

Employment Status of Female Students in the Evening Program at the Universidad Surcolombiana at the Garzón, La Plata, and Pitalito Campuses

Situación laboral de la población femenina perteneciente a la jornada nocturna de la universidad surcolombiana en las sedes de Garzón, La Plata y Pitalito

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but is also essential for building a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world; in recent years, some progress has been made: more girls are enrolled in school, more women hold seats in parliaments and leadership positions, and laws are being reformed to promote gender equality. Despite these achievements, many challenges remain, as discriminatory laws and social norms continue to be widespread. This article presents an analysis of the labor characteristics of the female population enrolled in the evening program at the Universidad Surcolombiana across its campuses in the municipalities of Garzón, La Plata, and Pitalito in the department of Huila, covering aspects such as the employment rate, formality, economic sectors, income range, and level of satisfaction, among others. The theoretical framework is grounded in matrix capitalism, which posits that the gendered division of labor assigns women the majority of domestic and caregiving tasks, resulting in a work overload that leaves them with little time for training and recreation. This limits their opportunities to enter the labor market, earn sufficient income, and participate in social and political activities. The research is framed within a nonexperimental design that was applied cross-sectionally, in which data were collected at a single point in time through a written survey, with a quantitative approach and descriptive scope. A key finding is that 70 % of the population is in an employment relationship, is engaged in occasional work, or is self-employed, meaning that 30 % do not have an economic occupation; despite having low incomes and a lack of social security, the vast majority are satisfied with their current situation; the study concludes that it is essential for the female students under study to have an economic activity, since without one, 43 % would have to abandon their studies. This research will help regional institutions develop initiatives and programs aligned with local development plans and gender equity policies, offering new employment opportunities for students at the Universidad Surcolombiana; this will contribute to improving their quality of life, increasing retention rates at the university, and reducing gender gaps.

Keywords: Gender Equity; Labor Profile; Female University Students; Social Security; Job Satisfaction.

RESUMEN

La equidad de género no solo es un derecho humano fundamental, sino que es esencial para construir un mundo pacífico, próspero y sostenible; durante los últimos años se han conseguido algunos avances, más niñas están escolarizadas, hay más mujeres con cargos en parlamentos y en posiciones de liderazgo, y las leyes se están reformando para fomentar la igualdad de género. A pesar de estos logros todavía existen muchas dificultades ya que las leyes y las normas sociales discriminatorias continúan siendo generalizadas. En el presente artículo se muestra la caracterización laboral de la población femenina perteneciente a la jornada nocturna de la Universidad Surcolombiana en las sedes de los municipios de Garzón, La Plata y Pitalito, en el departamento del Huila, en aspectos como tasa de ocupación, formalidad, sectores económicos, rango de ingresos, nivel de satisfacción, entre otros. El marco teórico se aborda desde el capitalismo matricial, el cual concibe que la división sexual del trabajo asigna a las mujeres la mayoría de las tareas domésticas y de cuidado, lo que les genera una sobrecarga de trabajo y les resta tiempo para capacitación y recreación. Esto limita sus oportunidades de ingresar al mercado laboral, obtener ingresos suficientes y participar en actividades sociales y políticas. La investigación se enmarca en un diseño no experimental que se aplicó de manera transversal recolectando los datos en un solo momento a través de una encuesta de forma escrita, cuyo enfoque es cuantitativo y con un alcance descriptivo. Como resultado relevante, el 70 % de la población se encuentra en una relación laboral, trabajos ocasionales u ocupaciones independientes, lo cual arroja un 30 % no poseen una ocupación económica;

no obstante los bajos ingresos y falta de seguridad social, en su gran mayoría están conformes en su situación actual; el estudio concluye que para las estudiantes objeto de estudio es fundamental tener una actividad económica, ya que de no tenerla el 43 % tendrían que abandonar sus estudios. La investigación contribuirá a que las instituciones regionales articulen iniciativas y programas alineados con los planes de desarrollo locales y políticas de equidad de género, ofreciendo nuevas oportunidades de ocupación para las estudiantes de la Universidad Surcolombiana; lo cual contribuirá a mejorar su calidad de vida, aumentar la permanencia en la universidad y reducir las brechas de género.

Palabras Clave: Equidad de Género; Caracterización Laboral; Estudiantes Universitarias; Seguridad Social; Satisfacción Laboral.

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the UN adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, an opportunity for countries and their societies to embark on a new path aimed at improving the quality of life for people worldwide; the agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which encompass, among others, the elimination of poverty, the fight against climate change, education, gender equality, and environmental protection.

The fifth Sustainable Development Goal is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also one of the essential foundations for building a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world.

