justice, and freedom, a setting in which human life and aspirations for self-realization unfold, where each one needs others for his or her own development.

Precariousness of the Human Condition in the Pathologies of Disdain

Any social development that contradicts the conditions for unhindered self-realization is considered a social pathology.
(Honneth, 2011, p. 102).

Settings of participation in armed groups reduce young people to the precarization of the conditions for developing the human condition. In the social space inhabited by individuals in violent groups, there is an exacerbation of relations of disdain at all three levels: each person is identified by an alias, is perceived through bonds of enmity, and assumes they may be eliminated; they are identified by boots, uniform, and weapon, symbols of strength and power. Each is, for the other, a faceless, nameless anyone who hides and evades individuality. The social and intersubjective space becomes a setting of enmity, hatred, and resentment,

leading to distrust and the denial of social capacities and rights, as well as to the profound deterioration of security, solidarity, and social esteem.

The first level of disparagement in close relations appears in the form of humiliation and lack of empathy; recognition is expressed as sheer violation and disdain. Within groups, each person leaves their personal history behind to become an “alias,” adapting their life to the military style, characterized by verticality and domination through force, where only obedience and distrust are permitted, and where dreams and relations of empathy disappear. In affective disdain, self-confidence is precarious, for “the most basic layer of emotional and physical security, in the externalization of one’s own needs and feelings, which constitutes the psychic premise for the development of all other forms of self-esteem,” is obstructed (Honneth, 2010, p. 25) [own translation]. The basis of personal fulfillment is thus frustrated.

The second form of disdain is the deprivation of rights and social exclusion, since in such cases the person is humiliated because “within a community, he is not granted the moral imputability of a fully valued legal person” (Honneth, 2010, p. 26) [own translation]. This figure shapes how people interact and learn to regard one another reciprocally as subjects of rights and duties. This violent environment and its interactional mechanisms draw individuals into mutual denial.

Whereas in this sphere individuals ought to recognize one another as agents —capable of accomplishments and socially responsible— the actors of violence become visible as subjects of death and barbarity, deserving of social rejection and exclusion. The recognition environment into which they are tied is one of absolute disdain toward themselves and toward others. A deepening of the precariousness of the human condition appears as they project onto themselves the resentment and hatred that surround them.

The denial of rights and the reduction of capacities lead to further deterioration of the reciprocal affective environment, reduced to fear, hatred, and resentment. The capacity for affirmation becomes killing, while awareness of social responsibility is exceedingly poor. Typically, precarious conditions and past suffering shape how they think and feel, while the possibility of constructing a hopeful life project is stolen from them. Thus, the subjects of war —without ceasing to be victimizers— also become victims, fragile individuals exposed to death, degradation, and the loss of humanity; that is, to a pathological situation.

In legal disdain, the individual experiences exclusion before the law and vis-à-vis others, which leads to the decline of respect. The armed actor does not regard himself as morally responsible toward others and renounces the shared value system. His stance is one of violating the norms, rights, and duties adopted by the broader social group —the nation and civil community. He imposes his own

rules by force through the threat of weapons—armed shutdowns, confinement of the civilian population, kidnapping, and killing. Everything that makes us human and capable of living intersubjectively deteriorates progressively. Decline replaces the material and social expansion of rights. People place themselves at the margins of society and develop feelings of disdain toward it. This form of disdain—which should trigger indignation and a struggle in defense of dignity—exacerbates conflicts.

Likewise, the demand to be recognized—which leads to reciprocal recognition and originates in the moral need to be recognized as human in a back-and-forth exchange of reciprocity—deteriorates. One could say that individuals renounce that demand because they limit lived experience to the struggle for physical survival, where valuable ideals such as health, education, leisure, and participation in cultural goods disappear.

Life is almost reduced to natural and physical existence; the defense of one's own life at the cost of the other's is exalted, and the most radical act of disdain is carried out: crime. The combatant loses the conditions for demanding and granting recognition; this asymmetry obstructs solidarity and reciprocity. The situation is precarious even within the groups themselves, built around vertical and hierarchical bonds of domination and tyranny.

The third figure of disdain “consists in the degradation of the social value of forms of self-realization” (Honneth, 2011, p. 29) [own translation]; the capacities an individual develops cannot be positively valued by society because they cannot form part of the shared value system that would otherwise contribute to personal and communal fulfillment. They do not enable intersubjective recognition or the enrichment of personal and social life, precisely because they participate in a way of life that undermines respect for life and human dignity:

These evaluative patterns of certain actions or forms of life have, for the affected individuals, the consequence that they cannot refer, through the positive phenomenon of social appreciation, to the capacities acquired throughout their lives. (Honneth, 2010, p. 28) [own translation].

This recognition figure leads to solidarity with one another. It accounts for a movement of social maturation in which the importance of qualities is assessed and valuation systems are configured (Honneth, 1997, p. 139) [own translation], allowing people to refer positively or negatively to concrete faculties and capacities on the basis of horizons of values shared intersubjectively.

It implies valuation within a social framework where ethical values and goals are formulated and function as guidelines for action. The person is valued in terms of “social honor.” Participation in these value systems leads to ethical

self-confirmation, where self and other are related by a value horizon that generally acts as a regulator of the system of burdens and responsibilities. This ethical commitment assumes feelings of empathy and leads to solidarity practices.

Honneth (2011) contends that visible deficiencies of social life exist “that are related to the structural conditions of mutual recognition” (p. 140) [own translation] and that such conditions are found in the social forms in which the individual develops and learns to conceive of himself as a member of society with the same rights and “at the same time unique.” Moreover, the movement of the three moments constitutes the conditions of a “successful formation of identity:

[...] successful identity formation: emotional affection in intimate conditions such as love and friendship, legal recognition as a member responsible for his acts in society, and finally, the social appreciation of individual performance and capacities. (Honneth, 2011, p. 141) [own translation].

In the case of young people in armed groups, beyond losing the capacity to assume responsibility for their actions and to be accountable for others' lives, they develop an alienated view of themselves regarding their contributions to society in the sphere of work, while they instill feelings of disdain. The pathology and disdain in this field of recognition are radical, if we accept the value of participation in the world of work —“labor”— for social appreciation.

As Honneth (2011) states:

Now not only can it be supposed but affirmed with considerable certainty, taking into account analogous research, that the social appreciation of a person is measured in the form of formally organized work. The relations of recognition concerning social appreciation are highly intertwined with the distribution and organization of social labor. (p. 141) [own translation].

It follows that the structural conditions for the development of poor youth in Colombia promote disdain and are pathological. Hence, responsibility must be assumed to achieve transformation.

The moral theory of Honneth and Ricoeur, based on the principle of recognition, leads to an expansion of civic morality because it sets out the guidelines required for an appropriate unfolding of social life that fosters the development of persons and community. Additionally, it has the advantage of establishing relations of complementarity between personal and collective life because it constructs models of social interaction between the formal and the historical spheres, between universal and historical characteristics.

Recognition models harbor the power to spur evolution toward new normative ideals and open the capacity to promote equality and justice: “A formal scheme of morality encompasses the qualitative conditions of self-realization that can be distinguished from the diversity of all particular forms of life, insofar as they constitute general premises of the individual’s self-realization” (Honneth, 2010, p. 33) [own translation] which, however, are filled with content and historically transformed within social contexts.

The relations of disdain among young people under arms contradict the requirements of the struggle for recognition and dehumanize. Genuine struggles aim at equitable distribution, material redistribution, justice, and equal treatment (Honneth, 2010). Likewise, the granting of rights “fulfills the normative function of granting each citizen the real opportunity to participate in the democratic process of public construction of the community of law” (Honneth, 2010, p. 41) [own translation]. For Honneth (2010) and Ricoeur (2004), the struggle for recognition incorporates and integrates conflicts over fair distribution, freedom, and justice, as can be seen in the achievements of social movements in Colombia.

Finally, another feature of this phenomenon of disdain must be mentioned: the loss of freedom, the renunciation of emancipation, or the state of domination within the groups to which young people are subjected. If emancipation is understood as coming of age—the capacity to think for oneself, to act according to one’s own judgment, and to prevent submission to another’s will (Adorno, 1970)—then it is clear that young people participate in relations of dominant, vertical, and hierarchical power, where critical thinking, deliberation, participation in decision-making, and the possibility of acting responsibly disappear.

At no point can they construct reasonable judgments about their own life project or that of the community. Their judgments are determined by social suffering, hatred, resentment, and disdain toward others, society, and the institutions that have failed them.

Conclusion: Alienation in Self-Representation and Paths of

Hope

There exists a kind of alienation in the way we represent ourselves as human beings, following Marx’s most general definition of the concept as a deformation of self-consciousness. This alienation is both anthropological and ethical because it concerns the conception of “ourselves,” the humans we have come to believe

we are an idea we repeat without critical reflection and use as the basis for social relationships. The alienation that afflicts us consists, above all, in the adoption of the modern philosophical postulate that reduces human beings to individualistic, selfish entities driven only by natural passions and adjusted to instrumental logic. This conception has become the dominant ideology, devoid of conscious, critical, or deliberative debate. By organizing society according to this assumption, we generate a limited and impoverished understanding of ourselves that paralyzes those capacities —also inherent to human beings— that allow us to cultivate feelings fostering a good life in common.

However, these reflections and ideas suggest alternative paths forward. First, it is necessary to take seriously the proposals of critical theory and hermeneutic phenomenology, both of which call for a critical evaluation of the theoretical and ideological frameworks used as references for understanding humankind, society, and social bonds. Ricoeur's dual hermeneutics of suspicion and listening may serve as an appropriate mechanism. What is required is a radical revision of the anthropological conception and the ethics of violence that underlie the theoretical frameworks legitimizing its naturalization, normalization, and justification—frameworks that have submerged a sector of the poor youth population into exclusion, contempt, and death. It is equally important to reclaim the contributions of critical theory, which teaches the possibility of a form of thinking capable of questioning the structural conditions that promote relations of disdain and generate pathological social dynamics.

Second, we must contribute to the construction of an ethics of non-violence that comprehensively and holistically understands the human being and recognizes the positive capacities that enable new mechanisms for conflict resolution. If conflict is essential to social life, its violent resolution is not. It is possible to find ways of struggle grounded in the positive capacities for empathy, reparation, forgiveness, and reconciliation, capacities that also define us. Likewise, it is possible to work toward the peaceful pursuit of recognition at various levels that drive social development and aim at building a good life in common. Ricoeur's notion of mutual recognition, focused on the capacities of gift-giving, gratitude, and forgiveness, and applicable across diverse phases, is an important feature contributing to the unfolding of these struggles.

Third, the social theory of these authors, together with the struggles for overcoming disdain and for achieving social justice, can serve as a guide for new research aimed at discovering and exalting civic values that can most effectively foster the construction of a society that enables its members' self-realization under adequate conditions of intersubjectivity. Among such values, empathy, respect, and solidarity must not be absent.

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Research — on other topics

Investigaciones en otras temáticas
Pesquisa sobre outros tópicos

Delayed Cancer Diagnosis: Bibliometric Analysis and its Relevance in Health Systems*

[English version]

Diagnóstico tardío del cáncer: análisis bibliométrico y su relevancia en sistemas de salud

Diagnóstico tardio do câncer: análise bibliométrica e sua relevância nos sistemas de saúde

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Abstract

Objective: To analyze scientific production and trends regarding the relationship between cancer, delayed diagnosis, and health systems from a comprehensive approach. **Methodology:** Bibliometric techniques were applied using the Scopus database, incorporating productivity indicators and bibliographic coupling network analysis. Temporal trends, distribution by authors, journals, countries, and fields of knowledge were examined. **Results:** Delayed diagnoses are explained by personal factors (age, education, and beliefs), social factors (economic, cultural, and geographical conditions), and structural factors (institutional fragmentation and weak coordination among stakeholders). Five research clusters were identified: determinants of delayed

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diagnosis, therapeutic options, socioeconomic factors, the impact of COVID-19, and life expectancy as a factor in treatment decisions. **Conclusions:** Reducing delayed diagnoses requires strategies at macro, meso, and micro levels, prioritizing health promotion, disease prevention, and guaranteeing the right to life and health.

Key words: cancer; delayed diagnosis; neoplasm staging; health care systems; health policy (obtained from the DeCS/MeSH thesaurus).

Clasificación JEL: I18 - I19.

Resumen

Objetivo: analizar la producción científica y las tendencias sobre la relación entre cáncer, diagnóstico tardío y sistemas de salud desde un enfoque integral. **Metodología:** se aplicaron técnicas bibliométricas en la base de datos Scopus, con indicadores de productividad y análisis de redes de acoplamiento bibliográfico. Se examinaron tendencias temporales, distribución por autores, revistas, países y áreas de conocimiento. **Resultados:** los diagnósticos tardíos se explican por factores personales (edad, educación y creencias), sociales (condiciones económicas, culturales y geográficas) y estructurales (fragmentación institucional y baja articulación entre actores). Se identificaron cinco clústeres de investigación: determinantes del diagnóstico tardío, opciones terapéuticas, factores socioeconómicos, impacto de la COVID-19 y esperanza de vida como condicionante en decisiones de tratamiento. **Conclusiones:** reducir diagnósticos tardíos exige estrategias en los niveles macro, meso y micro, priorizando promoción de la salud, prevención de la enfermedad y garantía del derecho a la vida y a la salud.

Palabras clave: cáncer; diagnóstico tardío; estadificación de neoplasias; sistemas de atención de salud; política de salud (obtenidos del tesoro DeCS/MeSH).

Clasificación JEL: I18 - I19.

Resumo

Objetivo: analisar a produção científica e as tendências sobre a relação entre câncer, diagnóstico tardio e sistemas de saúde a partir de uma perspectiva integral.

Metodologia: aplicaram-se técnicas bibliométricas na base de dados Scopus, com indicadores de produtividade e análise de redes de acoplamento bibliográfico. Examinaram-se as tendências temporais e a distribuição por autores, revistas, países e áreas de conhecimento. **Resultados:** os diagnósticos tardios são explicados por fatores pessoais (idade, escolaridade e crenças), sociais (condições econômicas, culturais e geográficas) e estruturais (fragmentação institucional e baixa articulação entre os atores). Identificaram-se cinco clusters de pesquisa: determinantes do diagnóstico tardio, opções terapêuticas, fatores socioeconômicos, impacto da COVID-19 e expectativa de vida como condicionante nas decisões de tratamento. **Conclusões:** reduzir os diagnósticos tardios exige estratégias nos níveis macro, meso e micro, priorizando a promoção da saúde, a prevenção da doença e a garantia do direito à vida e à saúde.

Palavras-chave: câncer; diagnóstico tardio; estadiamento de neoplasias; sistemas de atenção à saúde; política de saúde (obtidos do DeCS/MeSH).

Classificação JEL: I18 – I19.

Introduction

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death worldwide. It is defined as a group of non-communicable diseases characterized by the uncontrolled proliferation of abnormal cells that may remain localized or spread to other organs and tissues. According to the World Health Organization (PAHO, 2024), approximately 10 million people died from various types of cancer in 2021, primarily breast, lung, prostate, colon, and rectal cancers, and nearly 20 million new cases were reported. By 2040, a nearly 60% increase is projected, with over 30 million additional diagnoses.

Cancer may present as benign or malignant tumors, the latter being the most dangerous due to their rapid growth and invasive capacity. Classification is based on the cell type of origin, including solid tumors (carcinomas, sarcomas, lymphomas, brain and spinal cord tumors) or liquid tumors (leukemias) (UICC, 2024). Early identification of the disease stage is decisive in determining treatment, typically using the TNM system, which assesses tumor size (T), lymph node involvement (N), and the presence of metastasis (M), or specific classifications like FIGO for gynecological cancer and Lugano for lymphomas (American Cancer Society, 2024a, 2024b).

Globally, initiatives have been implemented to improve timely diagnosis and treatment. The WHO promotes the Global Cancer Strategy, while the Union for International Cancer Control leads the Cities Against Cancer program. Countries such as the United States, Peru, and Colombia have reference institutions such as the American Cancer Society, the National Institute of Neoplastic Diseases, and the National Cancer Institute, aimed at strengthening prevention and comprehensive care (CAC, 2015; NCI, 2024).

However, health systems face structural weaknesses and fragmented care, limiting a timely response to a high-cost, significant public health burden. This underscores the importance of analyzing, from a health systems perspective, the challenges of delayed diagnosis and the State's role in guaranteeing the right to health and cancer prevention (Shakarishvili *et al.*, 2011).

Methodology

This study used bibliometric analysis as an evaluation technique for scientific output on health systems, cancer, and delayed diagnosis. The document search was conducted in the Scopus database, selected for its global coverage and for offering indicators that enable highly reliable descriptive and comparative analyses (Janik *et al.*, 2020; Shukla *et al.*, 2020).

The methodological procedure is presented below in Figure 1:

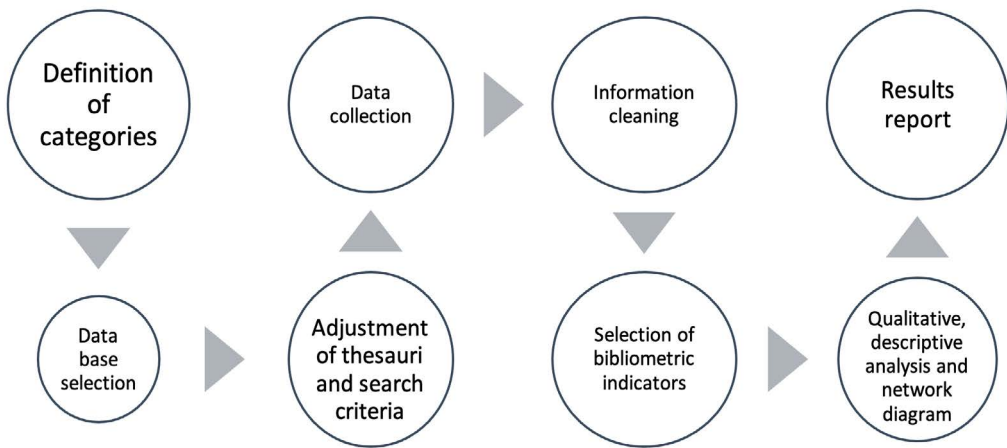


Figure 1. *Methodological Procedure.*

Source: Authors' own work based on Osorio-Andrade *et al.*, 2023..

Database Selection

Scopus was chosen as one of the most comprehensive sources of scientific literature and for its relevance in bibliometric studies related to public health (Shukla *et al.*, 2020).

Construction of Search Equation Using Thesaurus

The search equation was built using the UNESCO thesaurus and the DeCS/MeSH descriptors from Bireme: ((TITLE-ABS-KEY("cancer") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY("Carcinogen") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY("Delayed Diagnosis") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY("Neoplasm Staging") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY("Health systems"))) AND (LIMIT-TO (OA,"all")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE,"ar"))). The search was carried out up to March 2024.

Data Cleaning: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

No restrictions were set regarding language, country, author, or publication period, and an initial total of 350 records was obtained. After cleaning, documents other than scientific articles (e.g., in-progress reviews, errata, and session papers) and those without open access were excluded. The final sample consisted of 198 articles, processed using the *VOSviewer* software package (Waltman & van Eck, 2015). The criteria are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. *Methodological Procedure.*

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Study period	All	None
Country/Territory	All	None
Authors	All	None
Subject area	All	None
Source type	All	None
Study population	All	None
Document type	Article	Under review, session paper, erratum.

Language	All	None
Open Access	All open access	Green, gold, bronze, hybrid gold

Source: Authors’ own work based on Moreno & Urrego, 2022.

The selected documents were analyzed using bibliometric indicators, enabling descriptive, mathematical, and statistical analysis. Specifically, territorial indicators were used to identify the most representative countries; indicators for leading journals; indicators for the most prolific authors in the field and summaries of their most notable articles; indicators for the most-cited articles from various sources; areas of knowledge interested in the topic; affiliations or institutions with the highest global scientific output; term co-occurrence networks based on selected articles; bibliographic coupling for cluster generation; and finally, future research lines.

The combination of descriptive, statistical, and network analyses provided a comprehensive view of the field, consolidating evidence on scientific production related to cancer, delayed diagnoses, and health systems, as well as identifying gaps and future research directions.

Results

Temporal Trends and Volume of Publications

Figure 2 shows how scientific output on health systems and delayed cancer diagnoses began in 1999 with the article *Has the Use of Pap Smears Reduced the Risk of Invasive Cervical Cancer in Guadalajara, Mexico?* (Jiménez-Pérez & Thomas, 1999). This case-control study showed that women who underwent Papanicolaou smears had a significantly lower risk of cervical cancer (OR=0.3; 95% CI: 0.2–0.4), an effect that persisted for over five years.

Between 2000 and 2013, production was scarce, but from 2014 onward, there has been steady growth with intermittent behavior, reaching its peak in 2020 with 197 articles. The decline recorded in 2024 is due to the search cut-off conducted in April of that year, and therefore does not necessarily reflect a downward trend.

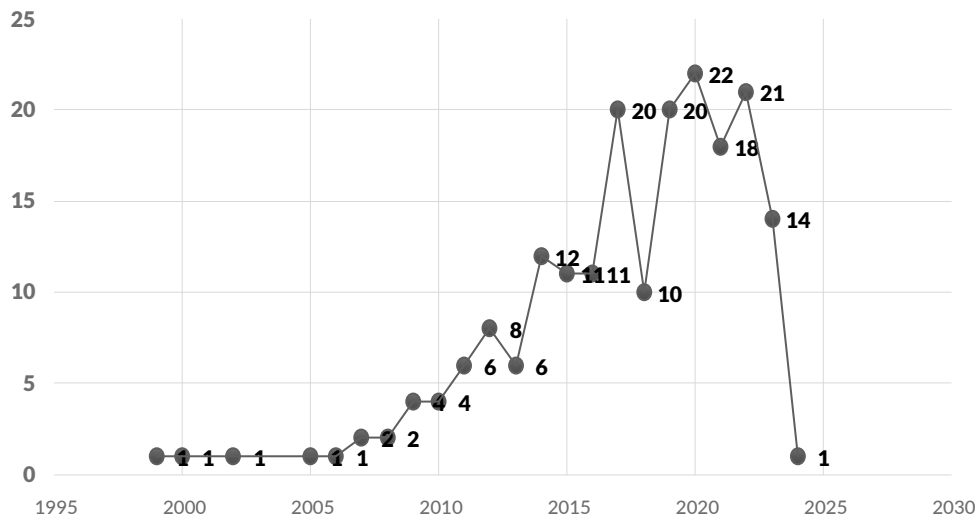


Figure 2. Evolution of Scientific Production.

Territorial Indicator

The United States accounts for the highest scientific output related to health system management and delayed cancer diagnoses, with 91 articles (27%), followed by Brazil (32; 10%), the United Kingdom (23; 7%), Spain (14; 4%), and Italy (13; 4%). In a second tier are Australia, Canada, and Germany with ten publications each (3%), France with nine (3%), and Uganda with seven (2%).

In Latin America, scientific production is low: Chile reports four articles (1%), Colombia three (1%), and Uruguay just one. Other countries, such as India and Pakistan, each contributed two documents. These data reveal a concentration in high-income countries and limited regional participation (Hershman *et al.*, 2010).

