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Care economy and feminization of poverty in Post-COVID Economic recovery in Génova, Colombia

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Abstract: This study explores the feminization of poverty and the dynamics of the care economy in rural areas, focusing on the municipality of Génova, Quindío, Colombia. The novelty of this study lies in its analysis of the compounded effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's economic participation and care responsibilities in a rural context, offering insights relevant to Latin America. This study addresses the critical problem of how increased caregiving responsibilities and labor informality during the pandemic have disproportionately impacted economically active women, exacerbating gender inequalities. The objective is to analyze the relationship between the care economy and feminization of poverty, providing policy recommendations for post-pandemic recovery in rural settings. The methodology consisted of a two-stage approach. In the first stage, a probabilistic stratified sampling design was applied using data from the Colombian National Population and Housing Census and the Génova, Quindío, and Colombia Municipal Panel. In the second stage, fieldwork was conducted with a sample of 347 women using the RedCap application for data collection. The results indicate a significant increase in unpaid domestic and caregiving work during the pandemic, particularly for the elderly, disabled, and children. Additionally, labor informality increased, further limiting economic opportunities for women. The key conclusion is that public policies aimed at reducing gender disparities in rural labor markets must prioritize caregiving support and formal employment opportunities for women. These findings suggest that addressing the care economy is crucial for closing gender gaps and fostering equitable economic recovery in rural Latin American areas.

Keywords: care economy; feminization of poverty; gender inequality; rural labor markets; post-pandemic economic recovery; labor informality; Latin America

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated pre-existing socioeconomic inequalities, particularly those affecting women who have historically been marginalized in labor markets and burdened with the bulk of unpaid care work. In Latin America, particularly in rural areas such as the region of Génova Quindío Colombia, there is growing concern over the increasing unemployment rates in this region, with Quindío ranking as the third most unemployed area in the country, with a rate of 13.7%, as reported by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE, 2023). This unemployment crisis is intensified by high levels of informal labor, multidimensional poverty, and deepening gender gaps.

Although there are reforms aimed at improving the efficiency of labor markets in Latin America and improving economic conditions, they continue to be insufficient, not only because of the high levels of poverty, but also because the generation of productive employment is low. Historically, these trends have been influenced by

industrialization, technological advancements, migration, and the expansion of the informal sector in response to the postwar era and the rise of the service sector. These dynamics have contributed to the increasing wage disparities and economic inequalities across regions.

Research on job quality in Latin America reveals that low-skilled workers are particularly vulnerable to informal employment and exclusion, often finding themselves working in small, unofficial businesses or excluded from modern economic frameworks (Fernández-Franco et al., 2022). According to Fernández et al. (2022), the region's stagnant productivity growth has led to general deterioration in working conditions, particularly in small retail operations. Understanding the dynamics of these labor markets is crucial, especially given the strong correlation between informal work and multidimensional poverty. The multidimensional poverty concept encompasses various deprivations experienced by impoverished individuals, including the economic, social, educational, and environmental aspects.

Women have been disproportionately affected by the labor market crisis, particularly in terms of gender disparities, job opportunities, discriminatory practices, and the substantial amount of time they spend on unpaid and caregiving activities. Buedo (2015) highlights how wage and labor divisions mirror contemporary societal stereotypes, pointing out that women's economic disadvantage has steadily increased since the 1970s, a trend referred to as the "feminization of poverty" (Buedo, 2015). Although overall poverty rates in Latin America have decreased, the gender gap continues to expand. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) indicates that the region remains caught in a cycle of sluggish growth and high inequality fueled by patriarchal social structures, wage inequalities, and women's restricted autonomy resulting from a lack of personal income (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL), 2022).

According to Lagarde (2001), the higher rates of poverty among women are not a result of biological factors, but rather stem from societal and institutional frameworks that place an unequal burden on women (Lagarde, 1996). These structural inequities are particularly evident in rural settings, where women's often invisible contributions go unrecognized. Segato (2006) contends that throughout history, women's bodies have been symbolically and literally appropriated, serving as metaphors for domination and control, mirroring the subjugation of labor in male-dominated societies (Segato, 2014). The incorporation of women into the workforce, especially in rural areas, has exposed them to additional disparities that are exacerbated by limited access to formal economic resources and opportunities.