In recent years, some progress has been made: more girls are enrolled in school, more women hold seats in parliaments and leadership positions, and laws are being reformed to promote gender equality; however, the UN itself indicates that despite these achievements, many challenges remain, as discriminatory laws and social norms continue to be widespread.⁽¹⁾

In this regard, according to the World Bank, women are granted only three-quarters of the legal rights enjoyed by men; after ten years of research, this was revealed in its article “Despite Progress, Women Face Challenges in the Area of Labor Rights”;⁽²⁾ likewise, this institution indicated that the pandemic exacerbated gender inequality in Latin America, as in low-income countries, women are engaged in informal work or other forms of vulnerable employment, such as self-employment in small subsistence businesses or domestic work; on the other hand, there are more women in the hardest-hit industries, such as retail, hospitality, and tourism; and finally, women are traditionally responsible for caring for children and elderly individuals, which is why school closures and quarantines have a greater impact on women in the workplace and in academia.⁽³⁾

Although there is global discussion about gender equality and the inclusion of women in society, significant gaps still exist; specifically, regarding employment, the government recently released unemployment figures for February 2022, which show an overall rate of 12,9 % but a significant gender disparity: 10,3 % for men and 16,5 % for women.⁽⁴⁾

In line with the above, the faculty of economic sciences at the National University of Colombia conducted a study titled “Women and the Labor Market in Colombia: Wages Do Not Reflect Qualifications”. The study compared the working conditions of men and women in Colombia, taking into account that gender and gaps are pronounced features in developing countries; the study concluded that even when women have a higher level of education, they receive lower pay than men do, despite working in the same positions and economic sectors, with differences reaching up to 21 %; likewise, the research revealed that women take longer to find employment; on average, a woman spends 18 months looking for a job, while men find work in an average of 7 months.⁽⁵⁾

With respect to the overall employment rate (OER) and the gender gap, the department of Huila, as of 2019, had a gap of 28,7 %, making it the third department with the greatest disparity after Caldas and Caquetá and well above the national average of 20,8 %.⁽⁶⁾

For years, the Universidad Surcolombiana has been implementing a decentralization process to enable many more people to access higher education through its various campuses in Garzón, La Plata, and Pitalito. Additionally, most degree programs are offered in the evening, which allows students to balance work with their studies.

According to statistical data from the Universidad Surcolombiana, at the Garzón, La Plata, and Pitalito campuses for the 2022-1 academic year, the majority of evening students are women; 981 female students, equivalent to 63 % of the total evening student population,⁽¹⁾ who have decided to study with the aim of narrowing existing social gaps, securing better employment opportunities, and improving their own quality of life and that of their families; for them, the ability to work while studying is an opportunity to improve their circumstances during their academic life and, in some cases, even ensure their continued enrollment in university, as otherwise they would have to abandon their education for financial reasons.

Given that gender inequality in the workplace is not uncommon in our local context, it is necessary to characterize the employment situation of the female night-school student population at the Garzón, La Plata, and Pitalito campuses of the Universidad Surcolombiana in order to coordinate, among the various regional institutions, the creation of initiatives and programs that offer new employment opportunities for these students, in line with local development plans and public policies on gender equity, and thereby contribute to improving their quality of life, increasing their likelihood of remaining in the educational institution, reducing gender gaps, and empowering women in society—in this case, in the central, western, and southern regions of Huila.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Patriarchal Capitalism

The sexual division of labor consists of the almost exclusive assignment of domestic tasks of a reproductive and caregiving nature to women; in addition to imposing a heavy workload on them, this leaves them with little time for training and recreation

and limits their options for entering the labor market, accessing more diverse jobs, and earning sufficient income; it also limits their opportunities to participate in social and political activities.⁽⁷⁾

The traditional economy regards the division of labor between men and women as “natural,” but the division of labor and gender inequality support a patriarchal social system; in this context, women must struggle against labor inequality and inequality in society, seeking to overcome two mutually reinforcing dimensions of power: capitalism and patriarchy.⁽⁸⁾

Conceptual Framework

The following terms are relevant to this research and should be addressed within the conceptual framework outlined below:

Gender

Salvador⁽⁹⁾ defines the concept of gender as the cultural, social, and historical construction of the roles that men and women play in society; in today’s societies, this differentiation of roles assigns women unpaid social reproduction tasks (caring for children, elderly individuals, and the sick; domestic chores; and similar community activities) and men paid (market-oriented) production activities.

Gender Equity

According to UNESCO⁽¹⁰⁾, “gender equality” refers to the existence of equal opportunities and rights for women and men in the private and public spheres, which provides and guarantees them the possibility of living the life they desire; it emphasizes that gender equality is now internationally recognized as a key component of sustainable development.

Sociodemographic conditions

These are the sets of biological, social, economic, and cultural characteristics present in a population group;⁽¹¹⁾ among others, they include sex, age, marital status, household composition, and educational level.

Labor market

According to a study, the labor market is the physical or virtual space where job seekers and employers meet.

Job satisfaction

According to a study, as cited by a study, job satisfaction is the attitude of workers toward their own work and is based on related factors such as opportunities for personal development, the benefits and compensation they receive, administrative policies, relationships with other members of the organization and management, and the physical and material conditions that facilitate their work and task performance.

