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RESEARCH REPORT 4

Paid Care Workers in Nicaragua: All Undervalued, Different Worlds

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1. Introduction

This chapter aims to contribute to our understanding of the care diamond in Nicaragua, on the basis of an analysis of those people occupied in paid care work. Although there are various types of care work, they share the common feature that it is a “face to face” service that facilitates the development of the care recipient’s capacities – such as physical and mental health, knowledge, self discipline, empathy and the capacity to *provide* care. Examples of care work performed by women include that of teachers, nannies and nurses (England, Budig and Folbre, 2002: 455). These occupations imply some degree of delegation, from unpaid care in the household sphere to public and private services, both within and outside the household. They therefore involve some degree of “defamilialisation” of care, although this does not necessarily mean “defeminisation” of care as we will see. What are the main socio-demographic characteristics of the people working in care? Under which conditions do they do this work? What features do they have in common, and how are they different? And, what are the main changes that these occupations have undergone over the last ten years?

To answer these questions, we draw from two different statistical sources, the Population Census and the Household Survey to Measure Urban/Rural Employment, both from 2005. The table summarizes the occupations we focus on from both sources, based on occupational codes¹. Specifically, we focus on five occupations, which heterogeneity allows us to model the different conditions shaped by the socioeconomic differences of those who provide care. In this way, the research design allows us to compare differences and separate similarities. We are dealing with domestic workers, nannies, teachers of Child Development Centres inherited from 1980s under the Sandinista Revolution (CDI) and preschools, nurses and auxiliary nurses. Thus, we are dealing with two occupations that principally take place in the domestic sphere (domestic work and nannies), and four that principally take place in public or private institutions, two related to education (teachers of CDIs and of preschools) and two related to healthcare (nurses and auxiliary nurses).

Below we present some important methodological considerations and characterise care workers in socio-demographic terms, and the conditions under which they work. Second, we describe the major changes in this line of work between 1995 and 2005 after which, third, we detail the principal types of “worlds” of paid care in Nicaragua. Fourth, we explore how care workers deal with the care demands in their own personal lives, and how their strategies are similar to or different from those employed by women in other occupations. Finally, we consider major factors in promoting the defamilialisation of care in Nicaragua in general, and, more specifically, the conditions necessary for “decent” (as defined by the ILO) care-related jobs.

¹ The census used the Nicaraguan Standard Classification of Occupations (Clasificador Uniforme de las Ocupaciones de Nicaragua, CUONIC-2006), which is based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-88). The 2005 Employment Survey used a classification of its own. In addition to the occupation code and name, CUONIC-2006 includes a description of the work performed. The Employment Survey classification system, on the other hand, is essentially no more than a list of occupation codes and names.

2. Methodological considerations

The following table summarizes the sources of information for this study and the occupations considered.

Table 1
Care occupations considered, by statistical sources

Occupations	Population Census (2005)	Employment Survey (2005)
Domestic workers	Domestic workers	Domestic employees
Nannies	Nannies and other childcare workers	Nannies
Preschool teachers Preschool and CDI teachers	Senior preschool teachers; mid-level preschool teachers	CDI (child development centre) and preschool teachers
Nursing	Senior nursing staff Mid-level nursing staff	Nurses
Aides	auxiliary nurses in institutions auxiliary nurses working in homes	auxiliary nurses

Note: CUONIC-2006 includes the occupation “CDI teacher” under code number 2332, *Senior preschool teachers* (see Annex 1). In this table, we use the same nomenclature used in the code.