Despite women's increasing participation in labor markets, their economic conditions have not significantly improved. Barcena (2024) argues that women's involvement in labor is crucial for achieving equality and better income distribution, yet most employed women remain in low-productivity sectors with low wages and limited access to technology and innovation. Approximately 78.1% of working women in Latin America are employed in such sectors, often in precarious conditions, and with little opportunity for economic advancement.

Women's economic autonomy is closely tied to their access to personal income and how they allocate their time. Regional statistics indicate that only 30% of women have their own income, while 70% remain financially dependent on other household

members, thus reinforcing their economic dependence. Building on the work of Koengkan et al. (2022), their study reveals how gender inequality negatively impacts economic growth, with a particular focus on rural regions. In these areas, women often face significant structural obstacles to participating in the economy, exacerbating adverse effects on overall economic development (Koengkan et al., 2022). In the case of Génova, Quindío, Colombia, where women make up 50.7% of the population, female-headed households are disproportionately affected by multidimensional poverty. Data from the 2018 DANE census show that the municipality faces the highest unemployment rates in the region, with many women struggling to secure formal employment while shouldering caregiving responsibilities (DANE, 2020).

These regional trends are mirrored across Latin America, where 26% of women over the age of 15 earn less than the minimum wage, perpetuating economic precarity and reinforcing dependence. Women also tend to work longer hours than men, with much of this time dedicated to unpaid domestic and care work. Barcena (2017) highlights that structural imbalances in the division of care responsibilities between men and women continue to hinder women's autonomy, emphasizing the need for policy reforms that reduce working hours and promote a fairer distribution of caregiving tasks (Barcena, 2024).

Over the past three decades, the involvement of women in the Latin American workforce has seen a significant rise, increasing from 41.3% to 53.9%, which has helped reduce the disparity between genders (DANE, 2021). Despite this progress, obstacles persist, especially for older women who continue to provide unpaid care, limiting their engagement in the formal job market (Gontero and Vezza, 2023). In contrast, younger women have improved access to educational opportunities, enhancing their job prospects and the potential for financial independence. This evolution has also influenced family dynamics, with an increasing number of women choosing to postpone motherhood and focus on their professional development.

Despite these gains, female unemployment rates, wage inequality, informality, and limited access to leadership positions remain significant challenges. The concepts of the "glass ceiling" and "sticky floor" illustrate how gender inequality persists in professional spheres, with women facing barriers to leadership and decision-making roles (Camarena Adame and Saavedra García, 2018). According to Tortosa (2009), "the concept of 'feminization of poverty' refers to the phenomenon in which poverty disproportionately affects women. However, this 'feminization' is not always reflected in conventional measurements, and even when quantified, a critical explanatory element is often omitted: the structural vulnerability of women and their position within the social structure, viewed through a gendered lens" (Tortosa, 2009). In Colombia, the feminization of poverty is reflected in the disproportionate poverty levels experienced by women between 2012 and 2020, with 43.4% of women living in poverty, compared to 10.16 million men, a difference of more than 700,000 women in poverty (DANE, 2021).

Recent projections by the International Monetary Fund suggest that unemployment rates in the region will continue to rise, with Colombia's unemployment rate standing at 9.9% (Statista, 2024). This trend poses a significant challenge to achieving Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to poverty eradication, gender equality, and inequality reduction. The persistence of

poverty, especially among women, is evident across the country, with most regions reporting higher poverty rates among women than men, reinforcing the need for comprehensive policy interventions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exerted a disproportionate impact on women (Goldin, 2022), prompting Latin American countries to implement governmental strategies to address these issues. Conditional cash transfers (CCTs) have been introduced as a mechanism to mitigate poverty by providing targeted assistance to households headed by women. However, the outcomes of these initiatives have been heterogeneous, with numerous cases demonstrating an increase in poverty rates among women (Canelo and Duarte Avalos, 2023; Costa and Freire, 2021; González García et al., 2020; Lombana-Coy et al., 2022; Silberman et al., 2020). The pandemic has underscored the necessity for substantial changes that address the fundamental causes of gender inequalities and the escalating incidence of poverty among women (Bradshaw et al., 2019).