Legal Framework

Among the laws and public policies issued by national and regional governments that help improve the social and labor conditions of women in Colombia and that therefore contribute to solving the problem at hand are the following:

Law 82 of 1993: Which establishes regulations to provide special support to female heads of household? It protects women who, whether single or married, have permanent financial or social responsibility for their own minor children or other persons unable or incapacitated to work, whether due to the permanent absence or physical, sensory, mental, or moral incapacity of the spouse or permanent partner or a substantial lack of support from other members of the nuclear family.⁽¹²⁾

Law 581 of 2000: Law on Quotas for Appointed Positions. It allocates to women at least 30 % of positions subject to free appointment and removal, both at the highest decision-making level and at other decision-making levels, and includes at least one woman’s name on each shortlist, ensuring that lists contain men and women in equal proportions.⁽¹³⁾

Law 1429 of 2010. Enacting the Law on Formalization and Job Creation The First Job Act is a regulation aimed at facilitating access to job opportunities for individuals under 28 years of age and recent graduates, among others. The goal is to reduce the difficulty of finding work and the lack of employment opportunities for young people.⁽¹⁴⁾

Law 2114 of 2021: Extension of paternity leave. Paternity leave is extended from 8 days to two weeks, and shared parental leave and flexible parental leave are established; this reduces discrimination against hiring women due to maternity leave periods.⁽¹⁵⁾

CONPES Social 161 of 2013: Presents the National Public Policy on Gender Equity and outlines the indicative action plan for the 2013–2016 period. The issues addressed and prioritized in this document reflect central aspects of gender inequalities affecting women in our country, highlighting the need for a coordinated, intersectoral approach by the state. The action plan specifies the objectives, scope, and actions of the entities involved to advance efforts to close inequality gaps.

Ordinance 013 of 2014 (Huila Departmental Assembly): By which public policy on gender equity for women in Huila is adopted, guidelines and strategies are established, and the departmental government is authorized to create an intersectoral commission for its implementation.

Resolution 007 of 2020 (Garzón Municipal Council): 2020–2023 Municipal Development Plan, which aligns municipal gender equity policies with those derived from the national development plan and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Resolution 13-007 of 2020 (La Plata Municipal Council): Municipal Development Plan, which contains public policies on women and gender equality for this municipality. Resolution 047 of 2014 (Pitalito Municipal Council): The public policy on gender equality for women in the municipality of Pitalito, Huila, is adopted.

Background on Gender Equality Research

International Background

A study conducted by the Autonomous University of Mexico through research professor Marina Chávez Hoyos, which culminated in the publication of a book titled “Women’s Work: The New Inequalities”, focuses on women’s participation in the workforce and the significant disparities compared to men; the study reveals that Mexico is among the countries with the greatest gender inequality in terms of employment opportunities and identifies a wage gap in which women earn only 66 % of what men earn in similar positions.⁽¹⁶⁾

According to the new index published by the World Bank in 2019, globally, women are granted only three-quarters of the legal rights enjoyed by men; after ten years of research, this was revealed in its article “Despite Progress, Women Face Challenges in the Area of Labor Rights”;⁽²⁾ likewise, this institution indicated that the pandemic exacerbated gender inequality in Latin America, since in low-income countries, women are engaged in informal work or other forms of vulnerable employment, such as self-employment in small subsistence businesses or domestic work; on the other hand, there are more women in the hardest-hit industries, such as retail, hospitality, and tourism; and finally, women are traditionally responsible for caring for children and elderly individuals, which is why school closures and quarantines have a greater impact on women in the workplace and in academic settings.⁽³⁾

National context

The Faculty of Economic Sciences at the National University of Colombia conducted a study titled “Women and the Labor Market in Colombia: Wages Do Not Reflect Qualifications”; the study compares the working conditions of men and women in Colombia, taking into account that gender gaps are pronounced features in developing countries; the study concludes that even when women have higher levels of education, they receive lower pay than men do, despite working in the same positions and economic sectors, with differences reaching up to 21 %; likewise, the research revealed that women take longer to find employment; on average, a woman spends 18 months looking for a job, while men find work in an average of 7 months.⁽⁵⁾

In 2019, the University of the Andes conducted a study in 23 cities across Colombia titled “Female Employment in Colombian Cities: A Statistical Description Method,” whose objective was to statistically establish the gender gap in employment; the study presents significant statistical data by economic sector and city. Its most relevant conclusions indicate that the gender gap in employment rates in Colombian cities is due, first, to differences between men and women in labor force participation rates and, second, to differences between men and women in formal employment rates and that between 2008 and 2016, conditions for female employment improved, primarily because of an increase in formal employment.⁽¹⁶⁾