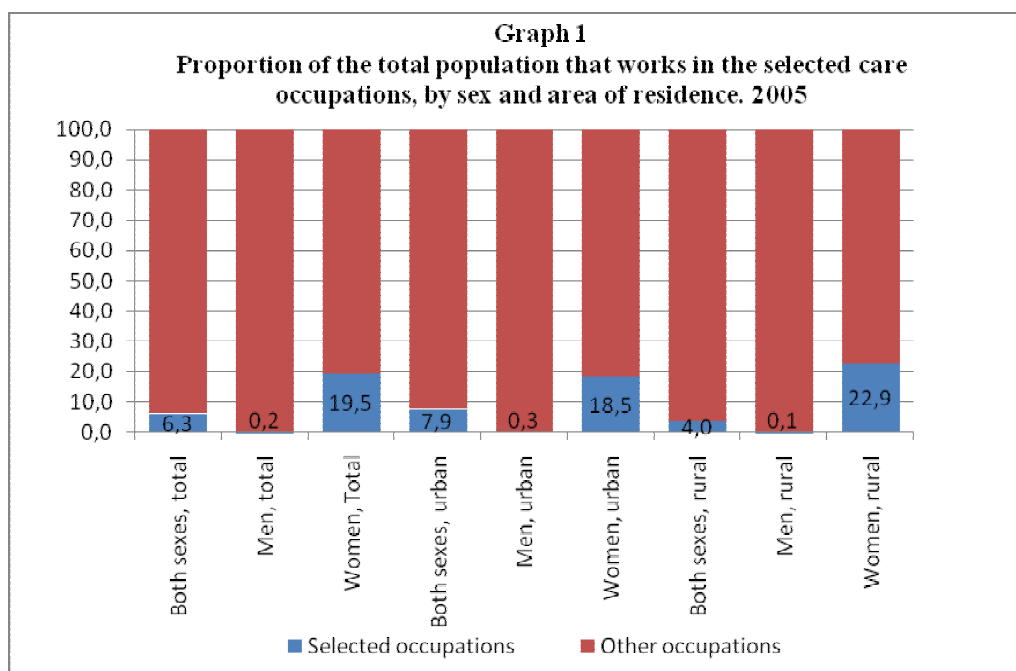
Source: 2005 Population Census; 2005 Employment Survey to Measure Urban/Rural Employment

Throughout, we complement our analysis with information from three secondary sources that provide qualitative information on female domestic workers.² A study by Guerrero, Terán and Tijerino (1993), which provides valuable information based on an intentional sample of 376 female domestic workers, despite the fact that it is almost 15 years old. The study deals with legal conditions, social and labour characteristics, benefits, work relationships and organisational factors. Another study, by Meléndez (2003), is based on 18 interviews and uses an interesting research design drawing on in-depth interviews with five female domestic employees, their employers and the individuals who provide care for their children. It also includes two interviews at employment agencies and one at the María Elena Cuadra Working and Unemployed Women’s Movement (Movimiento de Mujeres Trabajadoras y Desempleadas María Elena Cuadra). Third, there is a study by Valerio (2006) which revises mainly legislative documents on the issue of domestic work. A fourth study is the monograph *Derecho laboral de las trabajadoras domésticas nicaragüenses en San José, Costa Rica* (2005), which deals with violations of the labour rights of domestic workers, comparing the respective legal provisions regulating domestic work in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. However, since our work focuses on labour conditions affecting domestic workers in Nicaragua, it does not use the comparative data from this study.

² There is a notable lack of research on care-related occupations, though the authors’ search covered documentation centres at the Universidad Centroamericana, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, Ministry of Labour and Sandinista Workers’ Centre, as well as undergraduate theses.

