



REVISTA DE LA FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS DE LA SALUD

Vol. 29(1):44-56, January - April 2026
i-ISSN 0123-7047 e-ISSN 2382-4603



Original article

Mental health, family strengthening, and endogenous community development: a psychosocial perspective

Salud mental, fortalecimiento familiar y desarrollo comunitario endógeno: una perspectiva psicosocial

Saúde mental, fortalecimento familiar e desenvolvimento comunitário endógeno: uma perspectiva psicossocial

Carlos Germán Celis-Estupiñan  

ccelis2@unab.edu.co 

Director del Grupo de Investigación Violencia, Lenguaje y Estudios Culturales.
Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga. Bucaramanga, Colombia

Doris Amparo Barreto-Osma  

dbarreto@unab.edu.co

Directora de Transformación Social. Universidad Autónoma de Bucaramanga.
Bucaramanga, Colombia.

ARTICLE INFORMATION:

Article received: January 07, 2025

Article accepted: February 05, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29375/01237047.5270>

How to reference. Celis-Estupiñan CG, Barreto-Osma DA. Mental health, family strengthening, and endogenous community development: a psychosocial perspective. MedUNAB [Internet]. 2026;29(1):44-56. doi: <https://doi.org/10.29375/01237047.5270>

ABSTRACT

Introduction. The consolidation of the nuclear family coincided with the rise of industrial capitalism, along with a social division of labor for men and a sexual division of labor for women. In Colombia, this study was conducted within a family strengthening and community development program in the Nuevo Girón housing project in Santander. This study aimed to understand the subjective barriers and their reverberations in community dynamics within the framework of this program. **Methodology.** A qualitative, descriptive study was conducted, guided by Participatory Action Research (PAR) and the principles of the Do No Harm (DNH) approach. The psychosocial perspective is emphasized as a way of sustaining a productive tension between subjectivities, the family, and the community. Logbooks, field diaries, and conversations with 20 community participants were used as methodological tools to explore the expectations and frustrations of those involved in the program. The researchers provided accompaniment in a respectful manner, that is, non-intrusive, non-interventionist, and non-assistentialist. **Results.** The analysis showed that understanding the diverse forms of family ties, recognizing the effects of speech and dialogue in deconstructing reality, and generating reflective spaces for symbolization and autoethnography, among others, resonated with similar community-based experiences. These practices demonstrated, in qualitative and descriptive terms, that it is possible to adopt a critical stance toward how research is conducted with and within communities. The study highlights elements that subvert the logic of positivist



VEGILADA MINEDUCACIÓN

Author contributions

CGCE.

Conceptualization, methodology, research, drafting and writing of the original text, editing, revision, supervision, and project management.

DABO.

Conceptualization, methodology, research, supervision, and project management.

and epidemiological social research, showing that the community is not a passive object of study but a source of unique capabilities sustained by a set of histories and circumstances that converge in its territory. **Discussion.** The approach taken in this research avoided treating the community as an object of study—that is, as passive and deficient. Nor was the term “vulnerable population” used, given its victimizing connotations, which the community itself noted did not accurately represent them; this allowed us to respect their potential for capacity building. **Conclusions.** The importance of this research lies in the subjective and community resources that participants developed to interpret their own reality, enabling them to commit to their desires and life projects, with the understanding that transformations at the individual level generate reverberations in the community.

Keywords:

Family; Mental Health; Narration; Respect; Violence; Community development; Subjectivity; Family Practice.

RESUMEN

Introducción. La consolidación de la familia nuclear se da con la revolución industrial y el capitalismo, a la vez que se produce una división social del trabajo para el hombre, mientras que para la mujer se trata de una división sexual. En Colombia existe el programa de fortalecimiento familiar y desarrollo comunitario en la ciudadela Nuevo Girón, Santander. Se propone comprender los obstáculos subjetivos y sus resonancias en las dinámicas comunitarias a partir del programa de fortalecimiento familiar y desarrollo comunitario. **Metodología.** Estudio cualitativo descriptivo, orientado por la Investigación Acción Participativa (IAP) y los principios de la Acción Sin Daño (ASD). Se enfatiza el modo en que lo psicosocial permite mantener una tensión entre las subjetividades, la familia y la comunidad. Se utilizaron bitácoras, diario de campo