Local Background

In terms of the local context, it is evident that in 2018, economics professors from the Universidad Surcolombiana published the article “Evolution of the Gender Wage Gap in Colombia 2004–2012. An Analysis of the Glass Ceiling Phenomenon”, in which they sought to identify the determinants of the gender wage gap in Colombia, using the years 2004, 2008, and 2021 as reference points. The results show that there is an average wage differential in favor of men, and this gap is widening over time; 20 % and 40 % of this gap, respectively, is explained by factors other than individual productivity; likewise, the remuneration effect is the component that best explains the wage differential across different points in the hourly wage distribution, as the remuneration effect increases the gross gap by offsetting the negative value of the characteristic effect. Finally, it suggests that a public policy on education and labor market inclusion (including early childhood education) would be appropriate to enable women to stop dedicating themselves to household activities (the role of mother) and to enter the labor market.⁽¹⁷⁾

METHOD

Research Design

Given that the objective of this research project is to characterize the employment situation of female students enrolled in the evening program at the Universidad Surcolombiana at the Garzón, La Plata, and Pitalito campuses in 2022, we are dealing with a nonexperimental design that was applied cross-sectionally. According to Hernández et al.⁽¹⁸⁾, experimental research is conducted without deliberately manipulating variables, so phenomena are observed as they occur in a natural context and then analyzed; the same authors indicate that cross-sectional research involves the collection of data at a single point in time.

Research Approach

The research is quantitative in nature, as it collects quantifiable information to be used in the statistical analysis of the population sample. The quantitative approach is based on a deductive and logical framework that seeks to formulate research questions and hypotheses to subsequently test them.⁽¹⁸⁾

Scope or Type of Research

This research is descriptive in nature, as it details the situation presented within the context of the current issue regarding the enrollment of female students in the evening program at the Universidad Surcolombiana at its campuses in Garzón, La Plata, and Pitalito for the year 2022.⁽¹⁸⁾

Population and sample

The study population consisted of 981 students, of whom a survey was administered to a selected probabilistic sample using

demographic segmentation criteria from the Universidad Surcolombiana at the Garzón, La Plata, and Pitalito campuses and psychographic criteria of female gender enrolled in the evening program during the year 2023.

To establish the sample, simple random sampling was used. Given that the population size was known, the corresponding formula was applied using the appropriate confidence level and margin of error table; in this case, the confidence level was 95 %, and the margin of error was 5 %, resulting in a sample size of 260 individuals.

Data collection instruments

The survey was used as the data collection instrument, which Alvira⁽¹⁹⁾ defines as a technique for collecting information either verbally or in writing through a structured questionnaire.

The questionnaire included closed-ended questions on aspects such as employment rate, formality, economic sectors, income range, and satisfaction level; for the specific case of satisfaction questions, the Likert scale method was used, which consists of a set of items presented in the form of statements or judgments, to which participants are asked to respond; that is, each statement is presented, and the subject is asked to express their reaction by choosing one of the five points or categories on the scale.⁽¹⁸⁾

DISCUSSION

After the administered surveys were organized and tabulated, the following results were obtained:

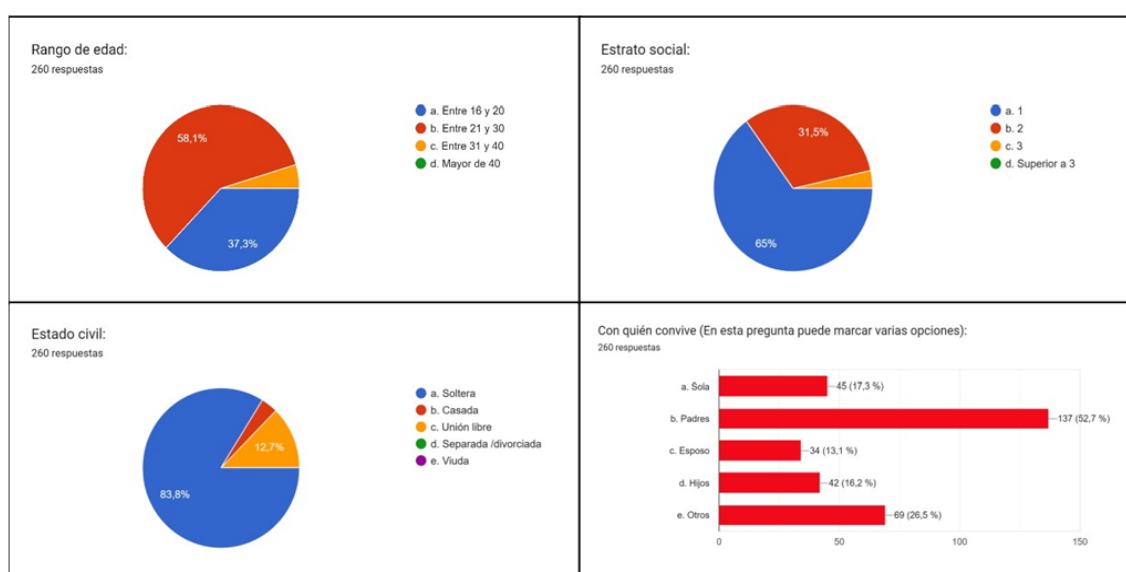


Figure 1. Sociodemographic characteristics

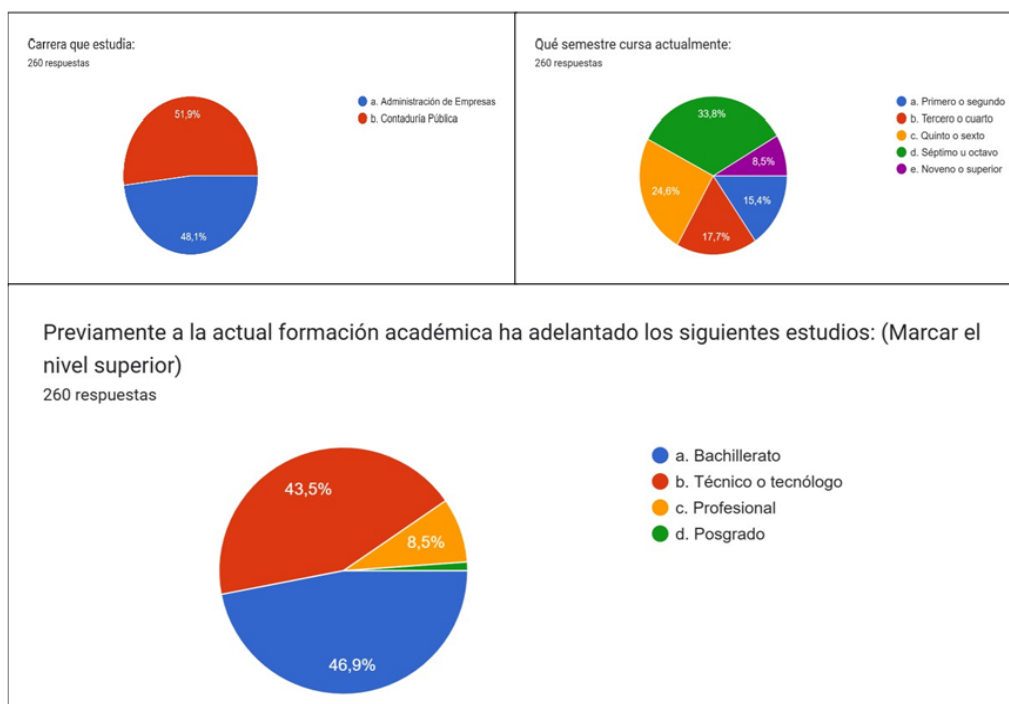


Figure 2. Academic profile

An analysis of the female student population enrolled in the evening program at the Universidad Surcolombiana's campuses in Garzón, La Plata, and Pitalito indicated that 58 % of the population is between 21 and 30 years old, while 37,3 % are between 16 and 20 years old; in other words, only 4,6 % are over 30 years old.⁽²⁰⁾

A total of 83,3 % are single women, and 12,7 % live in common-law relationships, as shown in the following graph; 78,8 % have no children, 13,5 % have one child, and 7,3 % have two children; and in terms of living arrangements, they share a residence with parents, spouses, relatives, or friends; however, 17,3 % live alone.⁽²¹⁾

Sixty-five percent belong to socioeconomic stratum 1, and a second segment comprising 31,5 % belongs to stratum 2.

51,9 % of the female evening students surveyed are studying public accounting, and 48,1 % are studying business administration; geographically, they are distributed evenly across the three campuses, with percentages of 33,1 %, 34,2 %, and 32,7 %, respectively, in Garzón, La Plata, and Pitalito. Only 33,1 % are in their first four semesters of study; that is, 69,1 % are in their fifth semester or higher. Prior to their current studies, 43,5 % had completed technical or vocational training, and 8,5 % had already held a professional degree.⁽²²⁾

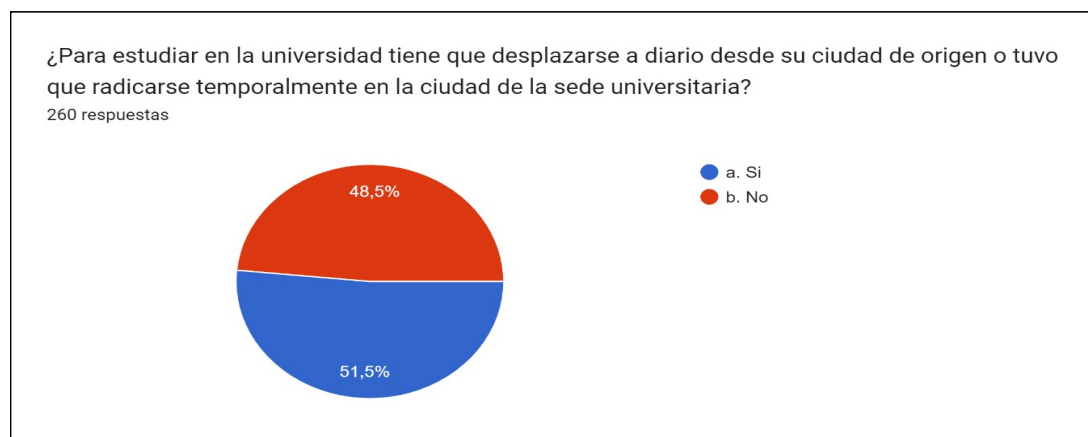


Figure 3. Mobility and residence status of the students

A total of 51,5 % commute daily from their hometown or have to move to attend college.