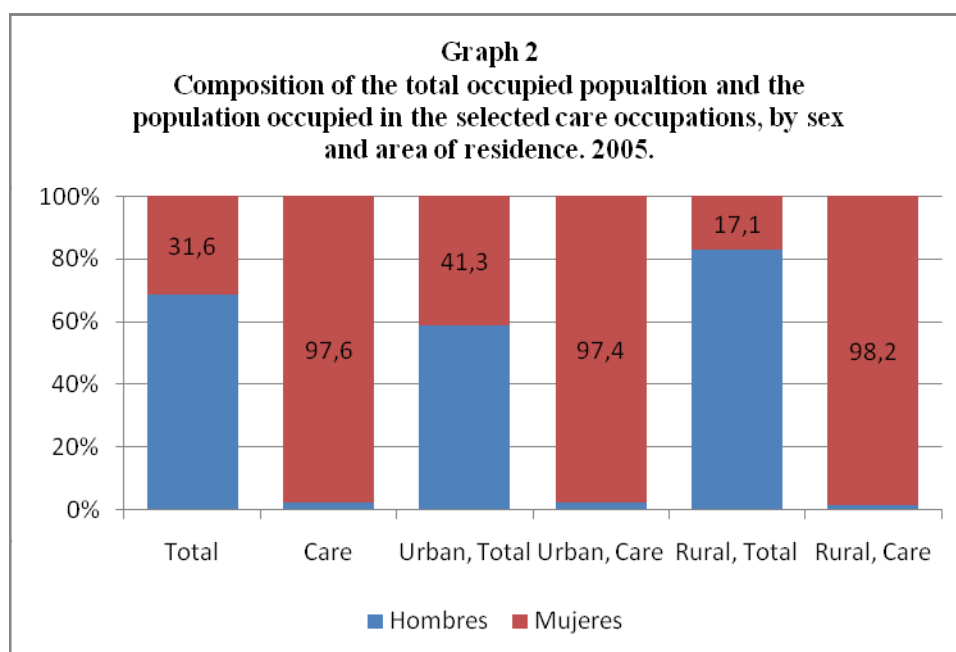
3. Care workers and the rest of the active population: similarities and differences

Paid caregivers represent a small proportion of the employed population. In 2005, there were 1,675,550 employed workers in Nicaragua, of whom 100,746, or 6%, provided paid care.



Source: Own elaboration based on data from the 2005 Population Census.

Almost all caregivers are women. While women constitute one third (32%) of the employed population, they represent the vast majority in the selected care occupations (81% of auxiliary nurses and 99% of domestic employees). In absolute terms, according to the 2005 census, 105,522 persons performed care work in the selected occupations, and 103,008 of these were women. Thus, the occupations studied are highly feminised, reflecting a high degree of segregation in the labour market for these occupations, which are considered “typically female” (see graph 2).



Source: Own elaboration based on data from the 2005 Population Census.

There is no difference in the age structure of the active population in general and the population occupied in care work in particular. In both cases the group between 18 and 49 years predominates, although it has a slightly higher weight among the care workers (81.9% and 76.8%). This lower weight among care workers is true for all age groups, except for the age group 15-17. The average age of care workers is 33 years, while this is 34.1 years for the general active population.

While the education level of the whole active population is low, it is even lower in the population of care workers. The proportion of care workers with primary and secondary education is higher, but the proportion of workers with technical and superior education is lower. The average number of years of education in the total population is 6.2, as compared to 5.8 for the care workers.

The proportion of people married or in consensual union is smaller among care workers than for the total occupied population, while the proportion of single people is larger. In the entire employed population, 60% of workers are married or in a consensual union. This percentage is considerably lower among care workers: 30% among nannies and other childcare workers, and 41% among domestic workers. Only 40% of the entire employed population is neither married nor in a consensual union. This proportion is greater among care workers: 43% for nurses, 59% for domestic workers (including, in both instances, a significant number of separated, widowed and divorced women, as well as single women) and 69% for nannies and other childcare workers (largely single women). The high proportion of nannies and other childcare workers who are not part of a stable couple can partly be explained by the fact that 23% of these workers are under 18 years of age.

The people that work in care almost always do so as salaried workers (92.0%). The predominance of this working arrangement contrast sharply with the total populations, where the salaried workers make up for 53.6%. Under the care workers, the lowest proportion of salaried workers is amongst nannies and other childcare workers (87%) and highest among nursing staff and domestic workers (over 90%). However, the lower proportion of salaried nannies could be due to a classification error. In the surveys the informant is asked to classify him or herself in one of the occupational categories, without knowing or sharing the involved concepts. In the last couple of years, this classification of the population in occupational categories has become more complex because of new work modalities generated by the flexibilization and deregulation of labour relations.

In the total occupied population, 38.3% is classified as independent worker, while for the care occupations this is only 8%. Independent workers refers to people with their own business, enterprise, farm etc., or those that exercise their function/occupation on their own account. Own-account workers do not have salaried workers, although they may have unpaid family workers (INEC, 2006). Among independent workers, the proportion of men and women that work as home auxiliary nurse stands out (23.4% and 12.8%, respectively). The registry of people that declare themselves to be employers or businessmen or women, although a very small percentage, also shows the problems of self classification and the confusion that exists between what one studied (profession) and what one actually does (occupation).