In the study conducted by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE, 2020) through the Care Economy Satellite Account (CSEC) and supported by Colombian Law 1413 of 2010, the care economy is defined as “unpaid work performed in the household, including home maintenance, caregiving for other household or community members, and the upkeep of the remunerated workforce”. These conceptual contributions are vital for examining inequality. As Rodríguez (2015) notes, building on key principles of feminist economic theory, “broadly speaking, the concept encompasses all activities and practices necessary for the daily survival of individuals within their societal context. This includes self-care, direct care for others (interpersonal caregiving), provision of the prerequisites for caregiving (household cleaning, food shopping, and preparation), and care management (scheduling coordination, transportation to educational institutions or other services, and supervision of paid caregivers, among others) (Rodríguez Enríquez, 2015). The care economy functions within an international economic order driven by accumulation, thus fulfilling the role of capitalist economies. As previously noted by Lagarde, this dynamic reflects the sexual division of labor, perpetuating the sociocultural belief that caregiving is inherently the responsibility of women. Through a situated analysis of these realities, this study highlights the urgent need for policies that expand the discussion and reconfigure the conceptualization of caregiving as a category.

This study examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the care economy in rural Colombia, focusing specifically on the municipality of Génova, and evaluated the efficacy of public policies implemented to address these challenges. The following research questions guide this study: (1) How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the care economy in rural municipalities such as Génova? This question is rooted in the need to understand how increased caregiving responsibilities during the pandemic have disproportionately affected women’s ability to participate in formal economic activities, a gap that remains underexplored in rural areas. (2) What public policies and programs have been implemented to address the feminization of poverty during the pandemic in rural contexts? This question aimed to evaluate whether existing interventions have been effective in mitigating poverty among women, especially given their role in unpaid care work. (3) What are the social and labor characteristics

of rural women in Génova in relation to poverty and employment conditions? This question examines the specific vulnerabilities of rural women, including informal labor and lack of access to resources, to better inform future policy recommendations.

By addressing these questions, this study provides a detailed analysis of the variables related to the care economy and their impact on the feminization of poverty. The main objective is to develop actionable recommendations for public policies that promote gender equity and support economic recovery in rural areas.

This research is part of the Colombian Royalties-funded project “Strengthening the Observatory of Human Sciences and Fine Arts for the Creation of Public Policy Lines Using R&D Tools, Focusing on Women’s Employment in Post-COVID-19 Economic Recovery”. This initiative responds to territorial demands in the Quindío Department of Colombia, which encompasses issues, needs, or opportunities that can be addressed through science, technology, or innovation. For the region, these efforts have been prioritized along strategic axes, including open access to information and data analytics through the establishment of social observatories, eradication of all forms of violence, ensuring food security, and closing gender gaps.

2. Materials and methods

This study employed a probabilistic and stratified statistical design, structured in three stages, with the aim of conducting an exhaustive analysis of the care economy and feminization of poverty in the municipality of Génova, Quindío. The statistical framework used was the National Geostatistical Framework of Colombia (MGN), provided by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) (DANE, 2019), which allows the linkage of cartographic data with census units at the sector, section, and block levels. This information was extracted from the 2018 National Population and Housing Census and supplemented with data from the Municipal Panel (Terridata) of the National Planning Department (DNP, 2024), covering the period 2018–2021 (DANE, 2020, 2023). This study employed a mixed-methods strategy that integrated secondary data from nationwide databases with primary information gathered through field surveys. The study’s theoretical underpinning draws from feminist economics and care economy concepts, which argue that unpaid caregiving activities, performed mainly by women, are crucial for societal reproduction, but remain economically underappreciated and overlooked (Esquivel, 2011; Fraser, 2016; Gómez et al., 2020).

2.1. Study area and population

This study focuses on the municipality of Génova, a rural area in the Quindío Department located in the Central Mountain Range of Colombia, south of the Department of Quindío. 86% of the terrain is mountainous, mainly comprising hillsides and slopes that are steeper than 35%. The region has an average temperature of 19.8 °C, a minimum temperature of 13.3 °C, and a maximum temperature of 33.6 °C. This region is recognized for its coffee production activity, which is an integral part of the area’s economy and culture (Acosta-Minoli et al., 2024). According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), the unemployment rate in Génova will reach 13.7% in 2023, one of the highest rates in Colombia (DANE, 2023).

The study population comprised economically active women in Génova, with a particular emphasis on those engaged in informal labor and caregiving roles.