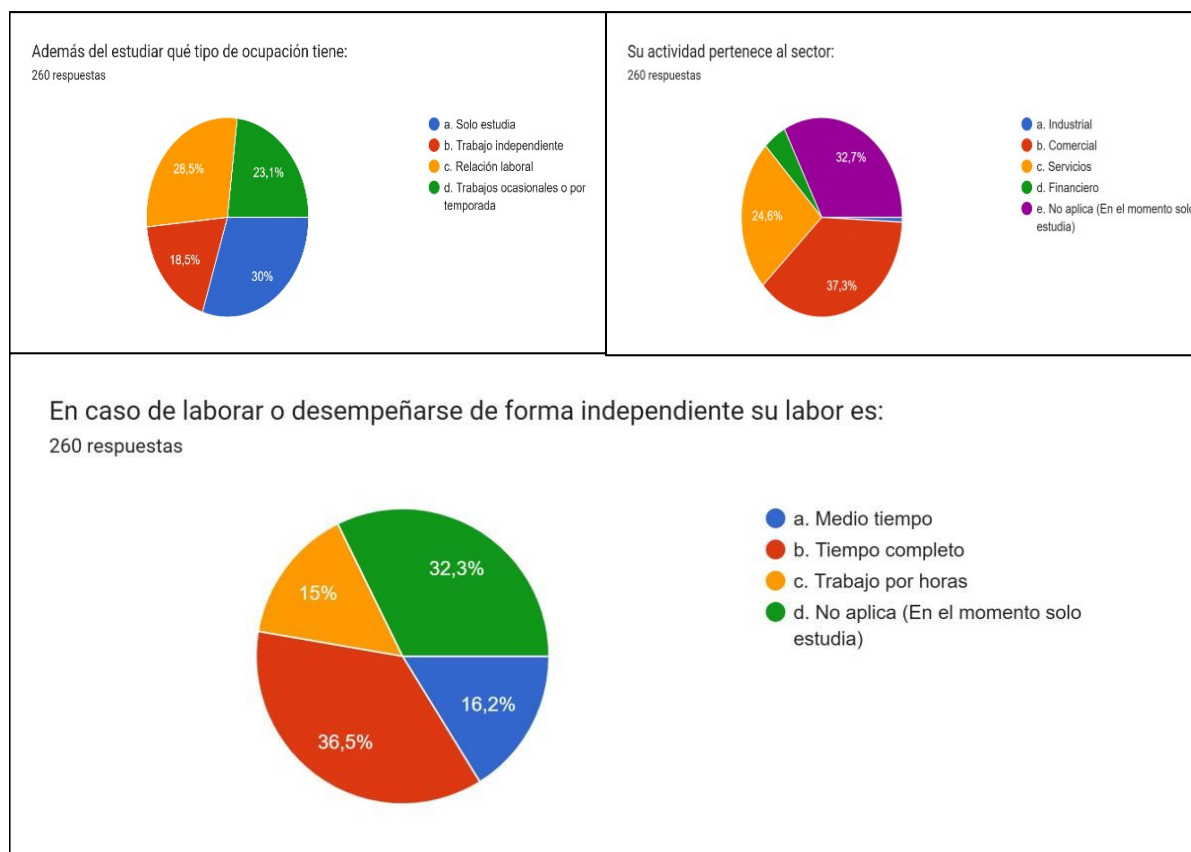


Figure 4. Employment and occupational status

Thirty percent are students, 28,5 % are employed, 23,1 % are in casual jobs, and 18,5 % are self-employed; their primary employment is in companies in the commercial or service sectors, 37,3 % and 24,6 %, respectively, only 4,6 % in the financial sector, and 0,8 % in the industrial sector; for the time they devote to these activities, 36,5 % work full-time, 16,2 % part-time, and 15 % intermittently or on an hourly basis.⁽²³⁾

As previously indicated, 30 % of the surveyed population is dedicated solely to studying; considering only the student population that has some type of occupation or employment relationship, 68,6 % have been in their current position for one year or less, 13,8 % for between one and two years, and 17,6 % for more than two years.⁽²⁴⁾