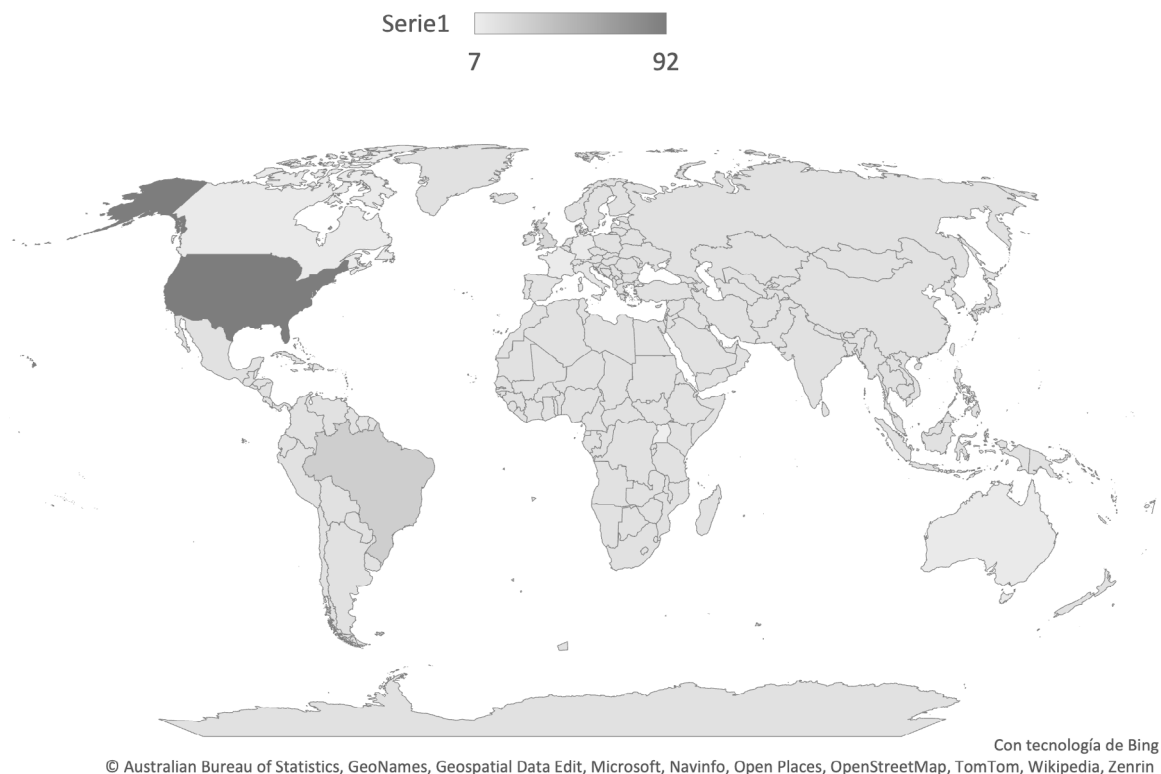


Figure 3. *Scientific Production by Country.*

Journal Indicator

The ranking of the ten journals with the highest scientific output in this field shows that 60% belong to the Q1 quartile of the SJR, 30% to Q2, and 10% to Q3. At the top of the list is *PLOS One* (USA) with ten articles, followed by *BMC Cancer* (UK) with eight, and *Breast Cancer Research and Treatment* (USA) with seven. These results highlight that journals with the greatest academic impact are the main channels for disseminating knowledge on cancer and delayed diagnoses.

Table 2. Journals with the Highest Number of Publications.

No.	Journal	No. of Documents	Country	SJR
1	Plos One	10	United States	Q1
2	BMC Cancer	8	United Kingdom	Q2
3	Breast Cancer Research and Treatment	7	United States	Q1
4	Journal of Clinical Oncology	7	United States	Q1
5	BMC Health Services Research	6	United Kingdom	Q1
6	Cancer	6	United States	Q1
7	International Journal of Cancer	6	United States	Q1
8	Annals of Surgical Oncology	4	United States	Q2
9	Asian Pacific Journal of Cancer Prevention	4	Thailand	Q3
10	Ciencia E Saude Coletiva	4	Brazil	Q2

Top-Contributing Authors Indicator

Table 3 presents the authors with the highest number of published scientific articles on health system management and delayed cancer diagnoses.

Zhu (F. Edward Hebert School of Medicine, USA) leads the list with 12 articles, highlighting his work on thyroid cancer incidence in the U.S. (1980–2005), cited 673 times (Enewold *et al.*, 2009). This author is followed by Shriver (Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, USA), with an h-index of 70 and his most cited article: *Comprehensive Molecular Portraits of Human Breast Tumours*, with over 8,900 citations (The Cancer Genome Atlas Network, 2012).

In third place is McGlynn (NCI, USA), recognized for her research on hepatocellular carcinoma and germ cell tumors. Her article on HCC incidence and mortality has more than 1,400 citations (Altekruse *et al.*, 2009).

Lin (HJF, Rockville, USA) ranks fourth for his contributions to lung cancer cohort studies and the role of metformin in survival (Lin *et al.*, 2017). Finally, Kantelhardt (University of Halle-Wittenberg, Germany) has contributed studies on early detection and therapies for breast cancer, including highly impactful clinical biomarker research (Schmitt *et al.*, 2019).

Together, these authors shape the leading lines of investigation and global academic influence networks in the field..

Table 3. *Most Prolific Authors.*

Author	Publications	Citations	h-index	Country
Zhu, K.	12	4160	35	United States
Shriver, C. D.	11	41.095	70	United States
McGlynn, K. A.	8	26.418	80	United States
Kantelhardt, E. J.	5	2217	28	Germany
Lin, J.	5	212	8	United States
Zahm, S. H.	5	13.463	66	United States
Jemal, A.	4	508.077	146	United States
Pawloski, P. A.	4	2.661	27	United States
Weller, D.	4	9.089	49	United Kingdom
Cherchiglia, M. L.	3	1314	19	Brazil

Most Cited Articles Indicator

The five most cited articles in this field, published between 2008 and 2020, address topics related to treatment adherence, early detection, and quality of oncology care.

The most cited study analyzes adherence to adjuvant hormonal therapy in stage I–III breast cancer, showing that sociodemographic factors decisively influence treatment continuity (Hershman *et al.*, 2010). The second most cited, *Characteristics of Missed or Interval Colorectal Cancer and Patient Survival*, highlights the importance of preventive colonoscopy in identifying polyps and reducing colorectal cancer incidence (Samadder *et al.*, 2014).

The third article, *American Society of Clinical Oncology/National Comprehensive Cancer Network Quality Measures*, established quality benchmarks for breast and colorectal cancers to support clinical management and decision-making (Desch *et al.*, 2008).

Fourth, a *Journal of Clinical Oncology* article highlighted poor adherence among older women with breast cancer, linked to advanced age and life expectancy (Soulos *et al.*, 2012). Finally, *Patient Beliefs that Chemotherapy May Be Curative and Care Received at the End of Life Among Patients with Metastatic Lung and Colorectal Cancer* (Mack *et al.*, 2015), with 104 citations, showed that patient beliefs about metastatic cancer influence the choice between chemotherapy and palliative care.

Table 4. *Most Cited Articles.*

Article	Authors	Journal	Year	No. of Citations
<i>Early Discontinuation and Nonadherence to Adjuvant Hormonal Therapy in a Cohort of 8,769 Early-Stage Breast Cancer Patients</i>	Hershman, D., Kushi, L., Shao, T et al.	<i>Journal of Clinical Oncology</i> , 28(27), pp. 4120-4128.	2010	632
<i>Characteristics of Missed or Interval Colorectal Cancer and Patient Survival: A Population-Based Study</i>	Samadder, N., Curtin, K., Tuohy, T et al.	<i>Gastroenterology</i> , 146(4), pp. 950-960.	2014	215
<i>American Society of Clinical Oncology/ National Comprehensive Cancer Network Quality Measures</i>	Desch, C., Mcniff, K., Schneider, E et al.	<i>Journal of Clinical Oncology</i> , 26(21), pp. 3631-3637.	2008	200
<i>Assessing the Impact of a Cooperative Group Trial on Breast Cancer Care in the Medicare Population</i>	Soulos, P., Yu, J., Roberts, K et al.	<i>Journal of Clinical Oncology</i> , 30(14), pp. 1601-1607.	2012	109
<i>Patient Beliefs that Chemotherapy may be Curative and Care Received at the End of Life Among Patients with Metastatic Lung and Colorectal Cancer</i>	Mack, J., Walling, A., Dy, S., Keating, N., Tisnado, D et al.	<i>Cancer</i> , 121(11), pp. 1891-1897.	2015	104

Fields of Knowledge

Scientific output on delayed diagnosis, cancer, and health systems primarily comes from the field of medicine, which accounts for 69% of the 183 articles. Biochemistry, genetics, and molecular biology rank second with 25% (66 articles), followed by multidisciplinary studies with 4% (10 articles).

Environmental sciences and nursing show lower participation, each accounting for 1% (4 publications). The remaining contributions come from diverse fields such as economics, pharmacology, social sciences, dentistry, neuroscience, decision sciences, and arts and humanities, each with one or two articles.

These data reflect the dominant presence of the biomedical field, with emerging contributions from social and economic disciplines.

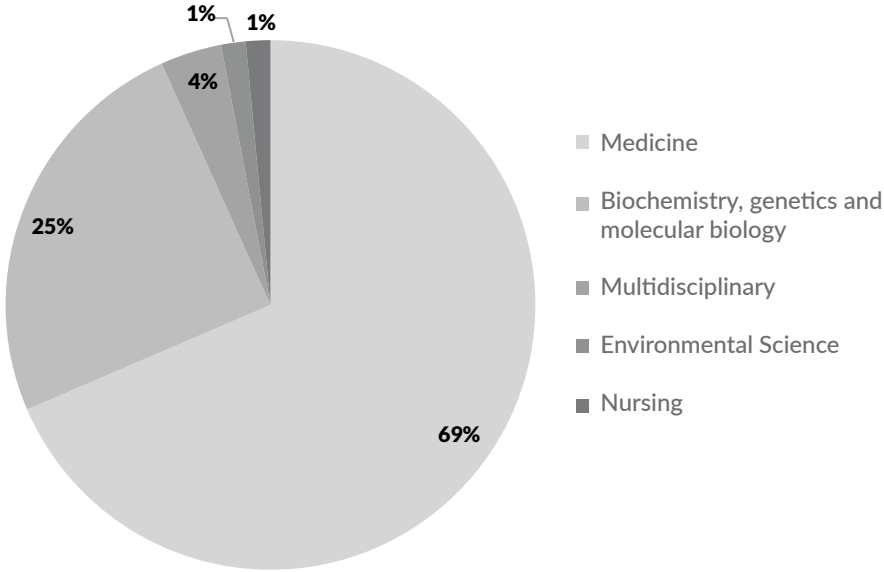


Figura 4. Scientific Production by Field of Knowledge.

Top-Contributing Affiliations

The institutions with the highest number of publications in this field are predominantly based in the United States. Leading the list is the *Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences* with 12 articles, followed by the *Walter Reed National Military Medical Center* with 11. Three institutions each produced ten articles: *Harvard Medical School*, the *National Cancer Institute (NCI)*, and *Brigham and Women's Hospital*.

In Latin America, the *Universidade de São Paulo* (Brazil) ranks sixth with nine publications. At similar levels are *Kaiser Permanente* (USA) with nine, the *F. Edward Hebert School of Medicine* with eight, the *Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health* with seven, and the *Duke University School of Medicine* with six.

These findings confirm the predominance of U.S.-based institutions in cancer research and diagnosis.

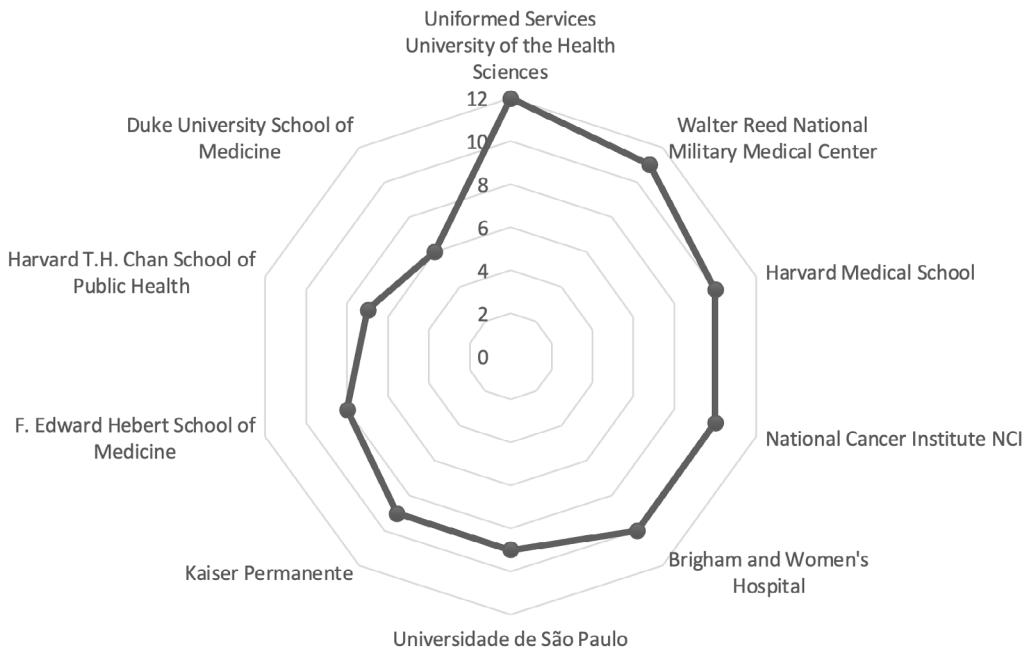


Figure 5. *Institutions with the Highest Scientific Output.*

Term Co-occurrence Network

The term co-occurrence network (figure 6) allowed the identification of the most frequently used keywords in the 198 selected articles (Donthu *et al.*, 2021). The analysis yielded a total of 304 terms, organized into five clusters that reflect the main research axes related to cancer, delayed diagnosis, and health systems. These clusters complement the findings from the bibliographic coupling and make it possible to visualize the conceptual structure of the field, as well as the connections between biomedical, epidemiological, and health management areas, thereby guiding potential future research lines.

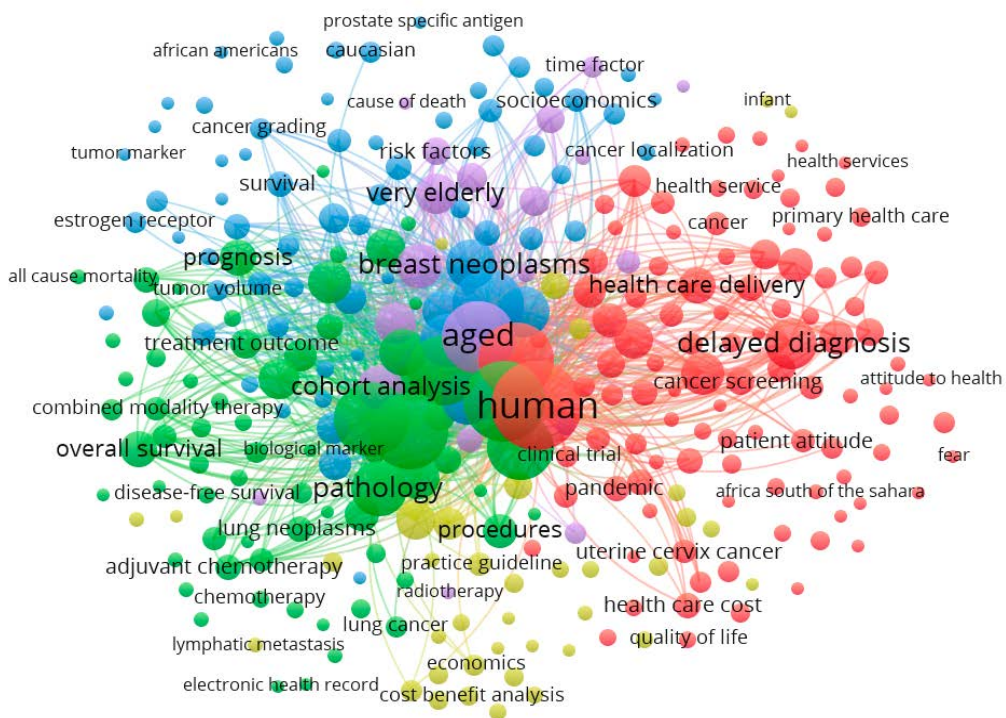


Figure 6. *Term Co-occurrence Network.*

Bibliographic Coupling

The bibliographic coupling analysis (figure 7) identified five clusters composed of 15 articles published between 2008 and 2021 (Waltman & van Eck, 2015). These clusters represent the main currents of international research on cancer, delayed diagnosis, and health systems, and provide a foundation for understanding prevailing trends and approaches in this field of study.

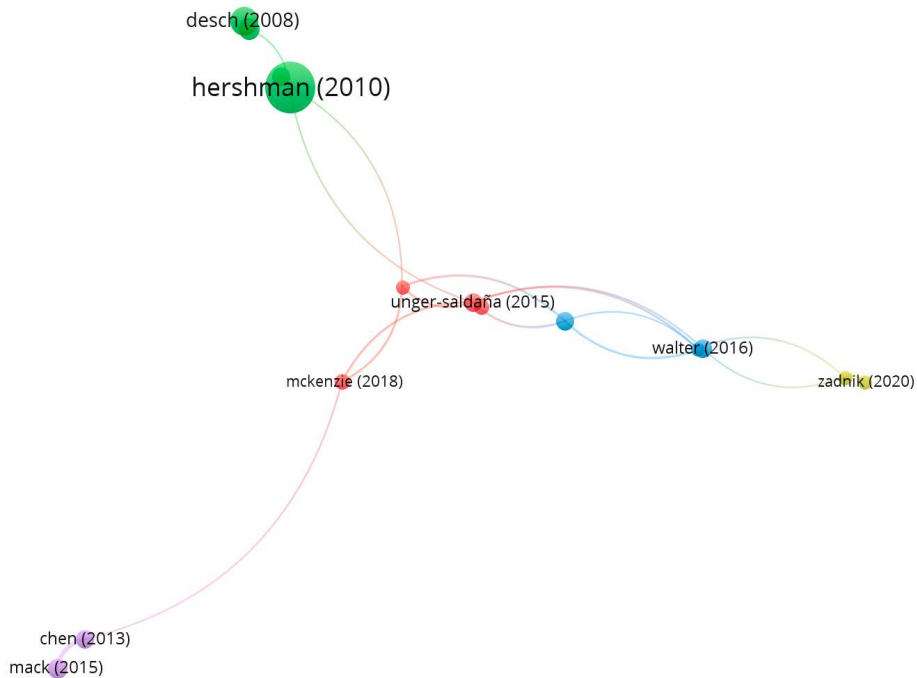


Figure 7. *Bibliographic Coupling.*

Clúster 1: Determinants of Delayed Diagnosis in Breast Cancer and Its Relationship with Personal and Clinical Factors.

This cluster comprises four studies analyzing the factors associated with delayed breast cancer diagnosis, complemented by evidence from other cancer types in developing countries.

The study *Health System Delay and Its Effect on the Clinical Stage of Breast Cancer* (Unger-Saldaña *et al.*, 2015) found that 48% of Mexican patients were diagnosed at stages III and IV, with a median of seven months between symptom onset and treatment initiation. The main delays occurred between the first consultation and diagnostic confirmation, linked to both system-level delays and individual factors such as age and lack of breast care knowledge.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, a study in Malawi revealed that late care-seeking was influenced by personal, social, and systemic factors, including the use of traditional remedies and community norms. A multilevel approach involving education,

improved access pathways, and institutional strengthening was recommended (Kohler *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, the multicenter ABC-DO study (McKenzie *et al.*, 2018) found that 61% of the 1,795 women were diagnosed at advanced stages, primarily due to modifiable factors such as low levels of education, limited disease awareness, and delays in referral.

In the article *Cancer Care Challenges in Developing Countries* (Price *et al.*, 2012), it was noted that over 60% of patients with breast cancer, Kaposi's sarcoma, or lymphoma experienced waits longer than six months for care, linked to geographic inequalities, oncologist shortages, and cultural beliefs.

Overall, the evidence shows that delayed breast cancer diagnosis results from an interplay of individual, social, and structural factors. Additional studies (Nila *et al.*, 2024; Ferreira *et al.*, 2023) confirm that these disparities affect survival and reinforce the urgency of strengthening early detection policies and timely access to care.

Cluster 2: Cancer Treatment Based on Care Measures According to Pathology Type and Stage.

This cluster includes studies on therapeutic interventions for different types of cancer and their impact on survival, adherence, and quality of life, highlighting the need for standardized protocols in health systems.

The article *Quality Measures of the American Society of Clinical Oncology/ National Comprehensive Cancer Network* (Desch *et al.*, 2008) established three standards for breast cancer and four for colorectal cancer, developed by multidisciplinary panels to ensure quality and consistency in care.

In the case of melanoma, the study *Use of Sentinel Lymph Node Biopsy* (Bilimoria *et al.*, 2009) showed that its use in stages IB/II depended on clinical, hospital, and socioeconomic factors. This finding underscores the importance of adherence to clinical guidelines to ensure equity in access.

Two breast cancer studies complement these results. The first, *Early Discontinuation of Adjuvant Hormonal Therapy*, involving 8,769 patients, showed that age was a critical factor in non-adherence, highlighting the need for educational strategies targeting young women (Aiello *et al.*, 2012). The second, *Impact of a Cooperative Group Trial in Medicare Patients*, analyzed the use of radiotherapy and found that, despite differences related to age, comorbidities, and marital status, the application rate was high, confirming its role in reducing mortality (Soulos *et al.*, 2012).

Overall, this cluster demonstrates that the quality of cancer care depends on both strict adherence to clinical protocols and on socioeconomic and cultural

factors, highlighting the need for policies that foster adherence and reduce inequities.

Cluster 3: Personal, Social, Health System, and Geographic Factors Determining Delayed Cancer Diagnosis.

This cluster analyzes how individual, clinical, administrative, and sociodemographic factors influence delayed cancer detection.

The study *How Might Healthcare Systems Influence the Speed of Cancer Diagnosis?* compared experiences in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, showing that centralized services, provider connectivity, and reduced access barriers enhance diagnostic timeliness, highlighting the impact of health system context on outcomes (Brown *et al.*, 2014).

In the *SYMPTOM Pancreatic Study cohort*, conducted in seven hospitals, symptoms and factors associated with diagnostic intervals in pancreatic cancer were analyzed. The study concluded that health systems should recognize vague gastrointestinal symptoms, mental health comorbidities, and diabetes as warning signs to reduce critical delays in confirmation (Walter *et al.*, 2016).

Meanwhile, the study *Rural and Urban Disparities in Time to Diagnosis and Treatment of Colorectal and Breast Cancer* found that rural patients experience longer diagnostic intervals, averaging 6 to 95 days for colorectal cancer, due to socioeconomic and insurance-related factors. For breast cancer, the differences were less significant, although inequalities related to geographic location persisted (Bergin *et al.*, 2018).