2.2. Sample design

The sampling framework was designed to cover 1440 households in the municipality to encompass the economically active female population of the municipality with a sample size of 347. This size was calculated using a simple random sampling method adjusted to the urban strata to ensure representativeness across the different sectors of Génova. This size was calculated based on a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of $\pm 5\%$, accounting for variability in employment conditions, caregiving roles, and access to formal labor markets. The stratification of the population was essential to reflect the heterogeneity within the municipality, particularly the differences in socioeconomic and demographic profiles across neighborhoods. The selection process includes three stages: selection of sectors, sections, and blocks, employing the Monte Carlo technique to ensure randomness in the selection. This hierarchical approach allows for the homogeneous coverage of urban areas and optimizes the relationship between population density and sampling units (Faulín and Juan, 2005). By focusing on economically active women, this study addressed a specific population segment most affected by the feminization of poverty and the care economy, aligning with the study's objectives of exploring gender inequalities and informing public policy.

2.3. Data collection tools

The REDCap tool was used for data collection to facilitate the administration of digital surveys in the field (Harris et al., 2009). The survey contained questions on socioeconomic conditions, time dedicated to domestic and caregiving work, and employment opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some limitations related to data collection were considered, such as digital literacy and cultural factors, including traditional gender roles, which may have influenced participants' willingness to disclose information related to unpaid caregiving or household dynamics, potentially introducing response bias. However, the robust sampling design and targeted data collection strategies provide a strong foundation for analyzing the feminization of poverty and the care economy in this context.

2.4. Variables and measurements

Regarding the study of sociodemographic aspects of the municipality of Génova-Quindío in the context of the care economy, gender equity, and labor activity in post-COVID conditions, 347 data points were collected for the following variables: Age, Marital Status, Area of residence, and neighborhood.

2.5. Data analysis techniques

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis, utilizing computational tools to process the responses and generate charts to illustrate the trends observed in the municipality. The selected variables were compared with previous studies on the feminization of poverty and the care economy in Latin America,

allowing the results to be contextualized within the framework of current public policies (Barcena, 2024).

3. Results

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the structural inequalities present in our societies, with rural female employment being one of the most affected sectors. This analysis examined several variables related to unemployment, feminization of poverty, and caregiving, specifically in the municipality of Génova. It is crucial to recognize that women were already facing significant challenges before the pandemic, including lower levels of formal employment, limited access to resources and economic opportunities, and a greater burden of domestic work, caregiving, and informal labor. **Figure 1** illustrates the spatial distribution by neighborhood in the municipality of Génova, highlighting the concentration of female unemployment in central areas, particularly among older populations, notably women aged 51–60.

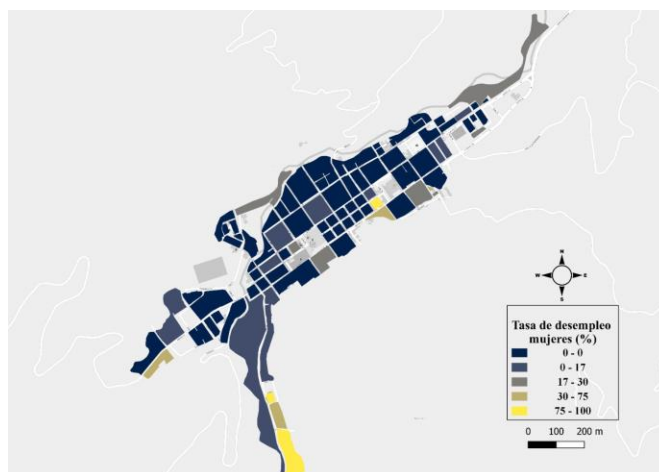


Figure 1. Spatial distribution of female unemployment rates. Génova (Quindío), 2018.

Source: Created by the authors based on CNPV data (DANE, 2018).

This distribution revealed a high concentration of women in central neighborhoods such as the “20 de Julio” area, as shown in **Figure 2**. This pattern can be linked to cultural and traditional factors concerning space usage and attachment, considering that territorial expansion in Génova tends to remain localized. According to the Land Use Scheme (DANE, 2019), there was no significant expansion toward the municipality’s peripheries. Additionally, the economic sector and service sales are concentrated around the main square, a common feature in many municipalities in Quindío, where institutions such as educational, religious, health, government, and cultural services are located. This centralization fosters proximity and increases access. However, poverty is more concentrated in neighborhoods closer to rural areas, which could be explained by limited access to institutional and commercial employment opportunities.