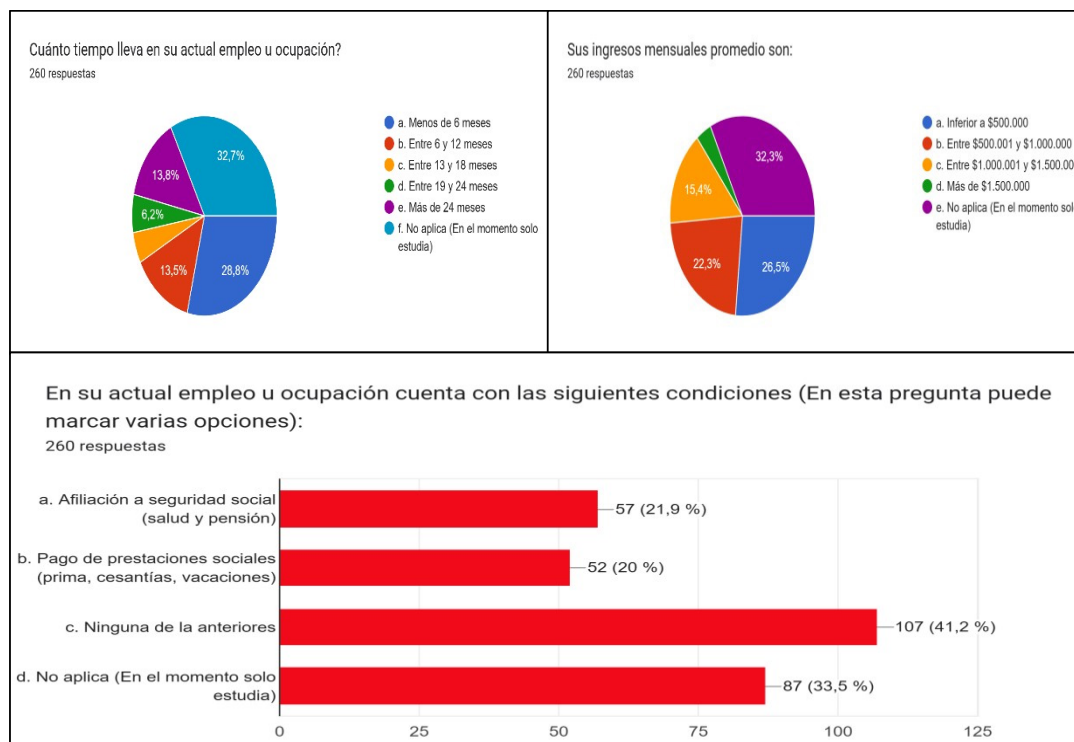


Figure 5. Working and economic conditions of employment or occupation

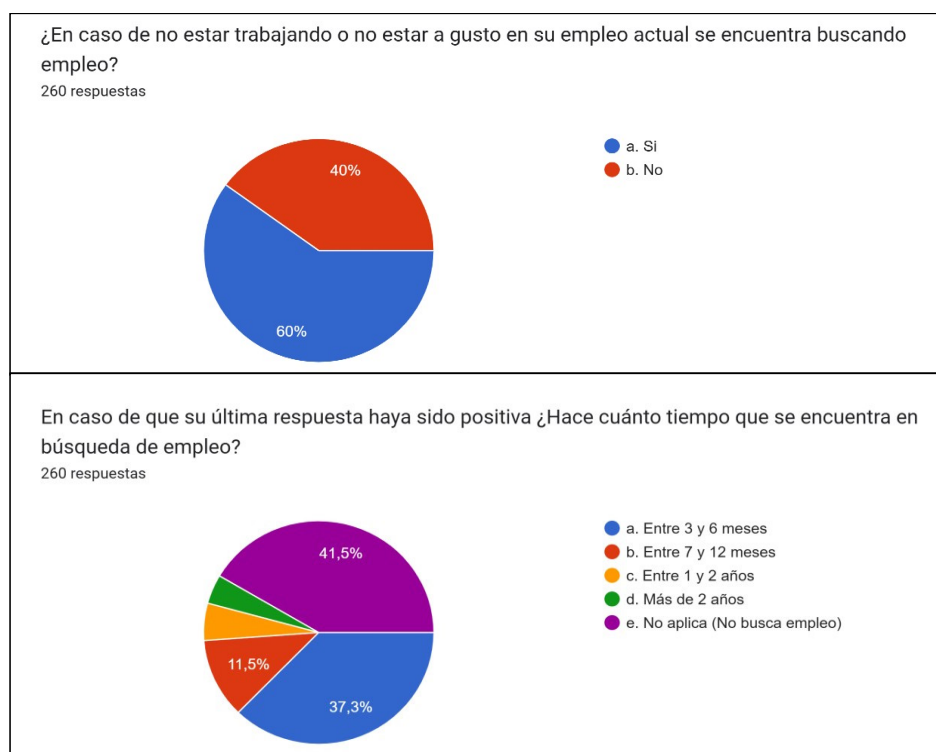


Figure 6. Employability and job search

Among the population engaged in economic activity, 71,7 % earn monthly incomes of less than 1,000,000 Colombian pesos (USD \$250), a figure below Colombia's minimum wage (USD \$325).