Taken together, the findings reinforce that social and geographic determinants are as influential as clinical factors in diagnostic opportunity, making it essential to develop differentiated policies based on cancer type and territorial context.

Cluster 4: COVID-19 and Its Relationship with Delayed Cancer Diagnoses, a Long-Term Impact.

This cluster brings together studies that analyze how the pandemic affected cancer detection and treatment, generating both short- and long-term consequences.

In Central Europe, the article *Impact of COVID-19 on Cancer Diagnosis and Treatment In Slovenia* (Zadnik *et al.*, 2020) reported a 43% decrease in histological notifications, a 33% drop in referrals, and up to a 76% decline in mammograms compared to the pre-pandemic period. These decreases were attributed to both the reorganization of services and patient behavior, as well as the responsiveness of healthcare professionals.

In South America, the study *Impact of the Pandemic on Cancer Diagnosis and Survival in Chile, 2020–2030* (Ward *et al.*, 2021) used a microsimulation model and estimated that the interruption of screening programs will increase the number of late-stage diagnoses and significantly reduce survival rates for breast, cervical, colorectal, prostate, and stomach cancers.

Various studies (Casella *et al.*, 2021; Do Nascimento *et al.*, 2023) show how some health systems attempted to reorganize care pathways and introduce flexible processes to reduce infection risks among cancer patients. However, the suspension of screening programs, delays in resuming services, and disparities in healthcare infrastructure may result in a sustained increase in delayed diagnoses in the coming years.

In summary, the pandemic acted as an amplifier of structural and social barriers, forcing health systems to rethink resilient strategies to maintain continuity of oncology care during crises.

Cluster 5: Life Expectancy and Its Relationship with Treatment Choices in Cases of Delayed Cancer Diagnosis.

This cluster examines how patients' perceptions of life expectancy influence treatment decisions in advanced-stage cancer.

In the study *Expectations About the Effectiveness of Radiation Therapy Among Patients with Incurable Lung Cancer* (Chen *et al.*, 2013), 384 patients in stage IIIB or IV were evaluated. 78% believed radiation therapy would prolong their lives, and 64% did not understand that the treatment was not curative. Misconceptions were more common among older patients and those who relied on caregivers for information.

Complementarily, the study *Patient Beliefs that Chemotherapy May Be Curative in Metastatic Cancer* (Mack *et al.*, 2015) analyzed 722 patients with lung and colorectal cancer. Only 33% understood that chemotherapy was not curative; those who did were more likely to receive palliative care (OR 1.97; 95% CI: 1.37–2.82). This highlights the importance of education in decision-making.

Other studies (Elkin *et al.*, 2022; Eaglehouse *et al.*, 2019) further emphasize that clinical factors (such as tumor size and lymph node involvement) and

contextual factors (like wait times and health system inequities) directly impact survival.

Altogether, this cluster shows that patients’ perceptions of prognosis influence treatment decisions as much as clinical conditions do. It underscores the need for clear communication and comprehensive programs for palliative care and emotional support.

Future Research Lines

Five priority research lines have been identified to guide future studies on cancer, delayed diagnosis, and health systems.

Table 5. Clusters for Future Research.

Cluster	Topics
Evaluation of health system functions	Comparative analysis of public, private, and complementary models will help identify effective strategies and improvement opportunities in technical and administrative management, ensuring quality and timeliness at all levels of care.
Personal, social, and cultural patient factors related to delayed cancer diagnosis	It is necessary to investigate how patients’ and caregivers’ lack of knowledge about the disease contributes to diagnostic delays, in order to propose educational processes and support networks that incorporate contextual, social, and cultural variables.
Social determinants of health and their relationship with delayed cancer diagnosis	Research is needed on how the health sector coordinates with other state sectors to address the social determinants that influence detection and treatment, recognizing cancer as a high-cost disease that requires strategic intersectoral planning.
Life expectancy and treatment decision-making in delayed cancer diagnosis	Studying treatments and comprehensive approaches that include physical rehabilitation, mental health, and family support can help ensure that a late diagnosis is not perceived as a synonym for premature death, but rather as an opportunity to improve the quality and dignity of life.
Promotion and strengthening of robust research	Given the predominance of publications from high-income countries, it is necessary to build research capacity in Latin America and other regions to encourage innovative studies tailored to local contexts and contribute to the development of public policies aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

These lines provide a strategic framework to advance knowledge and improve health systems' response to cancer.

Discussion

The bibliometric review shows that delayed cancer diagnoses are explained by an interaction of individual, social, and structural factors. This confirms the need for interventions at macro, meso, and micro levels: international policies, community actions, and person-centered clinical practices. However, health systems have yet to effectively deploy comprehensive strategies that reduce inequalities (Bran *et al.*, 2020).

In this context, training frontline healthcare professionals is essential. Physicians and related professionals must be prepared to recognize early symptoms and guide patients through care pathways without causing critical delays. Training should be comprehensive and include comorbid conditions such as HIV or hepatitis, which alter prognosis and require tailored approaches (McMahon *et al.*, 2022).

Diagnostic timeliness is measured through time intervals: from symptom recognition to the initial consultation, from consultation to histological confirmation, and from diagnosis to treatment initiation. In low- and middle-income countries, these intervals are significantly longer, reflecting structural inequalities. Sociocultural factors such as education level, marital status, or beliefs influence delays in seeking care, while in rural areas, travel times and lack of infrastructure amplify delays (Unger-Saldaña *et al.*, 2015; Bergin *et al.*, 2018).

Administrative, economic, cultural, and geographic access barriers remain key determinants of treatment adherence. Overcoming them requires redesigning the structure of health systems to ensure continuity and quality throughout the care process. A comprehensive approach must recognize that these limitations are not exclusive to certain countries but represent a global reality requiring context-specific adjustments (Bran *et al.*, 2020).

Conclusions

The bibliometric review confirms that cancer and delayed diagnoses represent a global challenge for health systems. Delays are explained by individual factors (age, education, beliefs), social factors (economic, cultural, and geographic

conditions), and structural factors (infrastructure, care networks, financing, and human resources). This is both a public health and governance issue with significant economic impact, as cancer is a high-cost disease.

The findings highlight the need to strengthen the training of frontline professionals, along with interdisciplinary teams capable of guiding patients from the initial consultation to diagnosis. Education and family support are essential to prevent access barriers or beliefs from unnecessarily extending waiting times.

Territorial inequalities also affect diagnostic timeliness: in rural areas, lack of infrastructure and long travel distances delay care; in urban zones, overcrowded services hinder responsiveness. This calls for structural adjustments to ensure equity.

Integrating educational programs, health navigation strategies, and early palliative care would help improve treatment adherence and support shared decision-making. At the same time, public policies must prioritize humanized care and continuity of treatment.

Addressing cancer and delayed diagnoses requires a comprehensive response that combines prevention, education, infrastructure, skilled human resources, and intersectoral policies. Only then will it be possible to reduce inequalities, ensure timely access, and improve the quality of life for people affected by this disease across all social and health care contexts.

Limitations

One of the main limitations of this bibliometric review is the limited representation of research from Latin America. Although countries like Colombia, Chile, Peru, and Venezuela face serious challenges regarding delayed diagnosis, their scientific output remains limited compared to high-income regions.

This gap hinders a deeper understanding of how each context's specific social, economic, cultural, and demographic factors influence the structure and responsiveness of health systems. Although Colombia has shown acceptable progress in academic production within the Ibero-American sphere, there is still a need to promote more local research that analyzes the causes of delayed diagnoses in low- and middle-income countries, to develop policies and strategies that are better aligned with local realities (Acuña & Ramírez, 2018; Martínez-Pérez *et al.*, 2020).

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Ceteris Paribus Laws and Argumentation Schemes*

[English Version]

Leyes *ceteris paribus* y esquemas de argumentación

Leis *ceteris paribus* e esquemas de argumentação

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Abstract

Objective: The present paper discusses an account on the epistemological foundation of argumentation schemes through the defeasible reasoning theory of ranking beliefs and the ceteris paribus defeasible approach of Wolfgang Spohn (2012). Hence, the purpose is to model a general scheme of reasoning for any argumentation scheme given Spohn's ceteris paribus conditions model. **Methodology:** Spohn's proposal of a general form of normality ceteris paribus laws is capable of being used as an a priori model to every kind of defeasible reasoning normativity, including argumentation schemes in the field of the informal logic. **Results:** The main result is the structure of a general scheme of reasoning for any argumentation scheme: 1. A is a necessary and sufficient reason to believe in B, iff given that believe in (B/A) \geq believe in (B/-A) and believe in (B/A) \geq believe in (B/-A), that is to say, Ceteris paribus. 2. A is the case. 3. Therefore, B must be believed. **Conclusions:** Normality of conditions is related to a centered epistemic agent in a given background. We believe defeasible a priori the ceteris paribus hypothesis and then we start the use of the mechanism of argumentation scheme. Argumentation schemes are either stereotypical pattern of defeasible reasoning, when the premises

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only support with likelihood and other things being normal, the acceptance of the conclusion. Practical reasoning is, then, defeasible in essence.

Key words: Ceteris paribus laws; argumentation schemes; ranking theory; defeasible reasoning; informal logic; epistemic normativity; normality of conditions (obtained from the UNESCO Thesaurus).

Resumen

Objetivo: el presente artículo examina la base epistemológica de los esquemas de argumentación a través de la teoría del razonamiento refutable. El objetivo es modelar un esquema general de razonamiento aplicable a cualquier esquema de argumentación, fundamentado en el modelo de condiciones *ceteris paribus*. **Metodología:** la propuesta de Spohn sobre una forma general de leyes de normalidad *ceteris paribus* puede ser utilizada como modelo *a priori* para diversos tipos de normatividad del razonamiento refutable, incluyendo esquemas de argumentación en el ámbito de la lógica informal.

Resultados: el hallazgo principal consiste en la estructura de un esquema general de razonamiento aplicable a cualquier esquema de argumentación: 1. A constituye una razón necesaria y suficiente para creer en B si y solo si, bajo la condición de que creer en $(B/A) > 0 \geq \text{creer en } (B/-A)$ y creer en $(B/A) \geq 0 > \text{creer en } (B/-A)$, cumpliendo con el *ceteris paribus*. 2. A es el caso. 3. Por lo tanto, B debe ser creído. **Conclusiones:** la normalidad de las condiciones se encuentra vinculada a un agente epistémico en un contexto específico. Se considera refutable *a priori* la hipótesis *ceteris paribus* y, a partir de ello, se usa el mecanismo del esquema de argumentación.

Palabras clave: leyes *ceteris paribus*; esquemas de argumentación; teoría de la clasificación; razonamiento refutable; lógica informal; normatividad epistémica; normalidad de las condiciones (obtenidos del tesoro de la UNESCO).

Resumo

Objetivo: este artigo discute os fundamentos epistemológicos dos esquemas de argumentação por meio da teoria do raciocínio defeasible baseada no ranqueamento de crenças e na abordagem ceteris paribus defeasible de Wolfgang Spohn (2012). O objetivo é, portanto, modelar um esquema geral de raciocínio aplicável a qualquer esquema de argumentação, com base no modelo de condições ceteris paribus de Spohn.

Metodologia: a proposta de Spohn sobre uma forma geral de leis de normalidade ceteris paribus pode ser utilizada como um modelo a priori para todo tipo de normatividade do raciocínio defeasible, incluindo os esquemas de argumentação no campo da lógica informal. **Resultados:** o principal resultado é a estrutura de um esquema geral de raciocínio para qualquer esquema de argumentação: 1. A é uma razão necessária e suficiente para acreditar em B, se, e somente se, dada a crença de que $(B/A) > 0 \geq$ crença em $(B/-A)$ e crença em $(B/A) \geq 0 >$ crença em $(B/-A)$, ou seja, ceteris paribus. 2. A é o caso. 3. Portanto, deve-se acreditar em B. **Conclusões:** a normalidade das condições está relacionada a um agente epistêmico centrado em um determinado contexto de fundo. Acreditamos defeasivelmente, a priori, na hipótese ceteris paribus, e a partir daí utilizamos o mecanismo do esquema de argumentação. Esquemas de argumentação são padrões estereotipados de raciocínio defeasible, nos quais as premissas sustentam a conclusão apenas com probabilidade e sob condições normais. O raciocínio prático é, portanto, defeasible por essência.

Palavras chaves: leis ceteris paribus; esquemas de argumentação; teoria do ranqueamento; raciocínio defeasible; lógica informal; normatividade epistêmica; normalidade das condições (obtidos do tesouro da UNESCO).

Introduction

The so-called laws of nature are taken as universal truth assertions supporting relationships of phenomena. This paradigm linked to natural sciences draws the standard meaning of law in science. However, in other fields, like social sciences, there are several generalizations or models that differ from this definition. Some examples are:

1. The Law of Demand
2. Mendel's laws

These generalizations are not universal, truth supporting claims but, in fact, are useful laws in social sciences, for instance (Fonseca, 2023). These kinds of generalizations need a *ceteris paribus* clause, which means “other things being equal”. Thus, *ceteris paribus* laws are universal statements with certain exceptions. John Stuart Mill used this concept properly, in this sense, in his account of economic disturbing factors (Mill, 1843). Mill's account asserts that there are exceptions or disturbing factors in theories that often override the meaning of laws, because laws do not fit with phenomena.

Another definition that brings light to the meaning of the *ceteris paribus* clause is Cairnes's description of political economy. Regarding political economic theories, Cairnes (1888) states: “The doctrines of political economy are to be understood as asserting, not what will take place, but what would or what tends to take place; and in this sense only are they true” (p. 103). *Ceteris paribus* clauses on Cairnes view are tendencies of what probably takes place.

In the contemporary philosophy of science, from logical positivism to present, definitions of this issue are related to the exclusion of disturbing factors in theories and scientific procedures. Only through this exclusion —the *ceteris paribus* clause— could sciences assert necessity and sufficient relation of phenomena (Nagel, 1961; Hempel, 1965). This argument is very problematic when applied to social sciences and other specific scientific disciplines. Certain neighbor phenomena in certain theories and models of such disciplines are not irrelevant or fixed. Therefore, *ceteris paribus* laws require a strong analytical approach to define its nature and function.

First of all, following Reutlinger's *et al* (2015) approach, we can differentiate comparative and exclusive *ceteris paribus* laws. Comparative *ceteris paribus* laws show that if the value of a variable increases, then the increase of another is directly proportional and equal, that is, all other things being equal. For instance, an increase in gas temperature leads to an increase of volume. On the other hand,

exclusive ceteris paribus laws need that the value of variables stays fixed and also require the exclusion of disturbing factors.

Comparative should be restrictive when it is instantiated into a specific class of circumstances or unrestricted when asserting a probabilistic cause for all circumstances (Reutlinger *et al.*, 2015).

Similarly, we can distinguish definite and indefinite exclusive ceteris paribus laws. Definite specifies the disturbing factors excluded from the law. Indefinite, consist of a “universal second order condition, which excludes all kinds of disturbing factors from the law, whatever they are” (Reutlinger *et al.*, 2015). The problem with exclusive ceteris paribus laws is that they may fall in trivialization because it is so difficult to reach an accounting of all the excluded factors.

The key to resolving the exclusive perspective problems is, in the so called semantic conception, adding the missing conditions to the laws (Fodor, 1991). This leads to the following schema of plausible solution:

- A factor C is a completer relative to a realizer R of A and a consequent predicate B if:
 1. R and C are strictly sufficient for B.
 2. R on its own is not strictly sufficient for B.
 3. C on its own is not strictly sufficient for B. (p. 23).

Also, to resolve the problem in relation to multiple mental states Fodor (1991) adds that:

Cp (A then B) is true iff either (1) for every realizer R of A there is a completer C such that A and C then B or (2) if there is no such a completer for realization R1 of A there must be many other laws in the network for A for which R1 has completers. (p. 27).

Another perspective to solve the problem is called epistemic. Completion is explanatory and only required post factual. This proposal answers the question: why was the law not instantiated? It is necessary to bring evidence for the existence of the disturbing factor (Pietroski & Rey, 1995). This is the schema for the thesis:

Cp (A then B) is non-vacuously true iff:

1.A and B are otherwise nomological.

2.For all x if Ax then (either Bx or there exists an independently confirmable factor that explains why $\neg Bx$).

3.Cp (A then B) explains at least something as assumed in 2. (p. 92).

An alternative theory to solve the problem is called normality theory. And for this case Spohn's (2012) reading on *ceteris paribus* laws is highly relevant and plausible. In this theory we can say that *ceteris paribus* clause means "other things being normal". In this sense, Spohn (2012) claims:

The goal here will be rather to explain how the notion of a *ceteris paribus* condition flows directly from the logic of non-probabilistic defeasible reasoning as explicated by ranking theory. If defeasible reasoning really is the basis of the phenomenon, it is no wonder that it is ubiquitous in the sciences, including physics. (p. 305).

Ceteris paribus laws are the case when we can obtain normal conditions in our ontological region, that is, that conditions are highly probable in such ontological region. Another way to think about it is using the notion of high probable conditions in a certain possible world.

I had emphasized that normality is an indexical or egocentric notion that refers to what is normal to us in our environment. Detached from such a context, normality is not meaningful. Thus detached, we could only say that everything in our environment is extremely exceptional, since the earth is such an extraordinary place in our universe (Spohn, 2012, p. 335).

Thus, in Spohn's reading, normal conditions are an epistemic issue because an epistemic agent believes something about the normality of conditions. Epistemic dimension is linked with ontological dimension if a doxastic agent might believe in certain *a priori* defeasible relations of phenomena, given certain fixed backgrounds.

Doxastic subjects expect normal conditions. Therefore, normal conditions are subject relative and require an epistemic reading. In contrast with the existential reading of conditions, linked with a strong concept of clauses as true hypothesis, or the account of *ceteris paribus* proviso as a list of conditions for a given hypothesis, Spohn's approach leads to a counterfactual perspective based on belief's normativity. The definition of such *a priori* defeasible condition is the following: "The belief in the reduction sentence $H=S$ then, (D iff R) is defeasible

a priori, or, equivalently, it is defeasible a priori that given S, D is a necessary and sufficient reason for R” (Spohn, 2012, p. 323).

Normal conditions are therefore epistemic conditions as a result of a fixed background. Spohn remarks on this that background normality is a learning process and our experience makes a confirming belief revision process and not the expectations with respect to that background. Nevertheless, what remains fixed is the belief in the proviso.

We cannot clear up all the conditions as the application requires certifying its satisfaction in a wide ontological and metaphysical point of view, as exclusive ceteris paribus theories want to achieve, that is impossible, and that is why we need to explain this through defeasible reasoning. Ceteris paribus laws, in an epistemological way, as hypothesis or a priori defeasible clauses of reasoning, are powerful tools for human knowledge that have fixed laws through the belief in certain a priori defeasible normativity on the knowledge of phenomena.

Ceteris Paribus Laws and Non-Monotonic Reasoning

As seen in the previous section, ceteris paribus laws are indeed kinds of normative defeasible reasoning beliefs. Hence, they are non-monotonic due to new information that should affect their validity. The ceteris paribus laws used to be formulated with a non-strict conditional, or with a default non-monotonic Modus Ponens. Following Reutlinger *et al.* (2015) we can find two semantic criteria to non-monotonic laws:

1. High probability semantics: An inference of a conclusion conditional from a set of premise conditionals is regarded as valid in this semantics iff the uncertainty of the conclusion conditional is not greater than the sum of the uncertainties of the premises.
2. Normality semantics: A conditional is considered as true in a ranked-world model iff all lowest-rank A-worlds are B-worlds. An inference is considered as valid in this semantics iff all ranked-worlds-models that verify all premise conditionals verify the conclusion conditional (Reutlinger *et al.*, 2015).

The Spohn's reading is addressed to the normality semantics. The general schema of Spohn's normative structures is the clearest with the following explanation:

We believe defeasible a priori the hypothesis or ceteris paribus law, as we believe that: given variable S, then D is a necessary and sufficient reason for R and vice versa, or, for instance, we believe Ceteris Paribus that, if x is put into water, then x is soluble if and only if x dissolves.

Necessary and sufficient reasons are ranked-world-models with certain properties as Spohn (2012, p. 109) clarifies:

A is a:

Supererogatory	Reason for B iff	$t(\text{belief in } (B/A) > t(B/-A) > 0$
Sufficient	Reason for B iff	$t(B/A) > 0 \geq t(B/-A)$
Necessary	Reason for B iff	$t(B/A) \geq 0 > t(B/-A)$
Insufficient	Reason for B iff	$0 > t(B/A) > t(B/-A)$

As we see, sufficient and necessary conditions are not monotonic nor deductive reasons. Therefore, sufficient and necessary conditions are not fixed notions. All are relative to certain calculus of probabilities and facts in a given possible world.

The sufficient and necessary conditions fixed the background linking the probability to the first ranking 0. That is why they are laws and that is why they are defeasible laws.

Moreover, as Schurtz shows, we can fix the formulation of a law with a default modus ponens with the ceteris paribus clause and with the other aspects of the semantics.

In consequence, the Spohn's proposal of a general form of normality ceteris paribus laws is capable of being used as a priori model to every kind of defeasible reasoning normativity, including argumentation schemes in the field of informal logic.

Ceteris Paribus Conditions and Argumentation Schemes

As human beings we are inevitably forced to dwell in language. Sometimes this involves the everyday tasks and concerns, as well as the professional and scientific demand of revising the nature of language as a social practice that

reveals us as doxastic beings who know, act, and justify our agencies through the inferential exchange of reasons. This exchange results in the construction of theories and logical models that allow us to analyze the form of language. These tools promote the understanding of argumentation, that is, the inferential exchange of reasons explicit in logic. Argumentation models are used in different types of speeches and texts to persuade certain audiences in favor of certain claims, given different epistemic agencies. Such developments are understood as an attempt to create systems for evaluating and analyzing arguments and researching their impact in different backgrounds. The realms of action of these argumentation models are related with non-verbal personal exchange and visual communications, matters such as oral and written discussions, debates in the mass media, interpretation of legal matters, corporate communications, advertising, intercultural dialogue, and the exercise of science as research, justification, normalization, and dissemination of disciplinary knowledge. Therefore, argumentation constitutes a normative element for the construction of social reality.

According to Blair (2009), "informal logic" is the name given to the criticism related to the relevance and application of the principles and methods of formal logic in the field of natural language and practical reasoning (p. 50). What follows from this is the need to build new methods and tools for the analysis and evaluation of arguments; deductive validity is not the only criteria to say that an argument is logically well established.

This problem arises when the consequence relationship is non-monotonic. When the premises only support with likelihood, and other things being normal, the acceptance of the conclusion. Nevertheless, there are well-supported arguments that offer good reasons for its acceptance.

This is evident in everyday reasoning and practical reasoning. In everyday reasoning, in the context of dialogue, the goal of an arguer is to support and justify the acceptability of a claim linked with certain intentionality. In the same sense, practical reasoning is relative to context, dialogue, agents, and institutions, and therefore, this kind of reasoning is dynamic and non-monotonic. Practical reasoning is defeasible in essence.

How such arguments are related with different kinds of reasoning derives in the notion of an argumentation scheme. An argumentation scheme can be instantiated infinitely and with different content due to the nature of its form, which is to say, the way of relationship between claims and argument. Thus, under "certain theoretical conception of the kingdom of reason" (Van Eemeren & Kruiger, 2015, p. 37) arguments can be categorized into types.