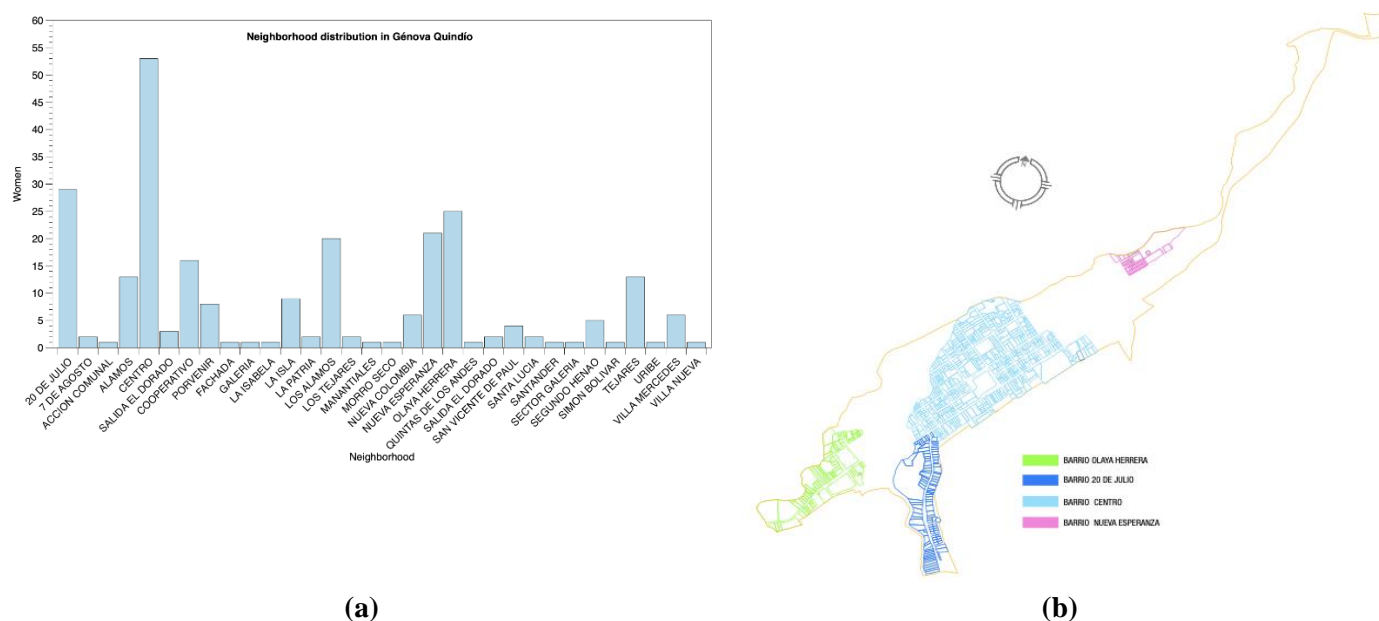


Figure 2. Neighborhood (Barrio) distribution in the municipality of Génova (Quindío). **(a)** Number of inactive women on each Neighborhood; **(b)** spatial distribution of the main neighborhoods in the Génova map.

Source: Created by the authors based on the data.

The neighbor distribution analysis showed that a significant proportion of women in Génova were clustered in neighborhoods with limited access to essential services, including healthcare, education, and transportation. As shown in **Figure 2a,b**, 62% of the respondents lived in areas that lacked access to formal health services, whereas only 18% resided in neighborhoods with sufficient public transportation. These factors further constrain employees' abilities to participate in formal employment. The geographic concentration of disadvantaged populations in under-resourced areas contributes to the persistence of multidimensional poverty, creating barriers to both employment and social mobility. This pattern of neighbor distribution aligns with previous studies on rural poverty, where access to infrastructure and services plays a crucial role in determining economic opportunities for women (DANE, 2019). The results suggest that interventions aimed at improving access to public services such as transportation and healthcare could alleviate some of the structural barriers faced by women in rural areas.

The spider web chart in **Figure 3** presents the relationship between respondents' questions, offering an integrated view of the conditions of the inactive population in the post-pandemic context in Génova. This detailed analysis focused on several aspects of the care economy.

