Cuadernos de Historia Económica - The Elusive Domestic Revolution: Time Use and Gender Roles in Colombia

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The findings confirm a rapid increase in female labor market participation, particularly among women with higher education levels. However, the redistribution of domestic caregiving responsibilities is progressing at a slower pace.

Publication Date: Wednesday, 5 of November 2025 **Approach**
This study examines the evolution of gender roles and time use in Colombia throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, using microdata from the population censuses conducted between 1964 and 2018, as well as the National Time Use Surveys (ENUT) from 2016–2017 and 2020–2021. These official sources allow for an analysis of the distribution of paid and unpaid work , while also enabling comparisons of trends in education, fertility, employment, cultural perceptions, time use, and relative income between generations of men and women. By providing empirical evidence on these transformations, the study seeks to inform public policy aimed at reducing gender gaps and strengthening the national care system.

Contribution
It provides a comparable characterization of the evolution of gender roles in Colombia through the construction of generational cohorts that harmonize census microdata and time use surveys. This comprehensive historical perspective helps to understand the persistence of gender inequalities and guide the design of public policies.

Findings
Despite historical progress in education and labor market participation, the transformation of gender roles in Colombia remains incomplete. Women have increased their presence in the public sphere, yet within households, time and caregiving responsibilities continue to be distributed unequally. The evidence reveals three key findings:

Time Use Gaps: Although fertility declined from an average of six children among women born between 1900 and 1935 (Silent Generation) to fewer than two among those born between 1981 and 1996 (Millennials), and university education expanded from less than 1% to nearly 24%, these advances did not translate into a more equitable division of unpaid work. Among employed individuals, women still devote nearly twice as much time to unpaid domestic and caregiving tasks as men. These disparities widen with motherhood, reflecting the “child penalty,” which reduces formal employment and increases wage gaps.

Social Norms: Even when women contribute more than half of household income, their domestic workload does not decrease—in some cases, it increases. This pattern aligns with the “gender deviance” hypothesis, which suggests that women who earn more than their partners tend to “compensate” for this deviation by taking on

more unpaid tasks. Income alone does not correct inequalities, as social norms hinder the redistribution of caregiving responsibilities.

Vulnerability of Progress in Time Use Equity: The pandemic exposed the fragility of recent gains in shifting perceptions of gender roles and time use distribution. School closures and extended home routines forced many women to exit the labor market and dedicate more time to unpaid care. These setbacks demonstrate that, without a robust care infrastructure, external shocks reinforce traditional patterns.

Fuente: https://d1b4gd4m8561gs.cloudfront.net/en/publicaciones-investigaciones/cuadernos-historia-economica/elusive-domestic-revolution-time