In Walton's reading, argumentation schemes are stereotypical patterns of defeasible reasoning that are the case mainly in everyday arguments. When they

are well used, they create presumption in favor of their claims, shifting the burden of proof to the objector. Associated with each argument scheme there is a set of critical questions that are used to evaluate each corresponding argumentative type. Critical questions behave as fuses of the default character (*ceteris paribus*) of the schemes (Walton *et al.*, 2008).

Argumentation schemes for most authors of the informal logic movement have a normative status. The normative status shows that certain sets of types of common places in the argumentation or *topoi* (Aristotle, 2005), binds the reason with the possibility of a plausible claim if a scheme is well fulfilled in *ceteris paribus* conditions (Kienpointner, 1992; Van Eemeren, 2015; Walton, 1996; Walton *et al.*, 2008; Govier, 2000; Blair, 2012).

The epistemological approach of argumentation schemes moves on to give a better account of the notion, and differentiates the schemes given an account of the relation between reasoning and argumentation. We need to infer claims based on the concept of justified belief or knowledge, and then we can communicate knowledge to others, not just in a rhetorical way, but through arguments grounded in inferring patterns related to knowledge and truth preserving conclusions. Argumentation schemes, therefore, are not just dialogical structures but also reasoning normative structures (Blair, 2012; Lumer, 2011).

With this state of affairs, the big problem with argumentation schemes is their theoretical nature, structure, and classification criteria (Lumer, 2011, p. 2). There are a lot of accounts on argumentation schemes. The main accounts and classifications are Walton (1996); Walton *et al.* (2008); Kienpointner (1992); Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004); and Lumer (2011); and a lot of critics on the topic like the strong criticism of Pinto (2001). The topic remains open and unresolved. In consequence, several blurred, different, paradoxical, unclear, and contradictory theories do not lead to accepting that argumentative schemes are normative models of reasoning and arguing. Therefore, this recent theory of argumentation schemes requires a meta-normative discourse that could base an ulterior development and perhaps an evaluation of the earlier accounts on argumentation schemes.

A New Foundation for Argumentation Schemes

The following proposal consists of to set up an epistemological foundation for every attempt to fix an argumentation scheme, through the defeasible reasoning theory of ranking beliefs and *ceteris paribus* defeasible laws approach of Spohn (2012).

First, we must remember the definitions and explanations achieved from sections 1 and 2.

1. The belief in the reduction sentence $H = S$ then, $(D \text{ iff } R)$ is defeasibly a priori, or, equivalently, it is defeasible a priori that given S , D is a necessary and sufficient reason for R (p. 323).

2. A is a:

Supererogatory	Reason for B iff $\neg(\text{believe in } (B/A) > t(B/-A) > 0)$
Sufficient	Reason for B iff $t(B/A) > 0 \geq T(B/-A)$
Necessary	Reason for B iff $t(B/A) \geq 0 > t(B/-A)$
Insufficient	Reason for B iff $0 > t(B/A) > t(B/-A)$. (Spohn, 2012, p. 109).

3. Normality semantics: A conditional is considered as true in a ranked-world model iff all lowest-rank A -worlds are B -worlds. An inference is considered as valid in this semantics iff all ranked-worlds-models, which verify all premise conditionals, verify the conclusion conditional (Reutlinger *et al.*, 2015).

4. (Therefore), we believe Ceteris Paribus that, for instance, if x is put into water, then x is soluble if and only if x dissolves.

Therefore, the general scheme for an argumentation scheme is:

General Scheme:

1. A is a necessary and sufficient reason to believe in B , iff given that believe in $(B/A) > 0 \geq \text{believe in } (B/-A)$ and believe in $(B/A) \geq 0 > \text{believe in } (B/-A)$, that is to say, Ceteris paribus.
2. A is the case.
3. Therefore, B must be believed.

We must remark:

1. This is not a Standard Modus Ponens, this is a priori defeasible conditional statement.

2. This general scheme does not rule a particular instantiation but rules the model of every normative *ceteris paribus* statement as a defeasible one.

Therefore, each argumentation scheme must be made given this general scheme.

The following step is to use and prove such a priori defeasible conditional *ceteris paribus* statement with respect to the practical use of arguments. And of course, this kind of phenomena is full of exceptions of such a *ceteris paribus* clause. The possibility of fixing the background or context of dialogue seems to be extremely hard work. The critical questions account is the widest used mechanism as a tester or fuse of the *ceteris paribus* character of the model.

However, the general schema shows the key to establishing a fuse to the *ceteris paribus*. We can state the probability of a particular argument fitting into the model or schema. In other words, it is possible to state if A is a necessary and sufficient reason to believe in B. But, as has been said, this is a defeasible condition and there is a degree or ranking of belief in the fulfillment of such conditions. Let me use the Spohn's (2012) figure again:

A is a:

Supererogatory	Reason for B iff	$t(\text{believe in } (B/A) > t(B/-A) > 0$
Sufficient	Reason for B iff	$t(B/A) > 0 \geq T(B/-A)$
Necessary	Reason for B iff	$t(B/A) \geq 0 > t(B/-A)$
Insufficient	Reason for B iff	$0 > t(B/A) > t(B/-A)$. (p. 109)

As a defeasible kind of reasoning the grade of fitting into the model, or the plausibility to accept a claim depends on the criteria of probability between II and III. If we found a reason in IV, we can say that there is a bad argument.

At this point it is important to say that the probability is not just a formal system, it depends on the semantics of propositions of a determinate possible world. That meaning corresponds to kinds of facts, for instance, physical or institutional.

Hence, the roll of critical questions is heuristic and related to the possibility of establishing the likelihood of sufficient and necessary reasons to accepting a claim.

Finally, argumentation is a communication process. Argumentation is ruled not just for this epistemological component. The acceptability of a claim is related for instance to Grice maxims (Grice, 1975). Grice maxims are part of the background or not ruled *ceteris paribus* conditions.

The work to make a compendium of schemes and to prove the schemes with argumentation phenomena is an ulterior task and this work could lead to prove this hypothesis on the nature of argumentation schemes.

Conclusions

The main claim of this paper was that setting a general scheme of argumentation schemes in informal logic is possible, given the epistemological foundation of *ceteris paribus* laws.

Ceteris paribus laws are a priori defeasible stereotypes (Putnam, 1975). *Ceteris paribus* clauses are generalizations when we obtain high probable conditions in certain ontological realms, that is, what is normal in certain environment or background.

The defeasible approach of Spohn (2012) is an account on *ceteris paribus* laws useful for the goal of obtaining a general scheme on argumentation theory. Spohn's normality theory, which means other things being normal, allows solving the problem.

Normality of conditions is related to a centered epistemic agent in a given background. We believe defeasible a priori the *ceteris paribus* hypothesis and then we start the use of the mechanism of argumentation scheme. For instance, Grice maxims (1975) are certain special kinds of *ceteris paribus* conditions. Therefore, Spohn's account is capable of being used as a normative for the inductive reasoning of argumentation schemes.

Argumentation schemes are either stereotypical pattern of defeasible reasoning, when the premises only support with likelihood and other things being normal, the acceptance of the conclusion. Practical reasoning is, then, defeasible in essence.

Inferences and arguments are truth-evaluable, but not always truth-preserving or deductive. Most of our arguments are inductive or defeasible. If we go beyond deductive logic, to give an argument is to provide reasons to a rational belief change. We need to infer claims based on the concept of knowledge, that is, normative, not just dialogical ones.

Hence, an argument is a kind of conditional that is accepted in an epistemic state iff AB is more plausible or probable than its falsification, that is, provides a relevant reason to the conclusion, as the general scheme in this proposal shows.

Therefore, this is the structure of a general scheme of reasoning for any argumentation scheme:

1. A is a necessary and sufficient reason to believe in B, iff given that believe in $(B/A) > 0 \geq$ believe in $(B/-A)$ and believe in $(B/A) \geq 0 >$ believe in $(B/-A)$, that is to say, Ceteris paribus.
2. A is the case.
3. Therefore, B must be believed.

For future work, proving particular argumentation schemes given this epistemic approach of a general scheme based on ceteris paribus conditions is necessary.

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The Environmentalist Discourse versus the Bureaucratic Discourse: The Cenagoso Bajo Sinú Wetland Complex, Colombia*

[English Version]

El discurso ambientalista frente al discurso burocrático:
Humedal complejo cenagoso Bajo Sinú-Colombia

O discurso ambientalista frente ao discurso burocrático: o
complexo de Humedais *cenagoso Bajo Sinú*, Colômbia

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Abstract

Objective: To analyze discursive practices on sustainable development (SD), understood as differentiated institutional and community genres, from the perspective of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), using the *Cenagoso del Bajo Sinú* Wetland Complex as a case study. **Methodology:** A qualitative approach was employed based on the three-dimensional CDA model, combining a systematic literature review with empirical analysis of a discursive corpus. Databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and SciELO were consulted, prioritizing studies on sustainability, environmental policies, and wetland governance. The corpus included environmental regulations, public policy documents, and semi-structured interviews with rural farmers. The analysis was organized along the textual, practice, and sociocultural dimensions of the model, allowing the identification of power relations and tensions surrounding the discursive production of sustainability. **Results:** The analysis revealed that discourse on SD operates as a hegemonic bureaucratic device that, once institutionalized, legitimizes territorial appropriation in the Wetland Complex and renders community knowledge invisible. Within N. Fairclough's framework, discursive asymmetries were identified that conceal processes of dispossession and environmental degradation beneath the rhetoric of sustainability. **Conclusions:** SD discourse imposes a bureaucratic logic that weakens its real implementation. This narrative obscures community knowledge.

Keywords: dissertation; ecosystem; environmental conservation; wetland; sustainable development (from the UNESCO thesaurus).

Resumen

Objetivo: analizar las prácticas discursivas sobre el desarrollo sostenible (DS), entendidas como géneros diferenciados institucionales y comunitarios, desde el enfoque del Análisis Crítico del Discurso (ACD) de Fairclough, tomando como caso de estudio el complejo cenagoso del Bajo Sinú (CCBS). **Metodología:** se empleó un enfoque cualitativo basado en el modelo tridimensional del ACD, combinando revisión bibliográfica sistemática y análisis empírico de un corpus discursivo. Se consultaron bases como Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar y SciELO, priorizando estudios sobre sostenibilidad, políticas ambientales y gobernanza de humedales. El corpus incluyó normativa ambiental, documentos de política pública y entrevistas semiestructuradas a campesinos. El análisis se estructuró en las dimensiones textual, práctica y sociocultural del modelo, permitiendo identificar relaciones de poder y tensiones en torno a la producción discursiva sobre sostenibilidad. **Resultados:** el análisis reveló que el discurso

sobre DS opera como un dispositivo burocrático hegemónico que, al institucionalizarse, legitima la apropiación territorial en el CCBS e invisibiliza saberes comunitarios. Desde el modelo de N. Fairclough, se identificaron asimetrías discursivas que encubren procesos de despojo y degradación ambiental bajo una retórica de sostenibilidad. **Conclusiones:** el discurso del DS impone una lógica burocrática que debilita su aplicación real. Esta narrativa invisibiliza saberes comunitarios.

Palabras clave: disertación; ecosistema; conservación ambiental; ciénaga; desarrollo sostenible (obtenidos del tesoro UNESCO).

Resumo

Objetivo: analisar as práticas discursivas sobre desenvolvimento sustentável (DS), entendidas como gêneros institucionais e comunitários diferenciados, a partir do enfoque da Análise Crítica do Discurso (ACD) de Fairclough, tomando como estudo de caso o complexo de humedais *Cenagoso del Bajo Sinú*. **Metodologia:** utilizou-se uma abordagem qualitativa baseada no modelo tridimensional da ACD, combinando revisão bibliográfica sistemática e análise empírica de um corpus discursivo. Consultaram-se bases como Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar e SciELO, priorizando estudos sobre sustentabilidade, políticas ambientais e governança de áreas úmidas. O corpus incluiu normativa ambiental, documentos de políticas públicas e entrevistas semiestruturadas com agricultores locais. A análise foi estruturada nas dimensões textual, prática e sociocultural do modelo, permitindo identificar relações de poder e tensões em torno da produção discursiva sobre sustentabilidade. **Resultados:** a análise revelou que o discurso sobre DS opera como um dispositivo burocrático hegemônico que, ao institucionalizar-se, legitima a apropriação territorial no Complexo de Humedais e invisibiliza saberes comunitários. A partir do modelo de N. Fairclough, identificaram-se assimetrias discursivas que ocultam processos de desapropriação e degradação ambiental sob a retórica da sustentabilidade. **Conclusões:** o discurso do DS impõe uma lógica burocrática que enfraquece sua aplicação real. Essa narrativa invisibiliza conhecimentos comunitários.

Palavras-chave: dissertação; ecossistema; conservação ambiental; ciénaga; desenvolvimento sustentável (obtidos do tesoro UNESCO).

Introduction

Nowadays, talking about sustainability often implies preserving the established order. This perception responds to discursive practices that shape our view of the world, as suggested by Waismann (1968), by promoting new ways of seeing things. The term 'sustainable', used in various contexts, has lost conceptual depth. Enriquez (2020) warns that its mere mention activates the idea of a well-intentioned discourse. These practices not only shape our notion of 'sustainability', but also environmental institutions at different levels. They are often linked to neoliberal discourse, which promotes economic growth with apparent environmental concern, and operate as an empty signifier that reinforces the *status quo* (Morffe, 2024).

Fairclough *et al.* (2004) propose that discourse can be understood in several ways, sometimes as meaning-making within social structures, other times as language tied to specific practices, or as ways of seeing the world according to certain social frameworks. However, not all discourses coexist without tension: some are affirmed, others are weakened, and many are transformed from within (Kommandeur *et al.*, 2025). In this regard, the bureaucratic discourse on sustainability does not arise spontaneously. It began to take shape after the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which sparked global environmentalism. Later, with the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) and the report *Our Common Future*—or Brundtland Report—an idea of sustainability connected to economic growth with institutional support took hold.

In 1992, the second conference on Environment and Development was held in Rio de Janeiro, called the "Earth Summit". There, Agenda 21 was approved, which initially aimed to guide policies toward effective sustainability for the 21st century. Twenty years later, at the Rio+20 Summit, the declaration "The future we want" was signed. In this new scenario, terms associated with "green" began to circulate, presented as different alternatives to the SD discourse. However, this was reinforced with the adoption of the 2015-2030 Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] and the Paris Agreement. This discursive evolution has generated very diverse debates: some more technical, others openly critical. Authors such as Hajian and Kashani (2021), or Ruggerio (2021), offer revealing readings on this conceptual tension.

This research draws on Salas-Zapata and Ortiz-Munoz (2019), who understand "sustainability" as a set of guiding criteria for human action. It also adopts the notion of territorial SD as the point of convergence for economic and management actors interacting locally (Vikhoreva *et al.*, 2020). From this perspective, the discursive practice of the SD is analyzed through Fairclough's Critical Discourse

Analysis (CDA), using the BSWC in Colombia as a case study. Specifically, his three-dimensional model is applied, which links the textual, discursive-practice, and sociocultural dimensions of language, enabling a critical understanding of the power relations embedded in sustainability discourses.

From this methodological perspective, the analysis is organized into three interrelated axes that allow a deeper exploration of the critical dimension of the sustainability discourse. These axes include: CDA (Fairclough, 2023) regarding the concept of “sustainability”; the territory of wetlands, and the BSWC case, where agro-livestock practices typical of the capitalist mode of production unnecessarily drive ecosystem deterioration and the shrinking of water bodies. Within this framework, “discursive practice” is understood as an intermediate dimension between text and social structure, where discursive genres are produced, circulated, and contested (Fairclough, 1992, 2003, 2023). This notion allows the analysis of how institutional and community actors construct differentiated meanings of sustainability in contexts of asymmetric power.

Methodology

Following the CDA approach proposed by Fairclough (2023), this study examines the discursive practices associated with SD in the BSWC, Colombia. A qualitative perspective is adopted with a dual strategy: systematic literature review and empirical analysis of a corpus composed of regulations, public policies, and semi-structured interviews. Sources were selected through searches in Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and SciELO, prioritizing studies on sustainability, environmental governance, territory, and wetlands. The study analyzes only the institutional and community environmental discourse.

Using Fairclough’s CDA framework (2023), discursive practices linked to SD were examined, using the BSWC as a case study. A qualitative perspective was adopted to unravel power relations, symbolic tensions, and legitimation processes present in institutional and community discourses on sustainability.

The BSWC, located in the northern part of the Córdoba department, comprises the lower area of a lacustrine-fluvial unit influenced by the Sinú River. It covers approximately 42,317 hectares under the jurisdiction of six municipalities (Resolution 202332008470566 of 2023). Its ecological and institutional configuration makes it a strategic territorial unit where official sustainability discourses converge with community resistance narratives, making it a suitable site for observing disputes over the meaning of territory.

This study uses Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model (Alassiri, 2023), which distinguishes three levels: linguistic, discursive, and social. Thus, "discursive practice" is understood as social processes that mediate the production, circulation, and interpretation of texts. In contrast, "social practice" refers to institutional structures influencing these processes (Fairclough, 2003). This perspective is useful for exploring how meanings of sustainability are constructed and contested in contexts marked by inequality (Haider & Gujjar, 2021).

Three discursive genres were identified in the analyzed corpus. To address this dimension, the notion of 'gender' was used as a form of situated communicative action (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993; Devitt, 2004), allowing recognition of certain circulation patterns. For instance, institutional documents repeatedly include formulas such as "rational use of water resources" or "strategic environmental zoning", reflecting a technical rationality. These discursive choices reveal contradictory ways of building sustainability.

The bureaucratic discourse on sustainability, represented by the *Management and Environmental Planning Plan of the Bajo Sinú Wetlands Complex* (CVS, 2007), is analyzed. This institutional, technical, and normative approach configures the territory as an object of management, blurring local knowledge and reinforcing a hierarchical logic. Also included is the community discourse of peasant-fisher groups, collected through semi-structured interviews with *Cenagoso Bajo Sinú Wetland Complex* (BSWC) residents, conducted with informed consent and anonymity safeguards, who perceive the wetland as a space of life, memory, and livelihood.

Characterization of Community Discourse from the CDA Approach

A representative example of this discourse is captured in an interview with two elder fishermen from the village of San Sebastián, BSWC. It falls within the local-testimonial genre, characterized by spontaneous orality, territorial rootedness, and the centrality of the body as a locus of experience. Phrases like "we live off that", "it's nice to live here", or "my lungs get tired" construct the wetland as a collective, emotional, and economic subject, through colloquial expressions that embody a reciprocity-based economy and a bodily relationship with the environment. These practices, transmitted in domestic spaces, correspond to what Bhatia (1993) calls "genres linked to local communities" and reinforce the practical dimension of CDA by showcasing territorialized meanings from positions of normative exclusion.

Finally, the legal and environmental policy discourse is examined, as represented by Decree 2372 of 2010 and the Environmental Management

Plan 2020-2031 of the Regional Autonomous Corporation of the Sinú and San Jorge Valleys (CVS). This is framed within the normative-institutional genre, marked by impersonal structures (“must consider”), abstract nominalizations (“zoning process”), and technical vocabulary (“regional sustainability”, “ecological criteria”), characteristic of a regulatory rationality that conceives territory as a planning object. This logic contrasts with the peasant-fisher discourse, which conveys a situated and embodied experience. From the CDA perspective, this contrast reveals how territorial meanings are contested in scenarios of discursive asymmetry, and how institutional and community genres express divergent logics of sustainability.

The discourses were approached as differentiated genres according to their function and context: legal-normative (decrees, plans), technical-administrative (institutional documents), and local-testimonial (interviews). This typology strengthens the practical dimension of CDA by showing how each genre organizes the production and circulation of sustainability meanings.

Discursive Contrast Between Genders: Ways of Constructing Sustainability

From the CDA perspective and the notion of ‘genre’ as situated communicative action (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993; Devitt, 2004), three discursive genres were identified in the corpus: normative-institutional, technical-administrative, and testimonial-community, each differentiated by their enunciation, function, and rationality.

- **Normative-institutional:** Evident in decrees and plans, this genre uses impersonal language, nominalizations, and prescriptive formulas. It reflects a regulatory rationality that plans the territory as an object.
- **Technical-administrative:** found in reports and diagnoses, it uses technical and neutral language, with standardized structures that reinforce a management logic based on scientific knowledge.
- **Testimonial-community:** present in interviews, it uses a spontaneous and affective language that builds the wetland as a lived territory, evidencing a relational logic grounded in care.

The contrast among these genres reveals structural asymmetries: institutional discourses objectify the territory, while the community discourse embodies and re-signifies it. This tension highlights power struggles in which some voices are legitimized while others are silenced. From the CDA perspective, language does not merely reflect the social world; it also contests and reproduces it.

Discursive Practices: Sustainable Development and Sustainability

This research focuses on the institutional environmental discourse, understood as a web of statements produced by state entities, multilateral organizations, and public standards that shape sustainability from technical, bureaucratic, and regulatory perspectives. Bureaucracy, far from being limited to the administrative sphere, operates as an organizational form of state rationality, supported by norms, means, and ends (Weber, 1985). This technical bias is not exclusive to the state; it also crosses modern discourses such as that of the SD (Casabone, 2017), proposing a balance between conservation and human needs. However, this approach does not completely dismantle the logics of exclusion and control. From the CDA lens, Fairclough (2005) addresses social reality through three key dynamics: stratification, relation, and transformation.

It is emphasized that social reality is organized in connected and dialectically mobilized strata, from general levels to more concrete ones. Thus, CDA conceives semiosis as a dialogical process essential to the reproduction and transformation of social relations (Fairclough, 2005). This analysis locates semiosis within capitalist dynamics, which reduce well-being and increase community suffering (Fairclough, 2013). By engaging with these dynamics, semiosis not only reproduces social bonds but configures hegemonic discourses that legitimize power structures.

The term “SD” functions as a discursive mechanism reinforcing the control of nature through a bureaucratic logic. It emerged in response to late 20th-century environmental degradation as a hegemonic notion legitimizing such control. For Fairclough (2013), bureaucratic discourse articulates a framework where power and language regulate social representations and shape cultural, political, gender, and hidden forms of power perspectives (Scott, 2023). Discursive practices enable institutional changes and reinforce ties with communities where certain institutions, such as those upholding sustainability discourse, are accepted as legitimate (Santamaría & Ruiz, 2021). In this discursive order, social relations operate through formalization and depersonalization, endorsed by a “technically based authority” (Brachet-Márquez & Godau, 1984), that is, the State. The global order imposes a single model for addressing environmental degradation without

considering each country's particularities. Vela (2005) refers to this as a legal equality among states, but not an economic one, hindering the design of public policies with a differentiated approach. This study analyzes the environmental discourse based on the policies implemented in the BSWC.

From constructivist theories, such as Latour's actor-network theory (2008), actors generate "language games" that shape new power-laden relationships. Action emerges from uncertainty, and through this, each actor incorporates others, weaving networks of cooperation and dominance that support multiple social practices. In line with this, Searle (2017) argues that social reality is built from practices rooted in community action. He introduces the concept of 'deontic power', inherent in human institutional frameworks, which encompasses duties, rights, authorizations, and privileges. This power, which is not limited to the legal realm, induces behavior without coercion by offering reasons for action that would not otherwise exist.