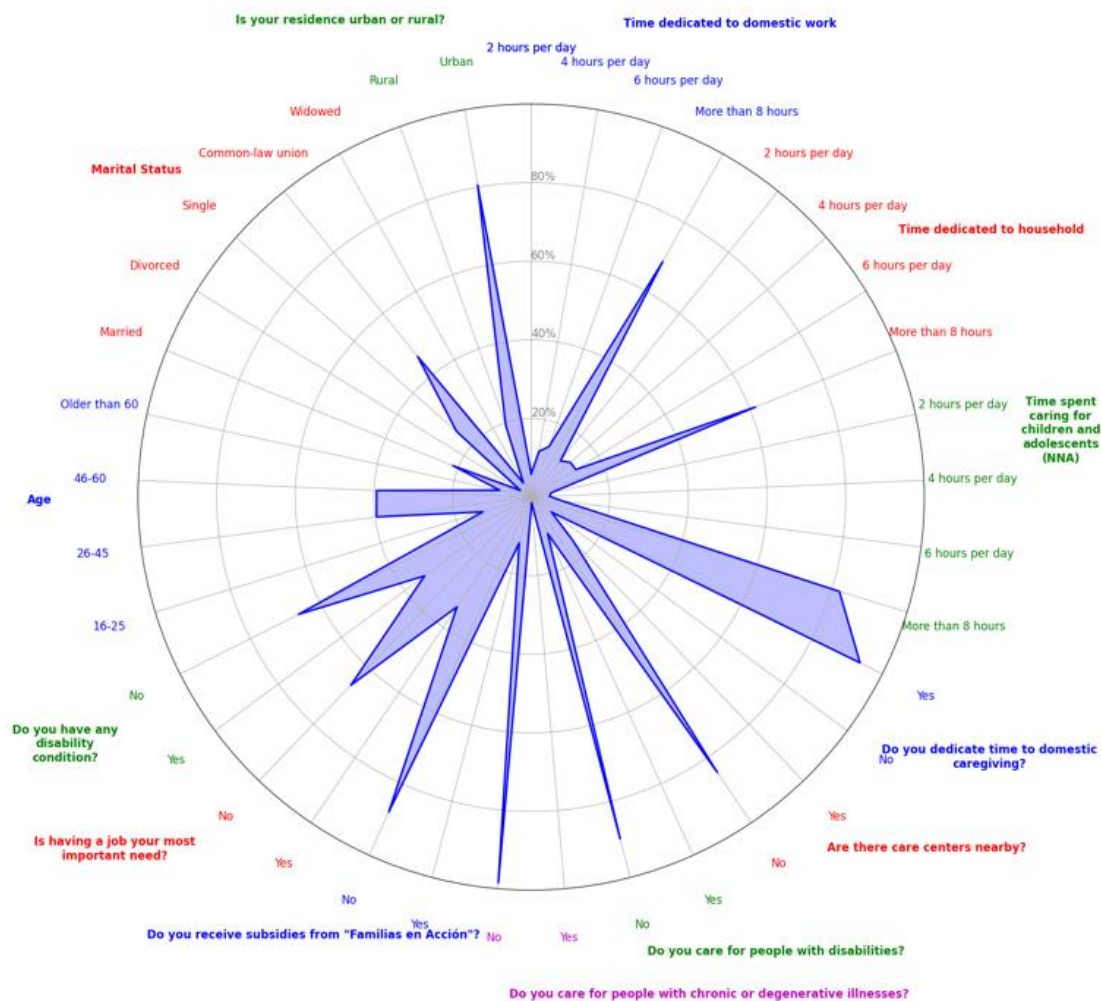


Figure 3. Neighborhood (Barrio) distribution in the municipality of Génova (Quindío).

Source: Created by the authors based on the data.

The chart shows that women aged 51–60 years remain economically active, demonstrating that the municipality has an aging female population still participating in the labor market and bearing the primary economic burden of their households through domestic and caregiving work. Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis highlights the importance of providing job opportunities and monetary assistance to this group of individuals. Of the 347 respondents, 117 identified employments as their most pressing economic need, with the loss of employment and reduction in income, emphasizing the lack of economic security and the need for interventions that promote job stability and access to formal employment.

Among the respondents, 12% received subsidies, indicating a reliance on government assistance. This is related to the most significant need identified—employment—highlighting the urgency of generating job opportunities that allow women to transition from inactivity to formal income generation, which would not only benefit the women themselves but also their families and dependents. The pandemic has reinforced existing gender inequalities, with women shouldering a larger share of caregiving and domestic responsibilities. This inequality limits their opportunities to fully participate in the labor market and advance their education.