y conversaciones con 20 participantes de la comunidad como recurso metodológico para conocer las expectativas y frustraciones de los participantes del programa. Los investigadores ejercieron el acompañamiento de manera respetuosa, es decir, no intrusiva, no intervencionista, ni asistencialista. **Resultados.** Se obtuvo que la comprensión de las diversas modalidades del lazo familiar, los efectos de la palabra en la deconstrucción de la realidad, la generación de espacios reflexivos para la simbolización y la autoetnografía, entre otros, dialogan con experiencias de trabajo similares, y se muestra, de manera cualitativa y descriptiva, que es posible tomar una posición crítica frente a la forma de hacer investigación con y en comunidad. Se destacan elementos que subvierten la lógica de la investigación social epidemiológica y positivista para demostrar que la comunidad no es un pasivo objeto de estudio, sino un potencial de capacidades singulares sostenidas por un conjunto de historias y circunstancias que convergen en su territorio. **Discusión.** La dinámica de trabajo en esta investigación se resistió a tratar a la comunidad como un objeto de estudio, es decir, desde la pasividad y la insuficiencia. Tampoco con la denominación de población vulnerable, por ese carácter victimizante que la misma comunidad señaló no los representaba, esto permitió respetar su potencial para la creación de capacidades. **Conclusiones.** La importancia de esta investigación radica en los recursos subjetivos y comunitarios que los participantes alcanzaron para hacer una lectura de su realidad que les permitiera comprometerse con su deseo y proyecto de vida, contando con que las transformaciones en cada uno producen resonancias en lo comunitario.

Palabras clave:

Familia; Salud Mental; Narración; Respeto; Violencia; Desarrollo comunitario; Subjetividad; Medicina Familiar y Comunitaria.

RESUMO

Introdução. A consolidação da família nuclear ocorre com a revolução industrial e o capitalismo, ao mesmo tempo em que se produz uma divisão social do trabalho para os homens, enquanto para as mulheres se configura uma divisão sexual do trabalho. Na Colômbia existe o programa de fortalecimento familiar e desenvolvimento comunitário no conjunto habitacional Nuevo Girón, Santander. Propõe-se compreender os obstáculos subjetivos e suas ressonâncias nas dinâmicas comunitárias a partir do programa de fortalecimento familiar e desenvolvimento comunitário. **Metodologia.** Estudo qualitativo descriptivo, orientado pela Pesquisa-Ação Participativa (IAP) e pelos princípios da Ação Sem Danos (ASD). Enfatiza-se a forma como o psicosocial permite manter uma tensão entre as subjetividades, a família e a comunidade. Foram utilizados registros em diário de campo, bitácoras e conversas com 20 participantes da comunidade como recursos metodológico para conhecer as expectativas e frustrações dos participantes do programa. Os pesquisadores acompanharam de forma respeitosa, ou seja, não intrusiva, não intervencionista e nem assistencialista. **Resultados.** Concluiu-se que a compreensão das diversas modalidades do laço familiar, os efeitos da palavra na desconstrução da realidade, a geração de espaços reflexivos para a simbolização e a autoetnografia, entre outros aspectos, dialogam com experiências de trabalho semelhantes e evidenciam, de forma qualitativa e descritiva, que é possível assumir uma posição crítica diante das formas de fazer pesquisa com e nas comunidades. Destacam-se elementos que subvertem a lógica da pesquisa social epidemiológica e positivista, demonstrando que a comunidade não é um objeto passivo de estudo, mas um potencial de capacidades singulares sustentadas por um conjunto de histórias e circunstâncias que convergem em seu território. **Discussão.** A dinâmica de trabalho nesta investigação evitou tratar a comunidade como um objeto de estudo, ou seja, numa perspectiva de passividade e insuficiência. Também não se recorreu à designação de «população vulnerável»,

devido ao caráter vitimizante que a própria comunidade assinalou como não a representando, o que permitiu respeitar o seu potencial de capacitação. **Conclusões.** A importância desta pesquisa reside nos recursos subjetivos e comunitários que os participantes mobilizaram para realizar uma leitura da sua realidade que lhes permitisse comprometer-se com seu desejo e projeto de vida, considerando que as transformações em cada sujeito produzem ressonâncias no âmbito comunitário.

Palavras-chave:

Família; Saúde Mental; Narração; Respeito; Violência; Desenvolvimento comunitário; Subjetividade; Medicina de Família e Comunidade.

Introduction

Researcher Silvia Baeza from the University of Buenos Aires (1) provides an interesting historical overview of disruptive changes in the family. She notes that the consolidation of the nuclear family occurred with the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism, alongside a social division of labor for men and a sexual division of labor for women: “man as producer of goods, woman as social reproducer of the species; it leaves the world divided into a social world and a domestic world” (2). The nuclear family corresponded to a less diverse and less globalized society; however, for more conservative groups these transformations have been interpreted as a deterioration of the family. What changed was “the only way to understanding it, an idealized model in which there was room for fewer and fewer families”(2). This places on the psychosocial and mental health research agenda the difficulty of defining the family and imposing an ideal, standardized model.