In response to the UN General Assembly's call to establish a global change agenda, the World Commission on Environment and Development published the report *Our Common Future*, which first proposed an economic growth model based on sustainability policies. However, Lander (2019) argues that this report failed to address the structural causes of the environmental crisis, uncritically embracing the logic of capitalist accumulation, thus consolidating a *technocratic vision*¹ of SD aligned with global market interests.

Far from being an instrument of structural transformation, environmental discourse has been absorbed by a technical-bureaucratic rationality that perpetuates the extractivist model and undermines its emancipatory power (Lander, 2019; Leff, 2022). This rationality acts as a pacification device in the face of ecological crisis, making institutional environmentalism a functional piece of the capitalist order. This symbolic co-optation is articulated with the rise of *soft law*, whose non-binding rules allow States to sustain environmental rhetoric without assuming legal commitments, while preserving a margin for extractive action (Noguera & Villota, 2020). In terms of regulations, at both local and international levels, legal frameworks still lack material conditions for environmental justice that would curb capital's accumulative appetite (Noguera, 2021).

According to Pérez-Marín (2016), this initiative was promoted under pressure from multilateral organizations such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], the United Nations Development Program [UNDP], the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank [IDB]. This vision of SD impacted not only research agendas but also Latin

¹ It is that approach that reduces environmental problems to technical and management solutions, omitting their political, ethical and territorial roots, which prevents profound structural transformations.

America's environmental history (Gallini, 2009). These actors applied what Searle (2017) calls “persuasive power”: the ability to influence others to act differently than they otherwise would.

Salas-Zapata and Ortiz-Muñoz (2019) identify a persistent ambiguity around the concept of “sustainability”, which has hindered its rigorous application in research. In contrast, Escobar (2011) argues that this notion emerged from social movements as an integral defense of life and the environment. These resistances made visible the consequences of excessive capitalist growth and, from perspectives like ecological economics, denounced unequal economic and ecological exchanges stemming from extractive practices that devastate territories and communities (Gudynas, 2023).

The notion of ‘sustainability’, far from having a uniform meaning, has been appropriated by different discourses with different purposes and uses, which hinders its systematic treatment in research (Ruggerio, 2021). This ambiguity intensifies given the complexity of environmental problems, which are socially embedded. In response, a critical perspective like Fairclough’s social analysis (2006, 2023) allows for the examination of both material practices and the meanings that sustain them. This approach enables a confrontation with notions like ‘SD’ (Biggs *et al.*, 2021), revealing its ambivalence and role in reproducing structured inequalities.

Critical social analysis, according to Fairclough (2023), allows us to address social realities as historical constructions subject to transformation, articulating material and semiotic dimensions that, in certain contexts, perpetuate human suffering. This perspective enables a critical reading of notions like ‘SD’ (Biggs *et al.*, 2021), by questioning their implications when naturalized in discourses grounded in technical knowledge. In this line, Merlinsky (2021) frames political ecology as a theoretical field that interprets socio-environmental conflicts as sources of transformative meanings that challenge the established order. These tensions, according to the author, can reconfigure institutional, legal, and territorial frameworks. Consistently, Garnero (2023) argues that the social and human sciences enrich this approach by incorporating the political, cultural, and economic dimensions underlying environmental problems.

These disciplines promote inclusive participation and governance, which are essential for understanding the complexity of environmental challenges and formulating more equitable solutions. Therefore, new approaches to environmental degradation must be fostered, approaches that deconstruct what Cubillos *et al.* (2022) refer to as the “coloniality of nature”, operating through three mechanisms: (a) epistemic violence against traditional knowledge and practices of colonized peoples and nature; (b) a political project grounded in the degradation of life in

its multiple expressions; and (c) the imposition of a dualist philosophy privileging the human over the natural.

As a consequence, it is urgent to overcome the bureaucratic-colonial discourse that employs the modern notion of “natural resources”, by embodying a marked anthropocentrism and sustaining a functionalist vision of nature as a reserve available to capital (Tamayo-Álvarez, 2023), subordinated to the concept of “development”. Sachs (1992) warns about the arbitrary nature of the key words of the development discourse (market, planning, population, environment, production, equality, participation, needs, and poverty), highlighting their cultural and historical specificity, as well as the risks they entail in Global South contexts.

In this regard, Hatzisavvidou (2024) argues that the Anthropocene presents humans as the driving force behind all change on Earth, under a planetary vision of zero emissions aimed at mitigating environmental effects. However, Parsons (2024) questions this universalizing approach for its vagueness, lack of transparency, and even recklessness, and warns about the neocolonial nature of the proposed mechanisms to achieve a net-zero emissions future. This research is based on the recognition that all development work generates environmental impacts, so it must be minimized as much as possible.

Sakalasooriya (2021) argues that there is no universal definition of “sustainability”, as it is a changing, multifaceted, and situated concept. This article adopts the proposal of Salas-Zapata and Ortiz-Muñoz (2019), who define it as a set of criteria guiding human action. These actions relate to the interactions between humans and ecosystems that, when integrated, form socio-economic systems (Elster, 2010), from a perspective that recognizes action as the foundation of social life. In turn, these practices are possible thanks to language: through it we commit ourselves, regulate our behavior, and produce social facts that sustain institutions (Searle, 2017).

From a territorial approach, Vikhoreva *et al.* (2020) understand the “SD” as the link between the interests of management entities and economic actors that interact in the territories. This concept varies depending on the dominant industry and area of activity. They conclude that its implementation responds to functional, process-based, systems, and situational management approaches proposed by Ogloblin *et al.* (2019), depending on the methods and strategies used in each context.

In rural areas, the SD deserves a priority place within territorial strengthening strategies. It is no coincidence that notions like “alternatives” to development are gaining momentum and becoming focal points in contemporary debate. This is partly due to a crisis that affects us all: climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, species extinction, glacier retreat, and plastic pollution in oceans. All

are signs of an exhausted model whose promises of inclusion and collective well-being remain unfulfilled.

Finally, this research invites us to rethink the hegemonic model of “development”, forged in the Global North under a capitalist rationality, and its effects on territorialities. Within this framework, multiple statements about inclusion or well-being operate as institutional speech acts (Searle, 2017), legitimizing extractive practices and governance schemes that perpetuate the dominant order. In contrast, emerging alternatives from the Global South are rooted in an ecological-holistic paradigm that acknowledges plural universes of meaning, including rationalities, knowledge systems, and ways of life distinct from Western ones, such as those expressed by ethnic communities and various Eastern worldviews that propose alternative ways of inhabiting the world.

The Defense of Wetlands as Ancestral Territories

Wetlands are strategic ecosystems due to their capacity to support essential activities such as water supply, agriculture, industry, navigation, and ecotourism. They also hold profound cultural and spiritual value, transmitted across generations in many communities (*World Wide Fund for Nature* [WWF], 2025). Their relevance began to be recognized in the 1970s, especially for their key ecological functions: supporting biodiversity and regulating hydrology (Shiau & Chang, 2022). Currently, they are valued for their role in the provision of ecosystem services such as climate change mitigation, coastal protection and species conservation. All this makes them pillars for the food and economic sovereignty of those who depend on these territories (Arroyave, 2022).

Despite their strategic role, wetlands continue to disappear due to inadequate agricultural practices and industrial activities (Seifollahi-Aghmiuni *et al.*, 2022). From a CDA perspective, the drivers identified by Let and Pal (2023), such as agricultural expansion, urbanization, or development, are understood not only as economic or territorial processes, but also as discursive expressions that perpetuate the instrumentalization of nature. This materializes in public environmental policies that conceive wetlands as resources available for human progress, reproducing a utilitarian logic in which ecological, cultural, or spiritual values are subordinated to development interests.

These discourses are often embedded in land use planning and environmental policy documents, such as the *Environmental Management Plan for the BSWC* (CVS, 2007), where technical and seemingly neutral language tends to obscure the power relations that define which uses of nature are legitimized and which are excluded. To counter this, international strategies have been implemented,

treaties, conventions, laws, and regulations, aimed at wetland protection (Davies *et al.*, 2020).

The BSWC, located in the northern department of Córdoba on the right bank of the Sinú River, is a protected area within the National System of Protected Areas [SINAP]. It was designated as an Integrated Management District (DMI) by the CVS (Kerguelén-Durango *et al.*, 2021). In this wetland, the livelihood of fishing communities faces risks due to hydrological alterations in the Sinú River and its basin, which affect fish resources, and climate change-related phenomena such as sedimentation and drying of water bodies (Hoyos & Rojas, 2024). Added to this are the inappropriate use of agrochemicals, deforestation, private agricultural expansion, the construction of dikes, and the operation of the Urrá hydroelectric plant, identified by various studies as responsible for interrupting the hydraulic connectivity between the Sinú River and the BSWC via the Bugre stream (Clavijo-Bernal, 2021).

Paredes-Trejo *et al.* (2023) propose to review the way in which hydroelectric power plants operate, incorporating ecological criteria that guarantee both the conservation of river ecosystems and access to water to cover basic needs. Villalba *et al.* (2024) indicate that the Urrá operation could reduce the duration and impact of droughts in the region. This perspective is grounded in scientific evidence and international frameworks, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention, Agenda 21, and the SDGs, which promote integrated water and energy management with a holistic approach and intergenerational responsibility.

The regulatory framework that regulates wetlands in Colombia operates at different levels. At the national level, it includes the *National Policy for Inland Wetlands*, Resolutions 157 of 2004 and 196 of 2006 on their conservation and sustainable use, Decree 2372 of 2010 regulating the National System of Protected Areas, and the *National Development Plan 2022-2026*. At the territorial level, it includes the *Watershed Management and Zoning Plan for the Sinú River* [POMCA], the *Departmental Development Plan*, and the *CVS Regional Environmental Management Plan 2020-2031*. At the local level, it includes the diagnosis of the Bajo Sinú lagoon complex, the BSWC environmental management plan, its DMI designation, and municipal plans related to the area.

All these administrative acts aim to protect wetlands, yet a reduction in water body areas, inappropriate land use, sedimentation, dike construction, and, recently, the clearing of the last forest remnants by landowners continue to be observed. These remnants served as nesting sites for local and migratory birds such as the *Ardea cinerea* and *Ardea alba*, whose eggs, during economic hardship, were used as a food source by some peasant communities. Pérez-Marín (2016) argues that discursive and normative frameworks in Colombia, applied to protected natural

areas, are anchored in a conservationist logic that legitimizes the control of nature by transnational interests. Although there has been a shift toward an SD discourse aimed at justifying the exploitation of nature, it continues to reproduce exclusionary structures and forms of territorial control.

The National Land Agency [ANT], through *Resolution 202332008470566 of 2023*, established the delimitation of the vacant lands comprising the BSWC. The issuance of this administrative act has been one of the formal state attempts to clarify the situation of the properties that constitute this territory, as a result of the constant socio-environmental disputes over land throughout the wetland. The act reveals that the area making up this habitat is considered public land, meaning it falls within those lands which, according to the *Colombian Civil Code*, “[...] being located within national borders, lack a private owner” (Art. 675). However, in Colombia, as Romo (2024) notes, there is debate regarding the mechanisms, criteria, and conditions for defining the scope of public versus private property in agricultural matters, which has contributed to the country's land issues.

Regardless of the meaning of “wasteland”, which is not the focus of this research, this figure was established as an important instrument of agrarian reform aimed at promoting democratic access to land ownership, though it has not been effective in the case under examination. However, the 1991 constituent covered the wasteland with a general and specific protection regime, within which the environmental factor (environmental heritage) is included, turning it into a territorial reserve of the State that cannot be appropriated or subjected to practices incompatible with the natural environment underlying the land in question.

Theoretical Aspects of Territory

A theoretical and conceptual review of the notion of territory must trace its roots back to Greece and follow its evolution to the present day. Etymologically, the term derives from the roots *terra* (land) and *orio* (belonging or place), so “territory” essentially means “a stretch of land divided politically” (Kwan, 2020). Thus, the concept refers not only to land or a geographical location but is inherently political, indicating the geographic domain controlled by a political entity, usually through the exercise of jurisdictional authority (Moore, 2015). According to Moore, the theoretical-political tradition conceives territory as a form of property (either as a collection of individual possessions or as a type of state property). The author proposes a theory called “On the political self-determination of the territory” based on two fundamental lines.

On the one hand, the existence of particular relationships between people that can generate moral reasons and obligations, and on the other, justice in the territory has to recognize the existence of significant relationships and norms between people and places. That is, land is both a universal and a particular good. In the first case, because everyone has an interest in its benefits, which is important in establishing rights over it; in the second case, because of particular interests, making land rights especially contentious (Moore, 2015). In this regard, Soja (2014) develops the category of (in)just geographies, dividing it into two scales: endogenous and exogenous.

The first refers to local decision-making and the aggregate distribution effects that follow, essentially, the implications of where things are located. In the case of the BSWC, these effects have been more negative than positive due to unresolved land access claims following *Resolution 010 of 1982* by the National Land Agency (ANT), which failed to fulfill peasant demands for fair redistribution of land, its resources, and opportunities for a decent life. On the contrary, it harmed the social life of the wetland's inhabitants and caused what Sedano *et al.* (2021) describe as “spatial (in)justice”. Thus, this reality contrasts with Moore's proposal (2015), as injustice is perceived in this territory due to the State's failure to acknowledge the significant relationships and norms between local people and the wetland territory.

In this territory, the spatial configurations resulting from the analyzed concepts are expressed in public spaces in a contextual way, since they respond to structural factors articulated to uneven geographical development (Sedano *et al.*, 2021). Achieving social inclusion in the BSWC's public jurisdictional space requires recognizing and respecting the right to community-based citizenship as a condition for advancing spatial justice. Within this framework, Moore (2015) asserts that a people hold jurisdictional rights, such as liberties and claims, over the land they inhabit, provided their occupation is legitimate. Additionally, Castaño-Aguirre *et al.* (2021) emphasize that understanding territory also requires considering the emotional bond people establish with it, as a foundation for personal and social identity, community relationships, and experiences that give meaning to inhabited space.

Given the ecological and legal characteristics of this ecosystem, it is subject to State protection and, consequently, cannot be adjudicated. Nonetheless, land claims for agricultural purposes were made on this territory, resulting in the allocation of public land and its transfer (without conferring ownership) to peasant communities. These groups engaged in what Ostrom (2000) conceptualizes as “sustainable and organized management of common goods”. In this line, the case of the BSWC reflects the limited capacity of the State, from a legal point of view, to respond effectively to the occupation of this common wasteland. Far from

resolving the conflict, the current regulatory framework has produced regulations lacking both substantive and procedural capacity to manage emblematic cases like this. These regulations have failed to establish clear guidelines for shared resource use and have perpetuated the exclusion of historically marginalized sectors, such as the peasant population living around the BSWC.

This situation illustrates how the regulatory regime governing ecosystems like the BSWC not only presents legal limitations in substantive and procedural terms but also reflects discursive frameworks that construct territory as available wasteland, nature as a manageable resource, and peasants as subordinate subjects. From a CDA perspective, such representations are not neutral: they are discursive practices that legitimize exclusionary mechanisms, reinforce state control, and weaken community-based management systems. In this regard, legal and technical language functions as a performative act that consolidates specific notions of legality and order, while simultaneously obscuring the knowledge, rights, and emotional bonds that underpin alternative forms of territoriality.

Conclusions

The SD discourse, far from offering a structural solution to the socio-ecological crisis, operates as a bureaucratic-capitalist device that reproduces colonial, extractivist, and anthropocentric logics. Under an appearance of neutrality, it subordinates life to economic growth and legitimizes dispossession through a technical and ambiguous language that supports the hegemony of the cumulative model. In response, territorial and anti-colonial resistances emerge that denounce this sustainable fiction and propose alternatives from the Global South, based on the de-privatization of the commons, the dissolution of the nature-human dualism, and the reconfiguration of life as a bond, not a commodity.

In this context, wetlands cease to be natural resources to reveal themselves as living, ancestral, and culturally significant territories. Their destruction shows the structural violence of extractivism and the capture of legal frameworks by technocratic discourses. Instruments such as Ramsar or POMCAs, far from protecting, are neutralized, while those who defend them are criminalized. This legal paradox renders community memories and bonds invisible. The analysis of the BSWC confirms that territory is not a physical entity but a political and affective construction; defending it means contesting meanings, decolonizing its governance, and reclaiming other ways of inhabiting rooted in memory, dignity, and collective life.

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The Magic of Reality in «*Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*» (The Old Man Who Read Love Stories) by Luis Sepúlveda*

[English version]

La magia de la realidad en «*Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*» de Luis Sepúlveda

A magia da realidade em «*Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*»
(O velho que lia romances de amor), de Luis Sepúlveda

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Abstract

Objective: To discover the trend of the *magic of reality* through the analytical study of the novel «*Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*» (The Old Man Who Read Love Stories) by the Chilean writer Luis Sepúlveda.

Methodology: Bakhtinian methods as well as a comparative analysis of this trend with dominant

trends of Boom and Post-boom period, academic documents, several editions of the novel, extracts from the narrated story and literary interviews were used. **Results:** Certain dichotomies and ethical messages that show the author's literary symbolism on protection of the Amazon jungle, its tribes and animals are examined. There are

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answers to the questions regarding the existence of the trend in the *magic of reality* in the aforementioned novel by Luis Sepúlveda. **Conclusions:** Through the life of the old man Antonio Proaño within the Amazon jungle, it becomes clear that the magic of reality is found within the dialogue and daily incidents of the novel's protagonists, which focus the power of the words that represents the Latin American magical environment.

Keywords: Magic of reality; realism; The Old Man Who Read Love Stories; the writer Luis Sepúlveda (obtained from the Thesaurus of Language and Literature).

Resumen

Objetivo: encontrar la tendencia magia de la realidad a través del estudio analítico de la novela *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor* del escritor chileno Luis Sepúlveda. **Metodología:** se hizo uso de métodos bajtinianos y la elaboración de un cuadro de análisis comparativo de dicha tendencia con las dominantes del periodo Boom y Posboom, investigando documentos académicos, varias ediciones de la novela, extractos de la historia narrada y entrevistas literarias. **Resultados:** se examinan ciertas dicotomías y mensajes éticos que muestran el simbolismo literario del autor sobre el tema de la protección de la selva amazónica, sus tribus y animales. En este sentido, se hallan respuestas a las preguntas planteadas sobre la existencia de la tendencia *magia de la realidad* en la mencionada novela de Luis Sepúlveda. **Conclusiones:** a través de la vida del viejo Antonio Proaño dentro de la selva amazónica, se hace claro que la magia de la realidad se encuentra dentro de los diálogos y los incidentes diarios de los protagonistas de la novela sepulvedana, que enfocan el poder de las palabras que representan el entorno mágico latinoamericano.

Palabras clave: magia de la realidad; realismo; Un viejo que leía novelas de amor; el escritor Luis Sepúlveda (obtenidos del Tesoro de lengua y literatura).

Resumo

Objetivo: identificar a tendência da magia da realidade por meio do estudo analítico da novela «Un viejo que leía novelas de amor» (O velho que lia romances de amor), do escritor chileno Luis Sepúlveda. **Metodologia:** utilizaram-se métodos bakhtinianos e a elaboração de um quadro de análise comparativa dessa tendência com as dominantes dos períodos do Boom e Pós-Boom, investigando documentos acadêmicos, diversas edições da novela, trechos da narrativa e entrevistas literárias. **Resultados:** analisam-se certas dicotomias e mensagens éticas que evidenciam o simbolismo literário do autor em relação ao tema da proteção da selva amazônica, suas tribos e animais. Nesse contexto, encontram-se respostas às perguntas formuladas sobre a presença da tendência magia da realidade na referida obra de Luis Sepúlveda. **Conclusões:** por meio da vida do velho Antonio Proaño na selva amazônica, torna-se evidente que a magia da realidade está presente nos diálogos e nos incidentes cotidianos dos protagonistas da novela de Sepúlveda, ressaltando o poder das palavras que representam o ambiente mágico latino-americano.

Palavras-chave: magia da realidade; realismo; Un viejo que leía novelas de amor; o escritor Luis Sepúlveda (extraídos do Tesouro de Língua e Literatura).

The Magic of Reality in Sepúlveda's Novel

A literature review of the work of Luis Sepúlveda, mainly, his novel «*Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*» (Hereinafter, *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories*), and his different publications reaches certain conclusions about the author's own literary style, the "magic of reality". At the same time, certain questions arise about the disappearance of this literary style, leading to a search for possible answers.

The author's own affirmation of the existence of his literary style, the "magic of reality" is found on the cover of the first edition of this novel. Although the Sepulvedian trend has disappeared throughout the re-editions of his work, academic studies from the time of its various publications were found that affirm the existence of Sepúlveda's literary style. In particular, there are texts by the scholars Juan Gabriel Araya Grandón, Carlos Morello Frioli, and Joaquín Marco, which were difficult to locate in the current period of this research. Professor Juan Araya Grandón (2000) mentions that:

Being Sepúlveda a prominent writer of the Post-Boom of Latin American literature, he separates himself from the García Márquez—style magical realism, by eliminating its exoticism and tropicalism and by incorporating magic as one more component of our way of being and of our society. His narrative is characterized by a new formula expressed in the phrase "magic of reality." Among the members of his generation, Osvaldo Soriano, Paco Ignacio Taibo, Ramón Díaz Eterovic, Mempo Giardinelli, Leonardo Padura Fuentes, Hernán Rivera Letelier, and others were mentioned. (p. 1).

Meanwhile, Frioli (1993) states that "[...] the magic of reality lies in the vision that the narrator offers of the Ecuadorian Amazon jungle and, specifically, in the deep knowledge that the main character, Antonio José Bolívar Proaño, gradually acquires of it" (p. 345). For his part, Joaquín Marco (2010) states that:

Luis Sepúlveda proclaims on the inside flap of his novel *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories* (Sepúlveda, 1993) a new trend that has separated itself from magical realism and is emerging forcefully in a credible way — the magic of reality. (p. 1).

The novel *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories*, as its own author declares, is the result of his life experience with the Shuar people. It was an UNESCO expedition that Sepúlveda accepted to evaluate the impact of colonization on this town. During this expedition, he shared the life of the Shuar for seven months and

came to understand Latin America as a multicultural and multilingual continent, where the Marxism he had been taught was not applicable to a rural population that depended on its surrounding natural environment. There he discovered their marvelous way of life as a unique balance within themselves and the nature. He worked in close contact with indigenous organizations and developed the first literacy plan of the Peasant Federation of Imbabura, in The Andes. The following excerpt from the interview with the authors Josefina Ribalta and Fernando Cross shows Luis Sepúlveda's own opinion on the ecological issue, as the core of the aforementioned novel:

F.C: And that respect for nature, for the balance of the environment — did you always have it, or did it arise as you grew older, “gathering experiences,” becoming “old”?