In the care occupations, the proportion of people working more than 48 hours a week is bigger than in the total population: 36.9% and 28.0%, respectively. Nicaragua's current Labour Code (Law No.185), established an ordinary working day of 8 hours a day, a maximum of 9 hours of extra hours a week and 6 consecutive working days a week. The exception is domestic work, for which the Labour Code establishes a special norm. In this case, there is no limit to the working day, the trial period is shorter, extra hours are not recognized and there is no maternity or professional risk protection (Hurtado, 2006: 57). Given that in most public or private institutions a normal working week consists of 5 days,

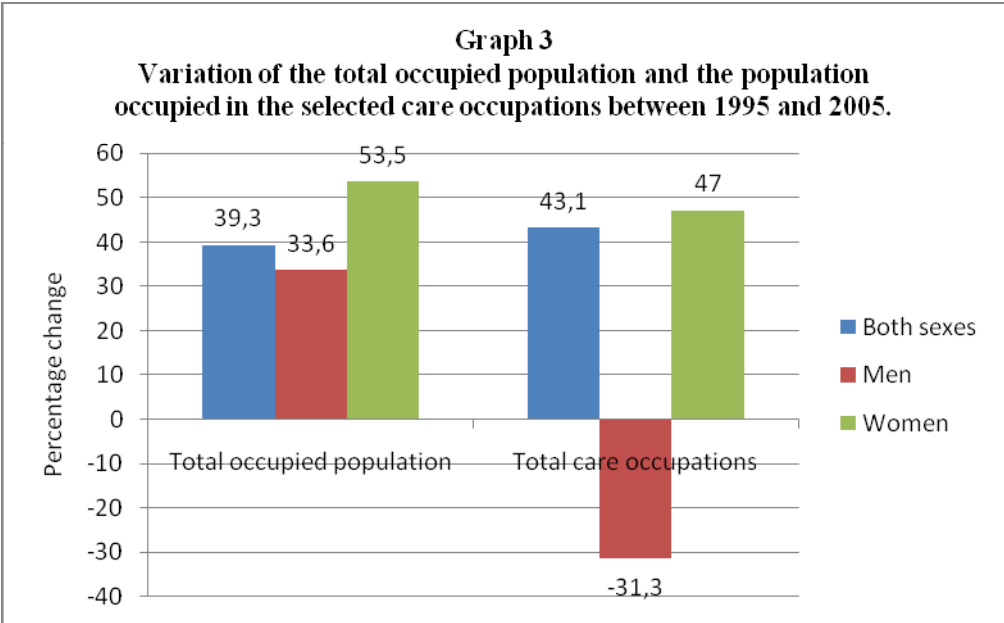
this means that it varies between 40 and 48 hours a week. However, the proportion of people that work within this range of hours a week is higher among the total population than among the care workers: 46.6 and 40.9%, respectively. In other words, the proportion of care workers that works either shorter or longer weeks is bigger than in the total population.

Finally, among the people that work in care, the level of union organization is extremely low, although quite similar to the general population. Only 2.7% of the care workers and 3.4% of the total population belongs to a trade union of some sort.