The lack of formal employment and limited opportunities in rural areas force many women to seek informal work or engage in precarious economic activities. The shift to informal work during the pandemic increased these women's economic vulnerability while simultaneously increasing their unpaid household labor. These informal jobs often lack security, benefits, and social protections. Rural women also face significant barriers in accessing essential services such as childcare, eldercare, and vocational training programs, further limiting their employment and economic development opportunities.

By contrast, young women aged 16–25 do not actively participate in the formal labor market. This trend shows that younger women dedicate more time to education. For example, in Colombia, according to the Ministry of National Education, women lead university enrollment. However, it is essential to acknowledge that, in rural areas, socioeconomic and cultural patterns, along with difficulties accessing the educational system and high dropout rates, play a significant role. In Quindío, the tourism industry and the generational gap have led to rural exodus and migration in search of employment opportunities.

The data also show that many women spent more than eight hours per day on domestic work (221 respondents) and household activities (166 respondents) during the pandemic. Moreover, a significant proportion assumed the role of “homemakers” (72 respondents) or performed “household chores” (92 respondents), reflecting the increase in unpaid work. The impact of the pandemic has been more pronounced for women, who traditionally assume the bulk of caregiving and household responsibilities such as preparing food, cleaning, and running medical errands. Essential activities are often invisible and unpaid.

The time spent caring for children, adolescents, and the elderly varies, but 40% of the respondents dedicated more than eight hours per day to these tasks. This underscores the additional responsibility placed on caregivers, who often lack external support. As noted by Gómez et al. (2020), caregiving tasks are typically performed by women who spend between one and five years caring for dependent elderly individuals, with daughters often providing care for an average of 12 h per day (DNP, 2024). Most respondents indicated that no caregiving centers were available near their homes, which could be due to a lack of awareness or recognition of such institutions in the municipality, or the limited institutional coverage of care centers.

A portion of the population also cares for individuals with disabilities or chronic degenerative illnesses; approximately 10% of women devote more than eight hours daily to this task. The care economy extends beyond childcare to include support for other dependent household members, which raises concerns about the physical, psychological, social, and economic burden on caregivers. Gómez et al. (2020) found that caregiving responsibilities contribute to cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, and neurological diseases in caregivers (p. 104). Furthermore, the lack of adequate support networks for caregiving responsibilities intensifies the burden on women, affecting their ability to participate in the labor market. The authors indicate that the support networks in Quindío are generally small, typically comprising only one person, which limits the transfer of direct caregiving assistance (Gómez et al., 2020).

With school closures and the need to care for sick or dependent family members, the unpaid workload for women increased significantly during the pandemic. This

work is neither recognized nor financially compensated, aggravating gender inequalities. One emerging category in the study shows that the dual burden of paid and unpaid work negatively affects women's mental health and well-being, leading to stress and anxiety that undermines their quality of life.

4. Discussion

The results of this study underscore the critical role of the care economy in perpetuating feminization of poverty in rural areas. Women in Génova are disproportionately burdened by unpaid caregiving responsibilities, which severely limit their participation in the labor market. The findings suggest that gender-targeted policies are urgently needed to address the structural inequalities that underpin the care economy and labor market in rural settings.

One potential policy solution is the implementation of state-supported childcare services and eldercare programs, which could reduce the time women allocate to unpaid care and enable increased participation in formal employment. Such policies have been successfully implemented in other Latin American countries, including Argentina and Mexico, where national care plans have been introduced to redistribute unpaid care work and promote women's economic autonomy (Canelo and Duarte Avalos, 2023). In Colombia, the recent enactment of Law 2114, which promotes shared parental leave, represents a positive step toward achieving greater gender equity in caregiving responsibilities. However, further efforts are necessary to ensure that these policies reach rural populations and to address the specific challenges faced by women in these areas.

The feminization of poverty in rural Colombia is intricately linked to disparities in the care economy and labor market. The findings from Génova offer significant insights into how unpaid care work and informal labor contribute to the economic vulnerability of women in rural areas. Addressing these issues necessitates a comprehensive approach that encompasses both gender-sensitive labor market policies and targeted interventions to support unpaid care work. The results of this study indicate that public policies aimed at promoting gender equity in rural labor markets could play a crucial role in mitigating poverty and enhancing women's economic opportunities during the post-pandemic recovery period.

5. Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to explore the relationship between the care economy and the feminization of poverty in rural areas using Génova, Quindío, and Colombia as a case study. By examining the labor conditions, caregiving responsibilities, and economic vulnerabilities faced by women in this region, this study provides insights into how unpaid care work and informal labor perpetuate gender-based economic inequalities, particularly in the context of post-pandemic economic recovery.

It is concluded that the care economy in Génova is characterized by a significant burden of unpaid work, especially in the domestic sphere and in the care of dependents. Most people dedicate more than eight hours a day to these activities. This situation

reflects the additional pressure that many families face, particularly women who traditionally assume most of these responsibilities.

Another key element in understanding women's reality and their participation in unpaid work is that, historically and culturally, they dedicate more time to these activities. This is reflected in the roles they take on and the amount of time spent, which distances them from the paid labor market and continues to influence the gender gaps between men and women. Comparative data from Argentina and Colombia show that in Argentina, the time women spend on these tasks has decreased by more than three hours, while in Colombia, it has increased by over an hour in the last decade. The time women dedicate to these tasks despite the reduction in the gap currently triples the time men spend on the same tasks (Gontero and Veza, 2023).

Female unemployment, particularly in rural areas, is a complex issue requiring a comprehensive response. Job loss and decreased income have led many women in the municipality of Génova to engage in unpaid domestic and caregiving work, revealing the strong need for employment and financial support. Furthermore, the pandemic exacerbated gender inequalities, increasing the burden of unpaid work and limiting economic opportunities for women. In this regard, the intersection between domestic work and the care economy is evident as a considerable proportion of inactive individuals spend extensive hours on both domestic tasks and caring for dependents. This duality of roles highlights the significant burden faced by families, especially women, who bear most of these responsibilities.

5.1. Policy recommendations

Building on the findings of this study, it is imperative to develop robust public policies that strengthen care infrastructure and promote gender equity in employment, particularly in rural contexts. Immediate actions should focus on fostering community support networks and providing tailored training programs that equip women with skills necessary for economic participation. Additionally, rethinking the distribution of domestic and caregiving responsibilities is crucial for alleviating the disproportionate burden placed on women. This can be achieved through targeted interventions by both the government and private sector to generate employment opportunities that accommodate caregiving needs.

Furthermore, in the long term, the implementation of policies that actively promote gender equality, ensure equitable access to resources, and reduce existing gender gaps is essential for addressing systemic inequality. Community involvement must be prioritized in tackling the challenges associated with domestic work and the care economy. Empowering communities through awareness campaigns and participatory programs can create a more equitable and resilient societal framework. These measures not only ease the caregiving burden on women but also strengthen community bonds and encourage self-sufficiency. Strategic initiatives, such as promoting local entrepreneurship and raising awareness about shared domestic responsibilities in rural areas, can further reinforce these objectives.

It is essential to implement strategies that promote gender equality and generate spaces for agency from an economic perspective to address the impact of female unemployment. This includes the possibility of secondary caregivers supporting these

tasks and improving their social support networks. Additionally, there should be a greater presence of the state, local governments, and academia in the execution of social and educational projects that positively impact women and their families who find themselves in this situation.

5.2. Future work

While this study provides valuable insights into the intersection of the care economy and the feminization of poverty in rural areas, it also highlights several routes for future research. First, although the case study of Génova offers a detailed understanding of localized dynamics, expanding the scope to include multiple rural and urban municipalities would allow for comparative analyses. This approach could identify regional variations and broader trends, enhancing the generalizability of findings across Colombia and Latin America.

Future research could also address the temporal dimension of these issues through longitudinal studies. Examining the long-term effects of gender-sensitive policies and interventions on caregiving responsibilities and labor market participation would provide deeper insights into the effectiveness and sustainability of these measures during the post-pandemic recovery period.

Additionally, while survey-based data collection provided essential insights, incorporating mixed-methods approaches could enrich the analysis. For instance, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews or focus groups could capture nuanced perspectives on the lived experiences of women in caregiving and informal labor roles. This would complement the quantitative findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by women in rural areas.

Finally, Further exploration of structural and systemic barriers is another important area for future work. While this study focused on unpaid care work and informal labor, additional research could investigate how access to education, healthcare, and technology influences the economic participation of women in rural areas. Similarly, exploring the role of community-based initiatives and grassroots movements in addressing these disparities could yield actionable insights for policymakers.

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