L.S.: No, the truth is that it has always existed. I was fortunate to have a wonderful grandfather. He was an Andalusian anarchist; in Chile, he was one of the early environmentalists who got involved in many lost causes to preserve certain spaces. The “old man” spoke of that right he called “the recovery of ecological dignity,” the right that human beings have to decide on the possibility of harmonious coexistence with the environment that surrounds us, which, translated into political terms, meant: what do we do with our raw materials without having to mortgage the future? And then, over time, I gained a more scientific rationalization of environmental problems and the terrible consequences they have for the entire human species, the profound ecological crisis of our time. (Sepúlveda, 1995, p. 9).

Regarding the Chilean poet Carmen Yáñez, life partner of Luis Sepúlveda, she has offered, via email, her own perspective on Sepúlveda's *magic of reality* (Yáñez, 2021). The novel in question narrates the life of an old man, Antonio Proaño, within an ambivalent environment in which the mayor neither respects his town nor its territory, mediates in illegal hunting of animals, and the extermination of forests to meet exaggerated and unreasonable resource demands of the Western world. It is a reflection of the colonial era, in which representatives of Western states such as Spain, Portugal, and the United States did not hesitate to exterminate hundreds or even thousands of natives of the Latin American continent to forcibly obtain treasures that would increase their wealth. A crime that continues today, with the devastation of the Amazon and its peoples. Professor Claudia Marcela Páez Lotero (2023) states that:

In this novel by Luis Sepúlveda, the old man Bolívar Proaño loves the Amazon deeply and witnesses the severe environmental damage caused by agriculture, livestock, logging, and mining and oil exploitation. [...] It addresses the effects of human colonization, agricultural, oil, and timber exploitation on the ecosystems of that region and on indigenous communities. (p. 5).

Methodology

It is well known that in every literary analysis it is increasingly common to observe that any literary research depends not only on the personality of the researcher but also on the methods used to highlight it (Fokkema *et al.*, 1993). In this case, this research is based on literary criticism and the contribution of Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, using his notions of “subject,” “reflection,” “polyphony,” “dialogue,” “carnivalization,” “social evaluation,” and the concept of “chronotope,” to identify and demonstrate Sepúlveda’s literary consciousness in his aforementioned work (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 216). The “social subject” is combined with “ideological objects,” within the criticism phase of a literary work and forms a unit that “reflects” the reality of the social aspect. In this way, social ideologies are transformed into the creation of that social subject, previously referred to, forming the “ideological environment” of Bakhtin’s theory (Poderti, 2019).

In this sense, the examined novel is presented as an ideological world unique to the reader, contributing a product of social consciousness. This is what is appreciated as Sepúlveda’s main communicative intention through the *magic of reality*. Therefore, interviews, academic essays and reference books are studied to define both the emergence and disappearance of this literary style in the author’s work, as is done in this research to identify traits of the magic of reality in the referenced novel (Kyriakoulakou & Martínez, 2024).

Analysis

The main element of the research is based on the brief historical overview of the editions of the novel under consideration, as noted by Maximiliano Alarcón in his interview “*The story of the 1st ‘handcrafted’ edition of Luis Sepúlveda’s masterpiece, before a French publisher launched him to fame*” (Alarcón, 2020):

According to official records, this work was first published in France in 1992, however, there was an earlier edition in Chile published in May 1990, which was withdrawn from the market before reaching popularity. (Paragraph 3).

We are, in all likelihood, facing one of the finest literary creations of this new narrative founded on what is called the ‘magic of reality,’ through which Sepúlveda and other authors seek to differentiate themselves from that which gave rise to “magical realism”. (Paragraph 4).

The previous paragraph corresponds to the prologue of the 1990 edition and was written by journalist Juan Pablo Cárdenas, at that time director of *Análisis* magazine and the main person responsible for the first printing of the book.

Following, a brief analysis of the various editions of the referenced novel is presented.

In Figure 1 (A-F), there are images from the 1st Chilean edition (Sepúlveda, 1989a) to the more recent editions (Sepúlveda, 2019). This affirms that, in the first editions by Tusquets, from its *Colección Andanzas*, the Sepulvedian trend of the magic of reality appears: “Sepúlveda is inscribed in this new Latin American literary current which, in his own words, ‘has separated itself from magical realism’ and credibly presents the magic of reality” (Sepúlveda, 1988, p. 1). Meanwhile, the edition shown in Figure 1 (D) is accompanied by a green paper ribbon that says: “Departing from magical realism, this novel reveals to us the *magic of reality*.” From these four editions, the existence of the magic of reality is concluded. However, in the later editions (E and F) by Tusquets, not only has the green paper ribbon been removed, but every mention on the cover or in the prologue of the novel has been eliminated. Now, in Figure 2 (A) there is a mention of this trend in blue, whereas in the other 2(B) there is none. Thus, questions arise that will be addressed in this research by examining the available material.

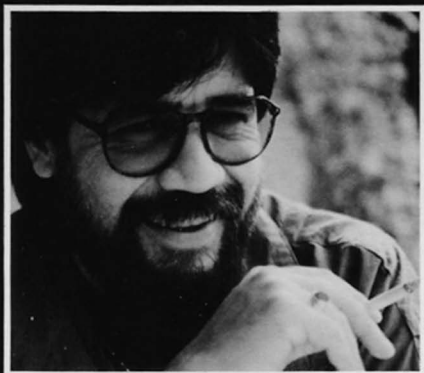


Figure 1. Various editions of the novel *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories*.

Source: (A) The first publication in Chile (Sepúlveda, 1989a), (B) The first publication in Spain (Sepúlveda, 1989b), (C) The first publication in France (Sepúlveda, 1992). (D) The third Tusquets edition (*Colección Andanzas*) (Sepúlveda, 1993), (E) The twenty-seventh Tusquets edition (*Colección Andanzas*) (Sepúlveda, 1996), (F) The twenty-fourth Tusquets edition (*Colección Maxi*) (Sepúlveda, 2019).

A

LUIS SEPULVEDA

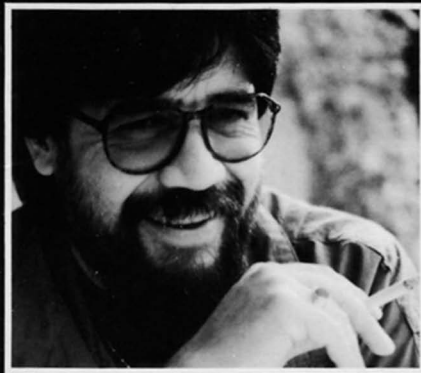


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Luis Sepúlveda nació en Ovalle, Chile, en 1949. Muy joven aún decidió ser viajero como quien decide ser oficinista. De Punta Arenas a Oslo, de Barcelona a Quito, de la selva amazónica al desierto de los saharauis, de las celdas de Pinochet al barco *Greenpeace*, recorrió casi todos los territorios posibles de la geografía y las utopías. Y, mientras viajaba, escribía. Publicó el primero de sus 10 libros a los veinte años. Ha recibido, entre otros, el Premio Gabriela Mistral de poesía 1976 y el Premio Rómulo Gallegos de novela 1978. Y, después de *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*, Premio Tigre Juan (Oviedo, 1989), traducida a 14 lenguas, merecedora de varios otros premios internacionales, convertida en *best-seller* y vendidos sus derechos para cine a Jean-Jacques Annaud, nadie puede ignorar ya a este autor, cuya obra nos enorgullece acoger a partir de ahora en nuestro catálogo. **Sepúlveda se inscribe en esa nueva corriente literaria hispanoamericana que, según sus propias palabras «se ha separado del realismo mágico y se plantea, de una manera creíble, la magia de la realidad».**

B

LUIS SEPULVEDA



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Luis Sepúlveda nació en Ovalle, Chile, en 1949. Muy joven aún decidió ser viajero como quien decide ser oficinista. De punta Arenas a Oslo, de Barcelona a Quito, de la selva amazónica al desierto de los saharauis, de las celdas de Pinochet al barco de Greenpeace, recorrió casi todos los territorios posibles de la geografía y las utopías. Y, mientras viajaba, escribía. Publicó el primero de sus 11 libros a los veinte años. Ha recibido, entre otros, el Premio Gabriela Mistral de poesía 1976 y el Premio Rómulo Gallegos de novela 1978. Y, después de *Un viejo que leía novelas de amor*, Premio Tigre Juan (Oviedo, 1989), traducida a 14 lenguas, merecedora de varios otros premios internacionales, convertida en *best-seller* y vendidos sus derechos para cine a Jean-Jacques Annaud, nadie puede ignorar ya a este autor, cuya obra nos enorgullece acoger a partir de ahora en nuestro catálogo. En 1994 Tusquets Editores publicó *Mundo del fin del mundo*, que, en 1989, había obtenido el Primer Premio de Novela corta «Juan Chabás» en Denia, Alicante y Nombre de torero (Andanzas 209 y 220).

Figure 2. Flaps of the Colección Andanzas editions (Sepúlveda, 1993; 1996).

Source: (Sepúlveda, 1993; 1996).

Note: (A) Third edition. In blue (by the author of the article) is the author's reference to the "magic of reality" (Sepúlveda, 1993). (B) Twenty-seventh edition. The previously mentioned reference was replaced by anaphoras to new publications of the author's novels (Sepúlveda, 1996).

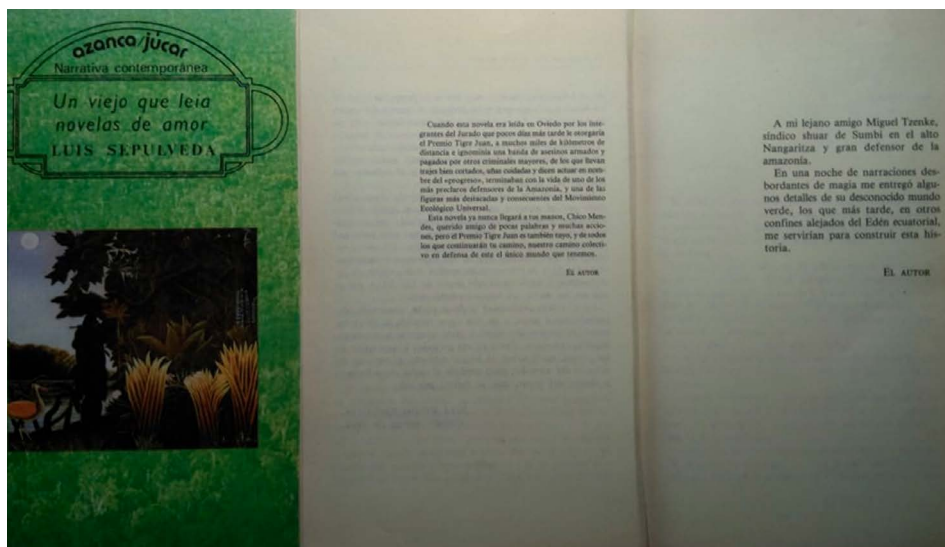


Figure 3. 1989 Edition.

Source: Sepúlveda, 1989.



Figure 4. The 1989 and 1993 editions of *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories*, in which “the magic of reality” is mentioned.

Source: Sepúlveda, 1993; 1989.



Figure 5. Covers of other French editions.

Source: Sepúlveda, 1992.

In *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories*, themes of love, respect for nature, the environment, and the tribes of the Amazon stand out. There is a particular interest in depicting the destruction of the Amazon jungle, its peoples, and its animals. Historically, this novel was published in 1989, and is the result of the personal experience of the Chilean writer who was exiled in 1977, for political reasons. In the same year, as previously mentioned, Sepúlveda undertook a study mission on Amazonian populations in Brazil. From this study and his six-month stay with the Shuar tribe in the Amazon of Ecuador, the Ecuadorian Amazon, the author narrates the relationship of a man with the nature, as well as the significance of artisanal weapons in human survival; meanwhile, the dominant theme of the work is love, expressed through the protagonist.

The author's own "self" is represented by his protagonist, Antonio Proaño, since they share the same human and ecological interests. According to Michele Lefort (2000):

Luis Sepúlveda novelizes his knowledge of the environment and of the people to create a humanist fable, moralizing for our time, one of the first consciously ecological novels that denounces the destruction of the natural world by timber-exploiting companies. He proposes a reflection on "the magic of reality," the expression is the author's own, and on the magic of the narrative, both the autobiographical pretext of the novel and the escapist narrative, the "old man's" readings, thanks to which he manages to survive the tragic experiences he would like to forget. (pp. 143-149).

The style of the novel is based on a scenic and polemical attitude that extends the realism of the 1940s and older narrative schemes of Latin American literature, influenced by Francisco Coloane and Hemingway, in their memory. The work is divided into eight chapters, each headed and lettered. Key characters include the protagonist, Antonio José Bolívar Proaño; the dentist and friend of the protagonist, Rabicundo Loachamín; the Shuar; the town; the hunters and the *gringos*; the mayor; the little tiger (La Tigrilla); the protagonist's wife, Dolores Encarnación del Santísimo Sacramento Estupiñán Otavalo (DESSEO); and his friend, Nushiño. The main theme is the relationship of a man with nature.

Regarding narrative aspects, the narrator is in third-person omniscient, focalized on the protagonist as the writer's alter ego. The narrator's "I" approaches the jungle and its inhabitants, the Shuar. Time is linear but frequently interrupted by flashbacks. In the Aristotelian and Bakhtinian *chronotope*, there are two spaces: the Amazon jungle and the Ecuadorian town "El Idilio". Consequently, there is a "diachrony" of the narrated story and a "synchrony" with the tale of the Amazon jungle". "As in the epic poems of Homer or Virgil, the work does not develop chronologically but, so to speak, emotionally, placing the reader from the beginning in *in media res*, at a key moment to understand its subsequent development" (Tausiet, 2007, p. 2).

The writing style is simple, with careful and lively language, using clear and well-documented vocabulary. The images are presented without hidden or incomprehensible messages or concepts; the messages that the author wishes to convey revolve around ecological and cultural themes, as mentioned earlier.

As is well known, the work engages with the parallel history of a double fall: that of Satan (whose divine wrath will cast him into the farthest abyss of Heaven, to the anguished depths over which the fallen angel will reign for all eternity, wounded in his pride and plotting endless revenge) and that of Adam and Eve (who will be expelled from the earthly Paradise and cast into mortality, into a world already inhabited by ruin, finitude, and sin). Thus, the rebellious angel causes the perdition of the new creature (who will always carry within it this dual nature, angelic and infernal) and opens a new playing field for his eternal dispute with God. (Milton, 1667, p. 23).

The evocation of the Arcadian ideal is notable in Sepúlveda's selection, which refers to the toponym "Idilio" in the narrated story. "Idilio" derives from the short poem called a "romance," belonging to bucolic poetry and referring to the theme of the "lost paradise." Both references are tied to Greek mythology. Peloponnesian Arcadia in the Peloponnese was the domain of Pan, a virgin wilderness home to the god of the forest and his retinue of dryads, nymphs, and other nature spirits.

It was a version of paradise, being the dwelling of supernatural entities, not an afterlife for deceased mortals. Both the Greek poet Theocritus (3rd century BCE) and the Roman poet Virgil, in his *Eclogues* and *Divine Comedy*, influenced medieval European literature, and Arcadia became a symbol of pastoral simplicity. Therefore, Garcilaso de la Vega revised the theme, and the name Arcadia came to refer to any idyllic place or paradise.

Nicolas Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego* is a famous painting reminding the viewer that even in the blissful utopia of Arcadia, the "lost paradise," death still exists. This connects to the novel in question, which narrates the story of the life, love, and death of "an old man who read love stories" in "*El Idilio*"; a place resembling the "lost paradise of Eden," which, according to its author, requires global attention worldwide, to survive within a natural world dramatically exploited by a period of irrational decisions eradicating the flora, fauna, and tribes inhabiting the Amazon jungle.

It is not surprising that Sepúlveda decided to publish his novel translated into English with the Arcadia publishing house in the U.S. (Souviron, 1996). Sepúlveda (1993) states that of Miguel Tzenke's Eden, only his parody remains: "El Idilio, that dreadful port town that is the very opposite of what it claims to be, a hell of ugliness and physical and moral solitude" (p. 3). The "magic of the jungle and its inhabitants" shows the author's ecological intention, as well as his aim to separate from his literary style any exotic or tropical elements, the basic ingredients of magical realism.

Next, basic characteristics of the two contemporary literary movements at the time of the novel's publication are presented, situated in the Latin American Boom and Post-Boom periods, compared with Sepúlveda's own literary style. These are magical realism, with basic exponents such as Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa and Julio Cortázar; and the *marvelous real* with Alejo Carpentier as an exponent. In this way, the author of this article elaborates her own comparison of the three trends —magical realism, *the marvelous real*, and the magic of reality— showing differences and similarities in a comparative table (Table 1).

A first conclusion from the comparison is that "magical realism" is the presentation of what is possible but improbable, whereas *marvelous real* is a folkloric and methodological substratum of Latin America, richer and better preserved than the European. As for the "magic of reality", it is a pure style, without detours or pernicious contamination.

Table 1. Comparison between *The Three Trends*.

Magical Realism	Marvelous Real	Magic of Reality
An international trend, emerging in 1918. It depicts a real world in which, suddenly, something improbable occurs. An artistic trend that favors Jung’s concept of the collective unconscious, based on the ideas of archetypal theories, in the sense that all epochs merge into a moment of the present.	A Latin American regional trend that depicts the culture and beliefs of native peoples, presenting them with a dramatic and fantastic notion that combines to create an original and unreal ensemble of ethereal, European, and other cultures.	An international trend related to the literary work of its founder, the Chilean author Luis Sepúlveda. It presents Sepúlveda’s literary intention to “separate the waters” from that which gave rise to magical realism and “ <i>marvelous real</i> ”.
The reality in the narrative is shown with fabulous and fantastic elements, often exaggerating the apparent. In this perspective, the writer needs to create a supernatural atmosphere without intending to separate from the natural world, thus taking reality as the foundation.	It is a narrative in which certain events escape rational explanation and contribute to everyday life. Something that could be understood as magical, supernatural, or improbable in other cultures is presented as completely natural. It originates in certain regions of Latin America and has indigenous and African roots. The notion of realism is shown as an alteration of reality itself.	The magic of reality in narrative moves between the clarity of his style, thanks to his gift of reducing words, and his simple and vivid language without oddities or technically invented magical elements.
<i>Magical realism</i> seeks to present reality itself as if it were magical.	The <i>marvelous real</i> operates within the natural and avoids any action that might provoke unpleasant feelings, fear, or terror in the audience, through an unusual event.	The <i>magic of reality</i> focuses on representing the magic of indigenous peoples themselves — their way of life, their beliefs, and their balance within their physical environment, the Amazon jungle.

Magical Realism	Marvelous Real	Magic of Reality
The narrator assumes the role of a player, attempting to provoke strange feelings in the audience.	It ceases to be the unknown and is incorporated into the real. Realism emerges as an alteration of reality. In this sense, it is presented as marvelous thanks to the role assumed by the narrator.	The writer lives within the narration told by his narrator, as the alter ego of the protagonist. In this way, he emphasizes the reality of events according to his ethical, political, and social thinking, avoiding exaggeration in the characters and the occurrences that arise in the story.
The prose is clear and precise.	The prose is characterized by a Baroque style.	The prose is clear and precise, and each narration moves within the magic of reality itself.
It presents what is possible, but improbable.	It constitutes a folkloric and methodological substratum of Latin America, richer and better preserved than the European.	A pure style, without detours or pernicious contamination.
Examples: <i>Pedro Páramo</i> by Juan Rulfo, and <i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i> by Gabriel García Márquez.	Examples: <i>Chac Mool</i> by Carlos Fuentes, and <i>The Kingdom of This World</i> by Alejo Carpentier.	Examples: <i>The Old Man Who Read Love Stories</i> , <i>Story of a White Whale</i> , <i>The End of the Story</i> , <i>World at the End of the World</i> , among others by Luis Sepúlveda.

Discussion

In the analyzed story, there is an intention to present ecological and cultural messages through dichotomies. The well-known expression "civilization versus barbarism" predominates. The protagonist Antonio Proaño's act of reading becomes a key element of the novel's structure, as he enjoys reading aloud every day, seeking to relax and escape from the loneliness of the final years of his life. Foreign cities do not escape his attention, admired for their beauty and the modern way of life of their inhabitants. He enjoys the rhythm of love affairs and seeks marvelous elements within them.

Likewise, a contrast emerges between, on one hand, the "ignorance" of the mayor and his companions, and, on the other, the "wisdom" of Proaño, who

has cultivated his intimate feelings of love through reading novels. In this way, Antonio acquires a double dimension in love: the natural and the literary. This dual dimension allows him to act as a hunter compelled by necessity, yet connected and in communication with *Tigrilla* throughout the hunt. Both the old man and *Tigrilla* become embroiled in a struggle for survival, which ultimately costs the life of the animal and breaks Antonio Proaño's heart, due to his violent act against such a beautiful and magnificent creature of the Amazon.

The narrative presents specific ethical themes expressed by the author. On one hand, ignorance versus wisdom is shown through the mayor and his companions versus the "wise" old Antonio Proaño. On the other, the protagonist's dual dimension of love—natural and literary—is displayed through his hunting of the *Tigrilla*, in communicative connection with her, illustrating the survival struggle between man and animal. Ultimately, the *Tigrilla* dies, and the "old man's" heart breaks.

In the jungle culture there is a remembrance of the past.

Inverting the established dichotomy, which extends to Proaño himself, Sepúlveda identifies the culture of indigenous peoples, who live peacefully in harmony with their natural environment, as "civilized," and Europeans and North Americans, who destroy everything in their path for temporary economic gain, as "barbaric." It is important to note that the dichotomy "civilization vs. barbarism" dates back to the time of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, when it was believed that Argentina's greatest problem was the dilemma between "civilization" and "barbarism". Civilization was associated with urban life, European influence, and progress, while barbarism was associated with rural life, backwardness, the "Indian," and the "gaucho"¹.

The following example illustrates Sepúlveda's literary intention to "separate the waters" from the origins of magical realism and *the marvelous real*. Specifically, it focuses on the political life of the town of Idilio through its mayor, the assumed highest authority. At this stage, the magic of reality consists of presenting events with lively and clear language, reflecting the magical life in Idilio, as shown in the following excerpt:

The mayor, sole official, highest authority, and representative of a power too distant to provoke fear, was an obese individual who sweated without rest [...] He arrived with the obsession of collecting taxes for incomprehensible reasons. He attempted to sell fishing and hunting permits in an ungovernable territory (Sepúlveda, 1989, p. 12).

¹ According to the historian Fernando Assunção (1978), the figure of the "gaucho" in Argentine, Paraguayan and Uruguayan cultures, as well as in the Rio Grande do Sul region (Brazil) and in Chilean Patagonia, is considered a national icon that represents rural tradition and customs (p. 16).

The *magic of reality* moves in the narrative with a clean style, a product of the author's talent for expressing himself with few words and with simple, vivid language, free from oddities or technically invented magical elements, far from folkloric stylistic or linguistic embellishments. Thus, his prose is clear and precise and each narration operates within the magic of reality itself, while his style remains pure, without detours or harmful contamination. This trend appears in the representation of the indigenous peoples' own magic; their way of life, beliefs, and balance within a natural environment like the Amazon jungle; as illustrated by the example: "The old man approached the corpse, bent down, moved its head and opened the wound with his fingers" (Sepúlveda, 1988, p. 13).