4. The most important changes over the last ten years

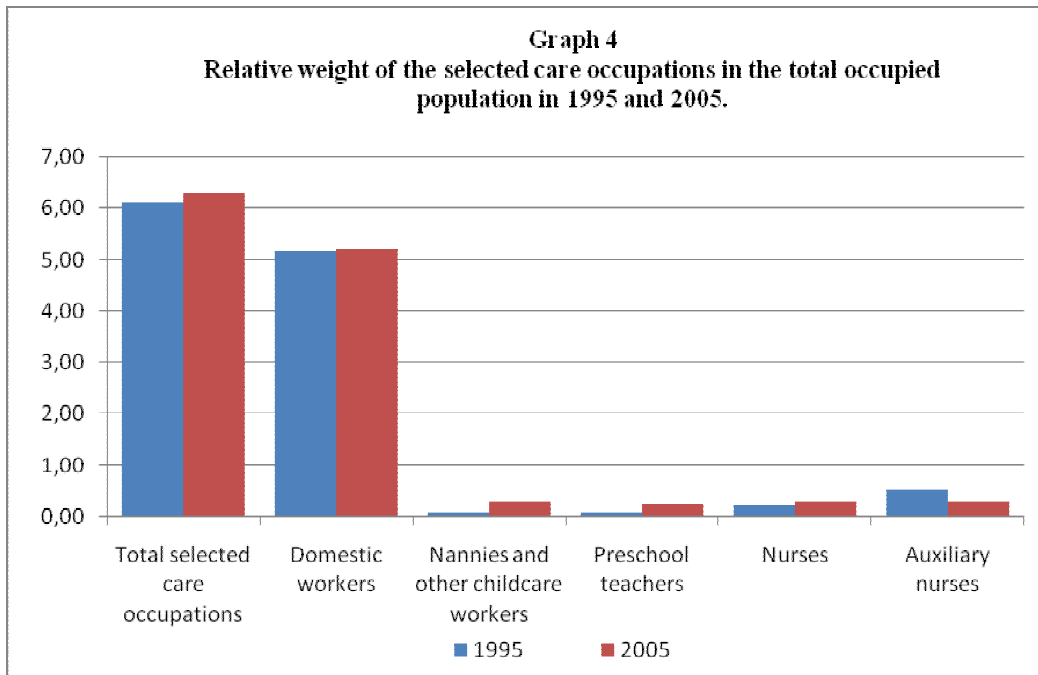
Between 1995 and 2005, the economically active population increased (by 39.3%), although the increase was much greater among women (53.5%) than among men (33.6%). This increase of the female EAP is consistent with trends across Latin America. Besides reflecting the economic necessity of these women entering the labour market and the loss of salaries' purchasing power, in Nicaragua it also reflects the increase in foreign investment that took place after the opening-up the economy at the beginning of the 1990s. Like in other Central American countries, this investment has been concentrated in highly feminised economic activities, like the textile *maquila* production.

The degree of feminisation of care work remained unchanged. In the same period, the proportion of women that work in care related occupations increased by 47.0%, although somewhat less than the 53.5% increase of the general female participation (see Graph 3). In contrast, the weight of men in care work reduced by 31.3% while in the total occupied population it increased by 33.6%.



Source: Own elaboration based on data from the 2005 Population Census.

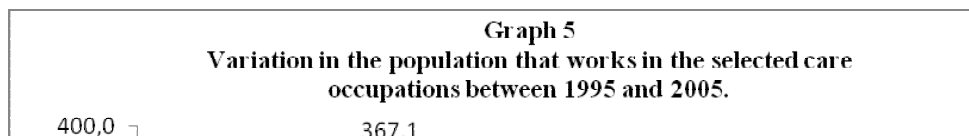
At the same time, *Care jobs increased as a proportion of total employment.* This increase also occurred in each of the specific care occupations under consideration, except with regard to auxiliary nurses, where the proportion declined, and domestic service, where it remained unchanged (Graph 4).



Source: Own elaboration based on data from the 2005 Population Census.

Two trends take place simultaneously: one involving a shift of care towards the domestic sphere, and one from the domestic sphere towards institutional venues for care. Between 1995 and 2005, the number of nannies increased by 367%, indicating a greater prevalence of in-home care (Graph 5). But also the number of preschool teachers increased by over 300%. This is good news in that it indicates a shift of the responsibility for care from the domestic sphere to the extra-domestic (whether public or private – a distinction we unfortunately are unable to make on the basis of available information).

These trends see themselves expressed in the fact that *the number of live-in nannies and other childcare workers increased*. In 1995, there was no record of persons in these occupations living where they worked. Thus, as of 2005, there was extraordinary growth among both sexes – more sharply among women than among men (369% vs. 292% for nannies and childcare workers, and 311% vs. 286.8% for preschool teachers).



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