A total of 41,2 % of the working women surveyed reported that they did not have social security or statutory benefits; excluding the nonworking population, this corresponds to 61,2 % without social security or statutory benefits.

The aforementioned circumstances—such as low income, inadequate social security coverage, and a lack of fair recognition of social benefits—combined with dissatisfaction with their current jobs among the self-employed mean that 60 % are looking for a job or seeking to change jobs.⁽²⁵⁾

A total of 37,3 % (54,2 %) had been looking for work for between 3 and 6 months, and 11,5 % (16,8 %) had been looking for between 7 months and one year.^(26,27)

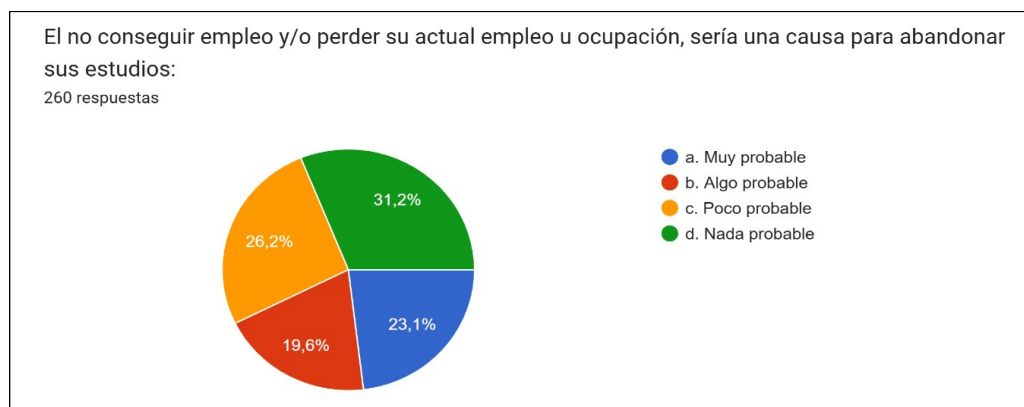


Figure 7. Academic vulnerability by employment factors

With respect to 23,1 % of female students, there is a high probability that they will have to drop out of school if they fail to secure employment or lose their current job; similarly, 19,6 % believe that this situation could affect their ability to continue their studies at the university.^(28,29,30)

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to characterize the employment situation of female students enrolled in the evening program at the Universidad Surcolombiana at the Garzón, La Plata, and Pitalito campuses.

Among the most important conclusions, 58 % of female students in the evening program at the regional campuses of the Universidad Surcolombiana are between 21 and 30 years old; the vast majority, 83 %, are single, and 79 % have no children. With respect to living arrangements, 53 % lived with their parents; 17 % lived alone; and the remainder lived with their partners, children, or friends. Sixty-five percent belong to socioeconomic stratum 1, 32 % to stratum 2, and the remaining 3 % to stratum 3.

Fifty-two percent of the female night students surveyed are studying public accounting, and 48 % are studying business administration; in terms of their campus, they are evenly distributed across the three regional campuses; and 33,1 % are in their first four semesters of study, meaning that 69,1 % are in their fifth semester or higher. Prior to their current studies, 43,5 % had completed technical or vocational training, and 8,5 % of the students were already professionals.

More than half of the surveyed students, 51,5 %, commute daily from their hometown or have moved to attend university; this entails significant additional costs, whether due to transportation expenses or costs associated with living away from home. This can be a considerable financial burden, especially for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

With respect to employment, 30 % of the students are solely students, 28,5 % have formal employment, 23,1 % work occasionally, and 18,5 % are self-employed. Among those engaged in economic activity, only 36 % do so full-time, with the commercial and service sectors predominating at 37 % and 25 %, respectively.

Sixty-nine percent have been in their current economic activity for less than one year; 72 % earn monthly incomes of less than 1 000 000 Colombian pesos (USD \$250), a figure below Colombia's minimum wage (USD \$325). Similarly, 61 % report that they do not have social security or statutory benefits.

These conditions mean that 60 % of the students are looking for a job or a change in their economic activity, a process that takes the vast majority between 3, 6, and 12 months.

Notably, the income earned by female students in the evening program at the regional campuses of the Universidad Surcolombiana is highly important for their continued enrollment at the institution, as 43 % state that if they fail to secure employment or lose their current job, it is highly likely that they will have to drop out of school.

The development of this research project—specifically regarding the identification of employment rates and the occupational profiles of female students in the evening program at the regional campuses of the Universidad Surcolombiana—provides relevant information to various regional institutions to help them develop initiatives and programs that offer new employment opportunities for these students, in line with local development plans and public policies on gender equity, and thus contributes to the potential improvement of their quality of life, increased likelihood of remaining in the educational institution, and a reduction in gender gaps.

FINANCING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: Carlos Julio Rojas Hermida; Wilson Fernando Luna Ocampo; Nataly Fernández Gutiérrez.

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