At the same time, he uniquely combines the tradition of the magic in love novels with the *magic of reality* in the Amazon jungle. This is reflected in the typical dialogue between the protagonist Antonio José Bolívar Proaño and the dentist, who provided him with love novels during each of his visits:

"Are they sad?" -the old man asked.
"Enough to cry rivers," —assured the dentist.
'With people who truly love each other?'
'Like no one has ever loved.'
'Do they suffer much?'
'I could hardly bear it,' the dentist replied."

But Doctor Rubicundo Loachamín did not read the novels [...] (Sepúlveda, 1988, p. 16).

"I wanted to be one of them, without actually being so". Luis Sepulveda lived in the Amazon with the Shuar, in his effort to be one of them. Ultimately, he could not fully integrate, so he lives within his narration; through his narrator, he relives his memories from the personality of the protagonist Antonio Proaño.

According to Bakhtin, language is a critical literary instrument. The Bakhtinian analytical literary method, with its "epistemological metaphors," helps locate Sepúlveda's ideas about respect for the Amazonian environment and its animals, as well as the Shuar tribes that preserve, who maintain rules of balance between their natural surroundings and way of life. From this, it can be deduced that the novel presents the social ideology of the time to the reader, as Bakhtin states, reflected in Sepúlveda's humanistic and ecological ideas. Bakhtinian theory holds that literary facts contain an ideological form, whose linguistic realization reflects the social ideologies of the work's time. Regarding Bakhtin's notions of ridicule and carnivalization, these appear in the mayor's description and dialogues; a ridiculed, amorphous figure who often makes mistakes in speech. In

this sense, following Bakhtin's theory on carnivalization as an ancient cultural code, polyphony and dialogue (Bajtín, 1999, pp. 38-42), the author presents situations that invite critical reflection, in line with his socialist-anarchist political perspective:

Upon entering the hut, through the rain layer he could see the solitary, obese silhouette of the mayor under the umbrella on the dock, like a huge, dark mushroom freshly grown on the planks. (Sepúlveda, 1993, p. 36).

Similarly:

Antonio José Bolívar Proaño refused the possibility of being the father of a carnival child. (Sepúlveda, 1988, p. 19).

As Bakhtin shows, in relation to law, laughter, seriousness, ridicule, the face and the mask, Sepúlveda expresses in his novel the parodic through the "hyperbole and scatology" of the figure of the mayor, whom he presents in a burlesque and carnivalized way (Rodríguez, 2001, p. 42).

In depicting environmental devastation, irony and almost mockery appear, used by the author as part of his social critique woven throughout the narrative: "Antonio José Bolívar Proaño kept them at bay, while the colonists destroyed the jungle, constructing the masterpiece of civilized man: the desert". (Sepúlveda, 1993, p. 27).

Sepúlveda's ethical messages represent dichotomies such as "civilization vs. barbarism", mentioned previously and "love and death." The latter dichotomy is expressed through the protagonist's love in the author's invented story. The novels speak of the otherness of love: love for others, for the creatures of nature, between Shuar women and men, and between Antonio Proaño and his wife Dolores Encarnación. A love that embraces all beings respecting nature. Her full name is Dolores Encarnación del Santísimo Sacramento Estupiñán Otávalo, with initials forming the acrostic DESSEO (Heymann, 1997, p. 154). This love is antithetical to her acrostic, as she dies at 20, childless and unrespected. Thus, Antonio chooses exile rather than the humiliation of a gang rape in his hometown, due to having no children in his marriage. Among the Shuar, fraternal love binds him to Nushiño, through which Antonio becomes a kind of Cain, condemning his friend to restless death wandering the jungle, and himself to new exile; as exemplified:

"Bad way to leave," —muttered Nushiño with a grimace of pain, tremblingly showing him his curare gourd— "No, I'll leave in peace, compadre. I will walk

like a sad blind bird, bumping into trees until my head hangs from a dry branch. Help me, compadre". The Shuar surrounded him. He knew white men's customs, and Nushiño's weak words told him the time had come to repay the debt incurred when they saved him after the snake bite. [...] He had never held a firearm, but seeing the man reach for a machete, he instinctively placed his finger at the right spot, and the discharge caused a flutter of startled birds. (Sepúlveda, 1988, p. 26).

The old man Proaño's love for the Tigrilla, mad with grief for her injured companion, is also the catalyst for the hunt, leading him to kill the tiger to shorten its suffering in a final act of tenderness before the ultimate confrontation with the Tigrilla; a kind of epic ballet presided over by Eros, culminating in a predictable Thanatos.

"It was pure, with no purpose other than love itself, and without jealousy". (Sepúlveda, 1988, p. 24). This expresses the author's love for the Amazon, its peoples, and wild animals; a love for the jungle depicted as a humid, warm womb, in both Eden and "green hell," where life and death are endlessly cyclical. Love and death are inseparable, except in his brief past life with the Shuar, when he experienced pure love for its own sake, without possession or jealousy. Painful love is part of Antonio Proaño's story; he lived it but feels the need for it to be told repeatedly, as the words in his love novels sometimes allowed him to forget human barbarity. For him, novels were the only balm left, or, as he says, the antidote against the poisonous venom of old age.

In *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories*, Sepúlveda, through the protagonist "the old man," shows the real roles within nature. Antonio Proaño broke the Shuar's sacred laws twice, killing first the "gringo" and then the Tigrilla with a pistol instead of a blowpipe. This depicts Shuar "civilization" versus the "barbarism" of Europeans and North Americans. Civilization lives through respect for nature and its inhabitants, while barbarism is represented by those who kill indiscriminately for ephemeral profit.

For the author, the Amazonian reality is so unimaginable that it must be recounted credibly, domesticated in fiction through the magic of reality in words. The Amazon, as named by the Spaniards who believed they had discovered a people resembling mythological Amazons, is a great source of myths, but these are absent in this book. The Amazon is domesticated almost entirely through the combined use of articles, lowercase, and accent shifts, making the vast Amazon—a limitless, ownerless land—a world more to our measure.

In this context, the book's dual dedication gains true value, honoring two defenders of the Amazon: the unjustly murdered man of action and the man "of overflowing magical stories" who entrusts words with the power to reveal "his unknown green world," the magic of his reality. Sepúlveda is their spokesperson,

transmitting this magic through writing, as his compatriot Coloane did with the oral stories of the Tehuelche, Yaghan, Ona, or Alakaluf (Lefort, 2000).

Finally, the *magic of reality* continues in the 21st century, recalling its founder Luis Sepúlveda; not only through his own words and works, but also through compatriot authors such as Isabel Allende and through interesting scientific encounters.

One example occurs 40 years after Sepúlveda's stay among the Shuar, in Quito, in an interview for Magazine Ecuador with Tzama Tigre Tzamarenda, a Shuar Amazonian native educated by his ancestors to be a guardian of the Amazon. Lucid and humorous, he has been a leader, warrior, painter, and shaman for over 30 years. When asked:

"What role have women held before and now in your society?"

— Women have always been and will always be the complement of men; sacred, they are the strength and origin of life, the foundation of the home, while men are like the roof. They bear all the weight, and we protect them with our lives, giving that pure, unconditional love. (Tzamarenda, 2021, para. 6).

This reflects the Shuar concept of love, as Sepúlveda expressed in *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories*: "It was pure love, with no purpose other than love itself. Without possession and without jealousy" (Sepúlveda, 1988, p. 25).

Another example is Isabel Allende's interview with *Bohemia*, where the journalist concluded: "Isabel Allende continues to sit and create tirelessly. Even after death, she will inspire new generations of writers who, like her, appreciate the *magic of reality*" (Allende, 2000, p. 2).

Poet Carmen Yáñez, in a personal letter, recalls:

Lucho used to take long walks in nature; it was his way of breathing the world. Listening to birds, observing their paths and migratory flights. They would perch on the trees surrounding our lush garden. Always with his dogs that accompanied him throughout life. This was the prelude to a new literary project or the continuation of one. (Yáñez, 2021, p. 1).

Moreover, the science of biologist Sir Richard Dawkins intersects with Sepúlveda's literary magic of reality in his scientific book *The Magic of Reality*, stating:

I want to show you that the real world, as understood scientifically, has magic of its own, a kind of poetic magic: an inspiring beauty that is the most magical

because it is real and we can understand how it works. Compared to the beauty and magic of the real world, supernatural spells and illusionist tricks seem cheap and vulgar. The magic of reality is not supernatural nor a trick, but —simply— it is wonderful. Wonderful and real. Wonderful because it is real. (Dawkins, 2018, p. 257).

This represents an interesting convergence between Sepúlveda's literary magic of reality in his novel and Dawkins' scientific concept.

Finally, academic José Carlos Aranda highlights in his academic blog entitled *An Old Man Who Read Love Stories: Keys for a Critical Commentary*, *saw* that the novel emphasizes the “magic” of reading as central. It opens doors to unknown worlds, fosters imagination and reflection, and acts as a social marker distinguishing readers from non-readers. Reading is portrayed as a sentimental refuge and a tool for self-knowledge, contrasting literal illiteracy with functional illiteracy, emphasizing the effort to learn to read versus knowing how but not reading; the latter equates to not knowing how to read (Aranda, 2011). Aranda underscores the magic of nature, central to Sepúlveda's creation of his literary style, *magic of reality*. Sepúlveda states:

The magical part, the miracle inherent to the Latin American spirit, occurred through other things. For example, through the reflection of humans on their surrounding natural environment, or through the infinite survival mechanisms humans invent under given conditions. (Sepúlveda cited by Zerán, 1997, pp. 363-364).

Conclusions

For Luis Sepúlveda, inspiration comes from the magic of nature and its people, which he called the “magic of reality”. He was, indeed, a storyteller among his family, friends, and audience, as he was an eternal traveler around the world, often encountering the perspectives of the marginalized. He often repeated one of his favorite phrases: “History is written by the victors, while literature has the duty to give voice to the losers”. Throughout his political life, he was imprisoned under Pinochet's dictatorship, an experience that remained present in his personal, political, activist, and literary works. The researcher of this article, after reading the beautiful letter by poet Carmen Yáñez, considers it a wonderful window into

the author's creative and literary thinking, whose magic permeates every moment of his literary life.

The novel *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories* embodies a creed of respect for life, nature, and human dignity. At the same time, it conveys ideas close to respect for ecological balance, humanistic values, and tolerance.

Hence, it is worth exploring possible answers to questions regarding the disappearance of the mention of “magic of reality” in later editions of the work and the recognition of Sepúlveda's literary style. What really happened between the editions of the *Andanzas* collection (from the first edition in 1993 to the twenty-seventh in 1996) in which the reference to the magic of reality disappeared from the book jackets? Why did Sepúlveda agree to remove from the official circulation of *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories* his affirmation regarding his new literary style, the magic of reality?

A possible answer to the first question could be that the author was pressured by Spanish publishers to align with the dominant literary styles of the time —magical realism and *marvelous real*— in order to continue publishing his novels. This is illustrated in an excerpt from his interview with Chilean scholar Faride Zerán:

I voluntarily distanced myself from the possibility of writing in the line of magical realism, although it was almost an imposition. I remember the years '78, '79, or the 1980s, when I first went to Spanish publishers with a manuscript, and the first question they asked was, 'Who do you write like?' It is true that a stereotype existed, but if we look at the literature written by the great masters like Gabo, there is a reflection and poetic interpretation of a particular reality in which the magical element is privileged, and, to my dismay, the anecdote is valued above objective truth, above the possibility of a more or less coherent and concrete approach to certain aspects of reality. (Zerán, 1997, p. 353).

Regarding the second question, the author may have chosen to communicate directly with his readers through his literary works, which reflect the magic of reality as his literary style. Luis Sepúlveda demonstrates, through the simplicity of the plot, life as it is —neither exaggerated nor imagined, but simple, as reality itself is— within a social and political context representative of the magic of reality in Latin America.

At the same time, his vision looks toward the future, imagining new literary creations and human societies more in harmony with the natural environment. The referenced novel represents the author's attempt to communicate with his readers and provide them with social awareness. Sepúlveda, as an activist in his personal life, discovers in his own literature everything necessary to set himself in

motion and to enact his own human revolution against the ills of his era. Through his magnum opus, *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories*, Luis Sepúlveda dreams of an idealized, just, and balanced world, where citizens and the environment are at the forefront of political, economic, and strategic decisions worldwide, with fundamental pillars of fraternity, solidarity, equality, and social justice.

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Appendix

"The Quarry of Luis Sepúlveda's Imaginary World" (Yáñez, 2021)
(by Luis Sepúlveda's life partner, the poet Carmen Yáñez)

Lucho used to take long walks in nature; it was his way of breathing in the world. Listening to the cawing of the birds, observing their flight paths, their migratory journeys. The birds would sometimes perch on the branches of the trees surrounding our lush garden. Always accompanied by his dogs, who were his companions throughout his life.

This was the prelude to a new literary project or the continuation of an existing one.

The beautiful fables he wrote always carried an ethical message, timely and weighty for a world caught in the voracity of consumption and power, and the consequences of inequality: diversity, recognition of otherness, and concern for the environment, conveyed through the voices of his real or fictional characters.

His imagination was immersed in lyrical prose, for the quarry from which it came was the world of image and poetry.

He used to say that he was more than a narrator; he was a storyteller, a citizen of the world who observed through the eyes of the marginalized, those who could not raise their voices. He came from that territory, and he never forgot it. Not even after his death. For his necessary words endure.

Gijón, December 19, 2021

Carmen Yáñez

(sent by email to the author of the article).

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Weaving Meanings: Laura Montoya and the Symbolic Fabric at the Caribbean Frontier of Colombia, 1917–1930*

[English Version]

Tejiendo significados: Laura Montoya y el entramado simbólico en la frontera caribeña de Colombia, 1917-1930

Tecendo significados: Laura Montoya e o tecido simbólico na fronteira caribenha da Colômbia, 1917–1930

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Colombia

Abstract

Objective: To analyze the symbolic efficacy of Catholic language in shaping the Caribbean geographic frontier in the area of the department of Antioquia within the Colombian State, a process in which Laura Montoya and her religious congregation “María Inmaculada y Santa Catalina de Sena” took part between 1917 and 1930. **Methodology:** This is a social history study. Laura Montoya’s discourses were examined on the basis of “linguistic equations” that account for the symbolic efficacy of Catholic language and for the symbolic power of the alliance between the State, the Catholic Church, and Antioquian society in the domination of national frontiers. Within this process of national incorporation, the participation of Laura Montoya through her

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religious pedagogy was crucial. **Results:** The incorporation of forest territories into the national order depended on women's participation. Indigenous women were evangelized and became responsible for disseminating a new moral order that facilitated the selective presence of the State and the Catholic Church. **Conclusions:** Laura Montoya's Catholic and evangelizing mission brought into the national order a geographic area that had been regarded as a national frontier.

Keywords: State; language; efficacy; domination; Catholic Church; Laura Montoya; Colombia (obtained from the UNESCO Thesaurus).

Resumen

Objetivo: analizar la eficacia simbólica del lenguaje católico en la formación de la frontera geográfica del Caribe, en la zona del departamento de Antioquia, del Estado colombiano, proceso en el que Laura Montoya y su Congregación religiosa «María Inmaculada y Santa Catalina de Sena» participaron en las décadas de 1917 a 1930.

Metodología: la investigación es de historia social. Se analizaron discursos de Laura Montoya, partiendo de ecuaciones del lenguaje que explicaran la eficacia simbólica del lenguaje católico en cuanto al poder simbólico de la alianza, Estado, Iglesia católica y sociedad antioqueña para dominar las fronteras nacionales. En dicha incorporación nacional, la participación de Laura Montoya mediante su pedagogía religiosa fue fundamental. **Resultados:** la inclusión de territorios selváticos al orden nacional dependió de la participación femenina. Las mujeres indígenas fueron evangelizadas, encargándose de diseminar un nuevo orden moral propicio para la presencia selectiva del Estado y de la Iglesia católica. **Conclusiones:** la misión católica y evangelizadora de Laura Montoya incorporó al orden nacional una zona geográfica considerada como frontera nacional.

Palabras clave: Estado; lenguaje; eficacia; dominación; Iglesia católica; Laura Montoya; Colombia (obtenidos del tesoro de la UNESCO).

Resumo

Objetivo: analisar a eficácia simbólica da linguagem católica na conformação da fronteira geográfica do Caribe, na região do departamento de Antioquia, no Estado colombiano, processo do qual participaram Laura Montoya e sua congregação religiosa «María Inmaculada y Santa Catalina de Sena» nas décadas de 1917 a 1930. **Metodologia:** trata-se de uma pesquisa em história social. Foram analisados discursos de Laura

Montoya, com base em “equações da linguagem” que explicassem a eficácia simbólica da linguagem católica e o poder simbólico da aliança entre Estado, Igreja Católica e sociedade antioquenha para dominar as fronteiras nacionais. Nessa incorporação nacional, a participação de Laura Montoya, por meio de sua pedagogia religiosa, foi fundamental. **Resultados:** a inclusão de territórios selváticos na ordem nacional dependeu da participação feminina. As mulheres indígenas foram evangelizadas e encarregadas de disseminar uma nova ordem moral favorável à presença seletiva do Estado e da Igreja Católica. **Conclusões:** a missão católica e evangelizadora de Laura Montoya incorporou à ordem nacional uma zona geográfica considerada como fronteira nacional.

Palavras-chave: Estado; linguagem; eficácia; dominação; Igreja Católica; Laura Montoya; Colômbia (obtidas do Tesouro da UNESCO).

Introduction

Domination, even when it is grounded in the crudest forms of force, whether through weapons or money, always possesses a symbolic dimension. Acts of submission and obedience are acts of knowledge and recognition that, as such, draw upon cognitive structures capable of being applied to all things in the world and, in particular, to social structures. (Bourdieu, 2009, p. 229. Own translation).

Research on religion and gender is gaining increasing relevance, highlighting the tensions between tradition and modernity in both political and religious spheres. Today, the global academic community is focused on analyzing women's participation in theology, a field of thought historically dominated by male religious capital and by a hierarchy defined through the sacrament of Holy Orders.

In international academic literature, particularly in English-speaking scholarship, a close relationship between politics and religion is emphasized. This connection reflects the understanding that political revolution alone is insufficient to trigger a symbolic, and consequently cultural, revolution within the modern State. History has shown that the Catholic Church is not a marginal actor in the political life of nations; rather, it has participated actively in the social revolutions of the modern world.

A comprehensive review of academic literature (EBSCOHost, AtlaSerials, Religion Collection), using search terms such as "Catholic church AND /women," "Religion and politics," and "Religión y política," underscores the importance of the Catholic Church and women's participation in the evangelization of frontier territories.

Scholarship on the Catholic Church in Latin America is rooted in Spain's foreign policy. For this reason, the American countries that achieved independence between 1810 and 1824 maintained a strong identity-based bond with the Spanish crown, grounded in the legitimacy of Catholicism. However, it was not until 1835 that Pope Gregory XVI officially recognized Ibero-American independence through the bull *Sollicitudo Ecclesiarum* (Martín, 2018; Latasa, 2011).

Indeed, religion has not been excluded from the State-building process, generating both convergences and tensions at the international, national, and local levels (Habermas, 2018). For example, the encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*, issued by Pope Pius XII on 20 October 1939, called for the solidarity of Catholics in the face of war (PIUS PP. XII, 1939).

However, beyond relations among States, concern arises regarding the governance of populations within nations. The debate on women's participation in the Catholic Church has been longstanding from both ecclesial and cultural

perspectives. Historical reflection on the symbolic domination of women is essential to understanding the conflicts surrounding women's ordination and their involvement in territories undergoing processes of national integration, where ethnicity plays a differentiating role. Many Roman Catholics experience feelings of anger, indignation, and fear when imagining a woman hearing confessions, preaching from the pulpit, celebrating Mass in sacred vestments, or managing parish affairs.

Since the nineteenth century, numerous women have engaged in intellectual and political activities, although their participation was conditioned by geography, origin, race, social class, and gender (Burggraf, 2003).

Colombia was characterized as a conservative republic due to the National Constitution of 1886 and the Concordat signed with the Catholic Church in 1887, which established mandatory Catholic religious education aimed at generating identity-based ties that would facilitate national unity (Díaz & Leguizamón, 2019, p. 205). However, despite these efforts, there remained national frontiers that needed to be integrated into the national ideal. Evangelizing missions in frontier territories were predominantly led by men and were marked by failures in dominating Indigenous peoples in the Caribbean region.

Within this constitutional context, a woman from Antioquia, Laura Montoya, proposed the creation of a religious association known as the "Congregation of Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena", with the purpose of contributing to the evangelizing mission, particularly regarding the religious instruction of Indigenous women. Catholic pedagogy functioned as a way of life embedded in the intimate fabric of society, guiding families and shaping culture at large. As a result, most women received education with the expectation of becoming either wives or cloistered nuns (Díaz & Leguizamón, 2019).

However, the involvement of women in the "Congregation of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena" was crucial to the evangelization of Indigenous peoples, which generated controversy within the Catholic Church. For this reason, Laura Montoya was judged for assuming functions that, according to Catholic canon law, were reserved exclusively for priests; nonetheless, she always adhered to ecclesiastical precepts (De Santa Teresa, 2015).

This article examines the symbolic efficacy of religious language as a tool for territorial and population domination in the formation of the Colombian nation and State. Laura Montoya legitimized the power of dominant actors and the State-Church alliance, while simultaneously influencing the assimilation of Indigenous peoples along the national frontier.

Methodology

A critical analysis is conducted of Laura Montoya's discourses within a context of domination by the Catholic Church and the Colombian State. From this perspective, the analytical tripod composed of language, mentality, and historical events is employed. This conceptual tool is used in historiography and was popularized by Jacques Le Goff (2008).

The concepts of "symbolic efficacy of language" (Bourdieu, 2009), "civilizing process" (Elias, 2015), and Jacques Le Goff's notions of "culture" and "mentality" (2008) enable an approach that seeks to understand not only historical events and human actions, but also the ways in which they were perceived and expressed through the language and mentality of a given era. This represents a way of approaching history from multiple perspectives.

Results

The purpose of this analysis is to explore women's participation in evangelization and progress through the case of the female religious congregation of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena in Urabá during the early twentieth century in Colombia, a period in which the Colombian Republic was predominantly conservative.

It is crucial to recognize that the formation of nation-states has been closely linked to Catholic evangelization in the Western world, and women have played a significant role in this historical process by actively participating in missions to jungle territories. However, a central question emerges: can the Church ordain women? This dilemma became evident in Urabá when Laura Montoya was compelled to assume the void left by missions previously led by men.

Transformations of the Catholic Church and Conservative Colombia: 1886-1930

Between 1886 and 1930, Colombia underwent a series of significant transformations in both the political and religious spheres, particularly under conservative rule. Without a doubt, the Colombian nation was established as a unitary Republic that regarded God as the source of all authority, with the purpose of regenerating the country under the principles of authority, order, and sovereignty (Álvarez, 2011).

The Catholic Church, for its part, held spiritual authority to evangelize, civilize, and colonize Indigenous territories, as stipulated in Title IV of the 1886 Political Constitution of Colombia. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a cycle of transformations within the Catholic Church that enabled women's participation at three key historical moments. The first occurred during the Council of Trent, convened under the pontificate of Paul III in 1545. During this period, female religious life was defined primarily through enclosure, establishing that nuns were to be subordinated to bishops and to the Holy See.

