

Abstract for “Unpaid Care Work in Latin America: Unfolding Patterns and Determinants”

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The importance of unpaid care work for modern economies and societies constitutes one of the main issues in gender studies and feminist economics. Its relevance has been emphatically pointed out in the last decades, trespassing the academic frontier and impacting public policy debate. This trajectory parts from the critique of traditional economic models and seeks to widen the scope of what is taken into account when studying inequalities between and within households. And a key step in this process has been the measurement through time use surveys of unpaid work and particularly, unpaid work devoted to care.

The literature from developed countries has been prolific in describing the main differences in the distribution of unpaid care work between men and women, and in explaining those differences by a set of other variables, like socioeconomic status, education, age or household composition. Also, different patterns of the role of families and the social management and distribution of care have been identified from the comparative analysis of time use surveys' results. In Latin America, however, the research progress around unpaid care work is much more recent and fragmented. Although there is growing evidence from recent time use surveys and many scholars are studying unpaid work, the systematic and comparative analysis of unpaid care work is still weak, especially from an explanatory perspective. But the political debate about national care systems and their gender implications seem to be moving fast, making clear the need for refining the analysis and moving towards more comprehensive analytical tools on what is happening when households - and women specifically- allocate all or part of their time to unpaid care work.

This paper seeks to contribute filling this gap, by offering original comparative evidence of the significance of care activities within unpaid work, its distribution between men and women and the main determinants that could be explaining this distribution. Based on recent time use surveys from five Latin American countries (Colombia, México, Panamá, Perú and Uruguay), the paper illustrates about basic gender patterns in unpaid care work across these five countries, and estimates the influence of different factors on the amount of time dedicated to care by men and women in each country (through tobit regressions). This evidence constitutes useful information to better understand what configurations contribute to more equally distributions of unpaid care work between men and women.