The second significant moment took place in the twentieth century, when Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council on 25 January 1959. This Council brought about a major renewal within the Catholic Church. In the decree *Perfectae caritatis*, women religious obtained improved status and greater capacity for action within the Church, without dependence on the support of male religious orders (Holy See, 1965).

The third relevant moment occurred in 1998, when Pope John Paul II wrote the apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, celebrating the fact that women could participate fully in the structures of responsibility and communion within the Church (John Paul II, 1988).

Despite these advances, the colonization of a route to the sea for Antioquia revealed the cultural and religious barriers that women faced in intervening in sacred, state, and territorial domains traditionally reserved for men. The Catholic Church, entrusting priests with the protection of tradition and maintaining the prohibition of female priesthood, viewed as disruptive the establishment of female religious associations in the jungle, such as the one advocated by Laura Montoya.

Although the 1886 Political Constitution of Colombia allowed the creation of public or private associations that did not contravene morality or legal order, requiring registration before the civil authority and ecclesiastical authorization, the actions of women like Laura Montoya represented a challenge to established norms (Const. 1886, Art. 47).

The Path of Mother Laura: Foundation, Dissemination, and Tensions with Society and the Church

The path of Mother Laura, also known as Laura Montoya, represents a fascinating story of foundation, dissemination, and setbacks in her relationship with society and the Church. On 28 June 1916, the Bishop of Antioquia, Monsignor Maximiliano Crespo, granted authorization for the establishment of a religious congregation called the "Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena." The purpose of this congregation was the sanctification of its members

and their dedication to the salvation of Indigenous peoples (De Santa Teresa, 2015, p. 211).

Laura Montoya's Constitutions stipulated that the sisters were to live in regions inhabited by "infidels and savages" in order to facilitate the apostolate and reach all members of Indigenous families, including those who feared male missionaries (Montoya, 2013).

She also questioned the inefficacy of European missions in integrating frontier regions into the Colombian nation, such as the Gulf of Urabá. Her words reflected both the Church's perspective and that of Antioquian society, yet her resistance to dividing religious missions by gender led to her expulsion from the Catholic Prefecture of Urabá, which was under the leadership of the Discalced Carmelites.

Religious language, as a society's system of beliefs, evolves alongside it (Santamaría, 2016). Laura Montoya's major legacy lay in her contextualized missionary approach, a pedagogy that engaged with the cultural environment to disseminate Catholicism in collaboration with the Colombian State, seeking the integration and "civilization" of populations. She demonstrated remarkable skill in applying biblical teachings in frontier territories with strong Indigenous presence, where the expansion of the Church was crucial for ensuring adherence to divine commandments.

Montoya actively challenged established norms by participating in the missionary movement, overcoming the limitations imposed on women in Catholic missions during the twentieth century. Her goal was to liberate Indigenous people from sin, encouraging them to live according to divine justice. Female religious congregations, which grew in number and demanded greater participation and less enclosure, became key figures in the social, cultural, and political transformations of the nineteenth century, providing catechesis and challenging the distribution of power and authority (Burggraf, 2003).

In 1917, Laura Montoya began her missionary work, pushing beyond the boundaries set by the Council of Trent and distinguishing herself from European missions. Her evangelizing pedagogy was dedicated to pacifying Indigenous regions, serving the Catholic Church under delegation from the State. In 1930, at St. Peter's Basilica, Montoya expressed a profound desire to dedicate "a million lives" to the missions, reflecting her humility and her struggle against the Church's symbolic domination over women (Vatican, 2024).

The constitutions of the "Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena" were approved in 1968 by Pope Paul VI, nearly two decades after her death in 1949. Today, the order has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Africa.

In 1975, Mary Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex* denounced sexism in the Catholic Church, arguing that it instrumentalized women as objects of oppression, relegated them to passive roles, excluded them on the basis of presumed inferiority, blocked their transcendental role, and required reform through a Catholic feminist theology.

The alliance between the Church and the Colombian State established a system of domination and symbolic violence along the frontiers, subjecting both Indigenous peoples and women religious. Obedience emerged as a sacred value within a "civilizing process" (Elias, 2015) that promoted social self-regulation and the restriction of individual impulses.

Laura Montoya's mission in western Antioquia faced persecution, and she was expelled from territories dominated by men, with local priests and the wider community considering her work "useless" or a "delusion" (Montoya, 2017; Gil *et al.*, 2023). This conflict intensified debates concerning the role of women in the Church, where rituals traditionally reserved for men became a point of contention. Montoya defended her actions as pedagogical gestures, precursors to priestly ceremonies, and denounced the absence of clergy. The mission of "Las Lauritas" in Urabá was eventually replaced by the Carmelites.

The current debate in the Vatican regarding the female diaconate remains unresolved, despite several Popes recognizing the important roles women have played in the Church throughout history (Roma Reports, 2023). Laura Montoya's work was perceived as a "strange situation" for breaking with tradition by performing religious practices reserved for men.

The evangelizing method of "Las Lauritas" sought to transform the "savage" Indigenous person into a "civilized" citizen through medical and hygienic practices and the prohibition of traditional rituals, generating trust. The history of women in the Catholic Church and the modern State has been subjected to male domination through the symbolic language of encyclicals and papal letters, which often depict women in terms of obedience and submission (Bourdieu, 1982). Challenging these structures is crucial to achieving gender equality.

The Route to the Sea for Antioquia: A Territory of Missions and Colonization

The search for access to the sea was a crucial objective for Antioquia, intended to drive a process of missions and colonization that Christianized the region and integrated local communities. Simultaneously, both State-led and private colonization contributed to territorial expansion and economic development.

During the colonial period, western Antioquia constituted a closed frontier due to the difficulty of governing the Indigenous population. The Apostolic Prefecture of Urabá, established by the Discalced Carmelites in 1918, was a milestone made possible through the support of the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate (De Santa Teresa, 2015). The first field of Catholic apostolate in Urabá was established between 1510 and 1518, marking the religious history of the continent through missions from various orders that contributed to the moral and Christian formation of Indigenous communities (De Santa Teresa, 2015).

The Atrato River was the principal communication route in Urabá, but its use declined due to fear of the Indigenous peoples of Chocó and the region's reputation as swampy and prone to fever. Although Cartagena was the only legal Spanish port, contraband circulated through the Atrato. After 1540, river navigation and the entry of foreign vessels into the Gulf of Urabá were punished by death. Catholic missions in the region came to an end in 1714 (Parsons, 1961).

Despite earlier challenges, commercial and political elites did not abandon the hope of controlling the Atrato River as a communication route between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. It was believed that opening the Atrato depended on constructing a canal linking it to the San Juan River (Chenu, 1988). A decree issued on April 28, 1855 granted José Gooding and Ricardo Vanegas the rights to undertake the opening of an interoceanic canal in the province of Chocó (Vélez (Provincia), 1855). Since independence, Colombian leaders viewed progress in international trade as contingent upon connections between the interior and the sea (Melo, 2020). However, the heterogeneous geography of Gran Colombia, mountains, rivers, and jungles, combined with a lack of infrastructure and labor, limited interregional commerce and undermined the economic value of land (Vélez, 2002). Access to the Atrato River was perceived as key to Antioquia's economic prosperity (Gutiérrez, 2010).

Colonization was conceived as progress, transforming the tropical rainforest to "civilize" the region (Melo, 2020). During the conservative administration (1886–1930), *baldíos* (public lands) laws were enacted (Law 61 of 1874; Law 52 of 1877; Law 48 of 1882). The National Constituent Assembly granted Antioquia sovereignty over the Atrato River (Law 17 of 1905). Colonization was based on the dissolution of Indigenous *resguardos* and the adjudication of *baldíos*. These lands, perceived as unproductive and controlled by Indigenous communities, were subjected to market legislation, in line with the conservative government's particular interest in settling these "no man's lands" (Serje, 2005).

Initially, an increase in land adjudication to so-called "free men" was observed, and in 1887 a Colonization Board was established in Dabeiba, composed of notable figures such as Felix A. Vélez, Benjamin Trespalacios, Juan Henrique

White, Constancio Gómez, and Ismael Montoya. From that point forward, gold mining began and work on communication routes in the area was undertaken.

Law 89 of 1890, which sought to incorporate the Indigenous population into civil life, prevented Indigenous peoples from defending their territories against dispossession for adjudication to “free men,” marking a significant redistribution of land.

It is essential to highlight that for years, colonization legislation established that ownership of *baldíos* could be acquired through cultivation, regardless of their extension. Moreover, those who labored the land in good faith could not be dispossessed (Law 48 of 1882). However, in 1929 the displacement of Indigenous peoples increased once they learned the commandment “thou shalt not kill,” and some Antioqueños took advantage to push their frontier forward and colonize (Machado, 2009).

Particularly noteworthy is José María Villa’s 1896 proposal for completing the Puente de Occidente in Santa Fe de Antioquia over the Cauca River, originally conceived as part of the works linking Antioquia to the Atrato River and its tributaries (Law 18 of 1905). This initiative was not only crucial for regional development but also served as inspiration for an even larger project, the Urabá railroad (Zuleta, 1864).

The dispossession of Indigenous lands spanned more than a century, with State authorities protecting Antioqueño settlers as they opened routes through Indigenous territories, disregarding their sacred character, as occurred with the parcelling of an Indigenous cemetery (Gobernación de Antioquia, 1920).

In summary, the solution to the “ethnic problem” centered on the total elimination of Indigenous *resguardos* and promoted a missionary strategy. The Catholic Church, represented by religious communities such as the Carmelites and Laura Montoya’s congregation, played a fundamental role in the Christianization and “whitening” of Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations, while serving as a public referent within a State marked by militarization and police control (Uribe, 1992, p. 30).

The Evangelizing Method of the *Lauritas* Community

The evangelizing method of the Lauritas community, led by Laura Montoya, represented a unique and contextualized approach to missionary work. In 1910, Montoya, an Antioquian schoolteacher, requested financial support and legislation

from President Carlos E. Restrepo for works among the Indigenous population, whom she referred to as “savages.”

In her autobiography, Montoya expressed her view on the failure of male-led missions among the Caribe and Katío peoples, seeing women’s participation as necessary. In 1911, she invited young women from Antioquian society to participate in the “reduction, catechization, and civilization of the savages” (Mesa, 1986). Montoya believed that her condition as a woman was not an obstacle to serving Christ, convinced that the Indigenous world was disordered and resistant to Christianity.

On June 28, 1916, Bishop Maximiliano Crespo authorized the foundation of the Religious Congregation of the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena, with the purpose of the sanctification of its members and the salvation of Indigenous peoples (De Santa Teresa, 2015). Laura Montoya and her congregation began their evangelizing mission, being valued by political and religious elites as agents of progress. It was believed that only these “virginal” and “immaculate” women could morally and religiously indoctrinate Indigenous peoples, especially women, who were considered bearers of original sin.

The Diocesan Congregation of the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena was officially founded on January 1, 1917, with authorization from Rome (Mesa, 1986). The selective presence of the State, through infrastructure projects, required the moral education of Indigenous peoples to prevent them from occupying spaces designated for public use in the architectural design of the “paradise.” Within this context, Laura Montoya undertook the task of reaching Indigenous *resguardos* along the route to the sea for Antioquia. One such *resguardo* was Cañasgordas, known since colonial times for its resistance to both State presence and Catholic influence.

National order depended on female indoctrination through Catholic education, which projected an ideal model of femininity from pulpits and manuals (Pimoulier, 2020). It was believed that evangelizing women would enable male obedience to the authority of the Church and the State. However, Montoya denounced the absence of priests and male lay ministers in her evangelization zone.

For this reason, in 1917, Laura Montoya offered a mission of Christianization aimed at the civil incorporation of Indigenous peoples, who resisted surrendering their lands for public works. By establishing the Congregation of the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena, she sought to gain the trust of Indigenous communities, something necessary for the installation of the Discalced Carmelite missionaries in western Antioquia and Urabá (Montoya, 2013).

Furthermore, in Laura Montoya's evangelizing mission, popular religiosity did not pose an obstacle to implementing a Catholic pedagogical approach. Montoya transformed Indigenous popular beliefs through the presentation of miracles attributed to the Holy Trinity. Ultimately, despite the Catholic Church having long considered popular religiosity as pagan, Laura Montoya managed to adapt it to the principles of Christian faith (Le Goff, 2008).

Mother Laura described Indigenous religiosity as "pacts with the devil and superstitions," and considered Christianization the best strategy for eliminating it (Montoya, 2013). According to her, Christianization occurred in two phases: first, removing Indigenous peoples from their "almost irrational state" by helping them lose their fear of the civilized world; and second, prudently destroying their "barbaric customs" so they could receive "civilized life" (Montoya, 2013). Bringing civilization meant "erasing the savage" from both space and population, destroying barbaric customs through a Catholic pedagogy that punished the soul rather than the body (Díaz & Leguizamón, 2019).

For Laura, *jaibanismo* and Indigenous healing practices were a dark and demonic force. She considered the devil the "master" of the Katío people (Montoya, 2013). Her challenge was to eradicate ritual manifestations of *jaibanismo*, as ritual gestures were central to the symbolic system of the culture (Le Goff, 2008).

Montoya confronted Katío beliefs by symbolically opposing Caragabi and Antomiá (God and the devil). She convinced women through natural medicines and prayers, persuading them that they did not need a *jaibaná*, and that following one would lead to the loss of their souls. Instead of the "jai" (ritual dolls), she introduced the figure of the Virgin Mary and holy water in food as part of the evangelization process (Montoya, 2015).

Laura Montoya considered it essential to "Christianize" Indigenous peoples before clothing them, believing that shame would eventually lead them to dress according to Christian moral precepts and abandon sin (Montoya, 2013). She also placed great emphasis on evangelizing women and girls to civilize the territory. According to her missionary letters (2013), turning them into "model Christians" would transform the territory transgenerationally. She compared them to Eve, emphasizing their capacity for deceit, and insisted on the presence of priests for administering sacraments such as baptism and Catholic marriage (Montoya, 2013).

Through language, Laura Montoya constructed a new cultural system that required the adaptation of one culture to another through the domination of rituals, symbols, gestures, and practices (Le Goff, 2008). She replaced symbols of *jaibanismo* with the image of the Virgin Mary and introduced prayer accompanied by gifts such as medals, measures that fostered trust and strengthened the mission

(Montoya, 2013). Catholic pedagogy, in addition to punishment, emphasized rewards (Díaz & Leguizamón, 2019). Bourdieu (2009) notes that “one gives in order to possess,” highlighting power dynamics within exchange.

Laura Montoya’s project sought to lead people from “barbarism” to “civilization” through the sacraments (Montoya, 2013). The success of her mission lay in the transition from Indigenous religiosity to institutional Catholicism, using punishment and reward. The Lauritas earned the respect of Katío culture toward Catholicism, strengthening bonds through symbolic actions and the teaching of sacraments as salvation, faith experience, and a system of rewards and punishments.

Anthropologically, sacraments are cultural symbolic actions, but theologically they are linked to Christ and the Catholic Church. By responding to an internal call, the religious woman transcends cultural values, demonstrating creativity in evangelizing and challenging stereotypes about women’s roles in religious life (Gil *et al.*, 2023).

Once Laura Montoya gained Indigenous trust, the Catholic Prefecture of Urabá was established with the Discalced Carmelite Fathers on April 15, 1919 (De Santa Teresa, 2015). The Carmelites recognized that the Missionary Sisters had provided them with the *adjutorium simile sibi* (necessary assistance) for colonization.

However, Mother Laura’s evangelizing practices were considered too “liberal” for the Catholic Prefecture of Urabá. The Apostolic Prefect, Fray José Joaquín de la Virgen del Carmen, expressed concern that “[...] this kind of apostolic excursion is more proper to a missionary than to a woman missionary,” suggesting that they attract Indigenous peoples to their houses rather than moving around (cited in De Santa Teresa, 2015, p. 221). This passage reflects tensions regarding women’s roles in mission work.

The Gospel of Saint Paul states: “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law” (Reina-Valera, 1960, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35). This traditional interpretation of gender roles has been subject to debate.

As Lerner (1986) notes, “Women have not only been deprived of teaching at any historical moment and in any known society; they have also been excluded from the formation of theories” (p. 21).

The Prefecture asked Laura Montoya to join the Carmelites, but she refused and closed the houses in Dabeiba, Murri, and Turbo, relocating the novitiate to San Pedro. The prefect facilitated the arrival of the Discalced Carmelite Sisters from Barcelona to replace them (De Santa Teresa, 2015).

Despite these efforts, the frontier where the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena work remains a transnational zone marked by persistent poverty, affecting Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, where women bear the greatest burden of care and face illness and food scarcity. The population relies on subsistence agriculture, and development remains a distant goal. Nonetheless, the evangelizing work of these missionaries, present in 21 countries, continues to serve as a beacon of hope.

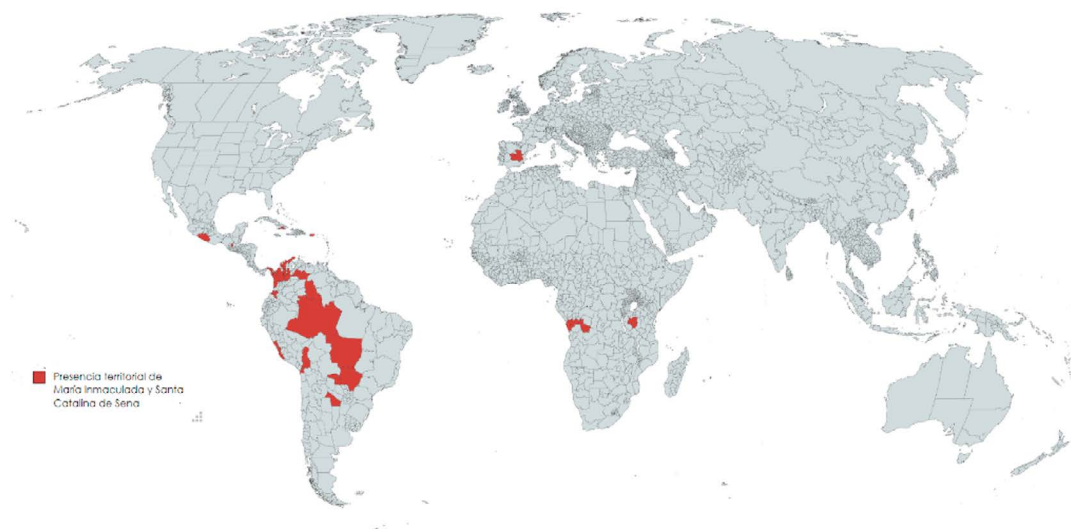


Figure 1. Map 1. Territorial Presence of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena.

Source: Author's elaboration based on information from the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate and Saint Catherine of Siena (2022).

Conclusions

The mission of Laura Montoya and her congregation, aimed at the evangelization of Indigenous peoples, was labeled as seditious. They were accused of influencing other women to join their cause, distancing them from matrimonial tradition and mobilizing them toward defending the right to education. “In the press of the time and in the Departmental Assembly, the self-sacrificing missionaries were the object of ruthless attacks” (Mesa, 1986, p. 48). Although she felt ashamed for

challenging the opinions and customs of her society, Laura Montoya persevered in her life's purpose: to fill empty spaces with a Christian meaning (Gil *et al.*, 2023).

The civilizing project led by the "Lauritas" evolved significantly as they became key collaborators of the Church in the pedagogy of the Gospel, particularly in introducing the sacraments among Indigenous communities. These sacraments, baptism, communion, marriage, prayer, and the act of contrition, played a fundamental role in the catechetical process. Indigenous women were crucial facilitators of this process, gradually abandoning the religious rituals of *jaibanismo* in order to adopt Catholicism. This change not only represented a spiritual transformation but also facilitated the intervention of the political orders of the nation in territories where the State could not be physically present.

Mother Laura confronted the deeply rooted traditions of the Catholic Church and the scrutiny of Antioquian society by assuming roles traditionally considered masculine, such as offering Mass. However, it is important to emphasize that this ritual act was performed more as a pedagogical gesture than an institutionalized ceremony. This anomalous situation was justified by the absence of priests before the establishment of the Catholic Prefecture of Urabá in 1919 (De Santa Teresa, 2015).

Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* states that the exclusion of women from priestly ordination does not imply "[...] a lesser dignity nor discrimination against them, but faithful observance of a disposition attributed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe" (John Paul II, 1994, para. 6).

The case of Laura Montoya opens the door to reflection on women's participation in the Catholic Church, which has been shaped by debates surrounding the priesthood and the diaconate. However, it is important to recognize that although the presence and role of women in the life and mission of the Church are not tied to ministerial priesthood, they remain absolutely necessary and irreplaceable (John Paul II, 1994).

Laura Montoya was judged for usurping the sacred order, since according to tradition women cannot perform the representative function of the ministry, that is, acting *in persona Christi* and representing Christ. God's communication in the Bible is conveyed through masculine imagery, and especially through the man Jesus Christ. Theologians have explained that the Church cannot entrust the representative function of the ministry to a woman, as this would contradict the divine plan of the Incarnation and would misrepresent God before humanity. However, the lack of a tradition of female priesthood does not preclude the possibility of changing a practice that has endured for centuries in the interest of greater service to Christ and His mission. In fact, changes have been observed in this regard from the pontificate of Paul VI to that of John Paul II, with an increasingly active role for women in the Catholic Church.

In summary, the meaning of the Incarnation lies in the fact that Jesus assumed a human nature, and the fact that He was male is extrinsic and accidental. In essence, God transcends bodily gender characteristics; God is neither man nor woman. History has shown how women-led evangelizing missions represented the presence of God in the jungle.

Consequently, the role of women has been of utmost importance for the evangelizing mission, and cultural change has provided the opportunity for Christians to deepen the redemptive message of the Gospel, both for women and for frontier territories where the presence of the Church and the State is limited. Since Old Testament times, woman has been regarded as mother and comforter (Reina-Valera, 1960, Isaiah 66:13), a fundamental role that continues to resonate in evangelizing work and in accompanying communities at the frontiers of faith.

The symbolic efficacy of Laura Montoya's pedagogy is evidenced by a major historical development of long duration: the expansion of her Catholic and female mission across three different continents, America, Europe, and Africa. All of this has been accomplished with the approval and support of the Catholic Church, thus highlighting the enduring impact of her evangelizing and educational work in various parts of the world.

Pastoral decisions regarding female priesthood will be made according to the needs of the Church and in accordance with cultural changes over the long term; the history of salvation is not limited to the period from Abraham to Christ. Theologians have argued that the ministry of ordained women would constitute a new type of ministry within the Catholic Church, one whose missionary dimension has historically been exercised even when culture and ecclesiastical institutions have opposed it.

The symbolic efficacy of language in Laura Montoya manifested itself through rituals and pedagogical practices that prepared the ground for receiving the Catholic Prefecture of Urabá, led by male Carmelite priests. Despite the evangelization of the territory, which taught the commandment "thou shalt not kill" to the Indigenous population, many remained submissive and self-sacrificing in the face of the offenses committed by Antioquian settlers, who, driven by greed on their route to the sea for Antioquia, violated the commandment: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, nor his wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's".

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