According to Baudrillard (3,4) the violence of everyday life or transpolitical violence, is caused by the weakening of the values that prior to globalization supported the forms of authority. Such violence results from an implosion of the system through excessive consumption, increasing individualism and imperatives of happiness and success, which intensify social differences, poverty and inequality. Excessive fear and frustration in everyday life gives rise to feelings of helplessness, a lack of meaning in life and reduces people’s contribution to the community. Therefore, the notion of mental health that guided this work was not that of the World Health Organization (WHO): “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or conditions”. “Complete well-being” can hardly be considered a defining feature of contemporary society.

Given this lack of contextualization, we adopted the definition established in, which conceives mental health as “(...) a dynamic state that is expressed in everyday life through behavior and interaction, in such a way that it allows individuals and collectives to deploy their emotional, cognitive and mental resources to navigate daily life, to work, to establish meaningful relationships and to contribute to the community.”

In community life, what happens in the broader context resonates within families; thus, modes of subsistence and ways of relating can either support coexistence or function as vectors of violence.

Background of the Family Strengthening and Community Development Program

Ciudadela Nuevo Girón, in Santander, Colombia, is composed of survivors of the 2005 overflow of the Río de Oro River; it also includes other residents affected by the armed conflict, including demobilized individuals and displaced populations. The community carried a stigma of violence and insecurity that has gradually shifted through social transformation initiatives.

Among the findings of the aforementioned research is the need to focus on the family and to open a space for listening where people can speak about their issues related to the ways in which intrafamilial relationships are established, calmly and without fear of judgment, diagnosis or pathologization. This reflection showed that the nuclear family paradigm was no longer relevant. Identifying new forms of association made it possible to point out certain subjective and collective obstacles that hinder the development of capacities for building a dignified life.

Transformations in the family system, driven by political factors, are evident in women’s empowerment, the exercise of their rights, new forms of neoliberal capitalism and the legitimization of sexual diversity, among others.

Based on the particularities of the experience, the objective was formulated as follows: “To build, in partnership with the Nuevo Girón community, a psychosocial support program based on participatory action methodologies, in order to contribute to family strengthening and participation in community processes.” This aimed to facilitate access to new forms of association that strengthen child-rearing, livelihood and older adults, as well as the establishment of new psychosocial support networks among community members, community institutions and the university.

Through job-training workshops for employment, personal development activities and initiatives for family and community cohesion exercises, researchers, the university

and the private sector were integrated into the strategy *Dejando Huellas* and the *Bordados initiative*.

The purpose of this article is to narrate the research experience derived from the family strengthening and community development program, which sought to integrate a psychosocial perspective on mental health with Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies. It also contributed to strengthening the link between the university and community development, in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to health, well-being and the eradication of poverty.

This initiative builds on a previous project entitled *Manifestations of Transpolitical Violence and Its Impact on Mental Health: A Study for the Design and Implementation of a Psychosocial Support Program*.

Methodology

This participatory research and action program entailed a psychosocial perspective that allowed a healthy and productive tension between individual subjectivities, the family, and the community, in other words, between the subjective and the social community. Conversation as a methodological tool helped us both understand how the community describes its expectations and frustrations, to provide support in a respectful manner, one that is non-intrusive, non-interventionist, and non-intrusive. This resource made it possible to glimpse the forms that everyday violence takes there and its impact on mental health, that is, on what hinders each person from carrying out their initiatives and building a life in which they feel better about themselves within a possible and reconciled coexistence. Ethnographic techniques, such as field notes and diaries were used to record conversations and interventions, as well as to document the workshops conducted to achieve the objectives. A manual content analysis was performed to identify subjective obstacles and their repercussions on community dynamics.

The methodological approach adopted for this program involved two key aspects; first, conceptual rigor; and second, flexibility in procedures. A qualitative methodology was adopted aiming to respect the community's own timeline rather than imposing activities. For this reason, a structure was proposed that included a beginning, a development phase, and concluding moments designed to open new horizons, since community life is a continuous and sustainable process of freedom and diversity. Forcing and imposing only produce resistance to transformation. The orientation was based on the principles of Non-Harmful Action (NHA) (8), for which it is important to note that the researchers' good intentions are not sufficient and that any

agent external to the community alters its logic and can produce new conflicts. It was also guided by Participatory Action Research (PAR) (8), which, by respecting the community and not treating it as a passive object of study, moves away from positivist scientific activity that, when speaking of populations, homogenizes (9) and reduces the uniqueness of the community to statistical data. This approach overlooks the distinctiveness and novelty of emerging identities. Priority was given to experimentation based on narrative experience and social history.

To achieve this, it was important to seek and defend the possibility of participation in a democratic environment capable of recognizing and fostering equity among participants (10). It was also necessary to acknowledge that every action taken within the family resonates in the community. At this point, reflexivity, understood as the researcher's critical awareness of the effect of their presence on the community, proved pertinent (11). In the psychosocial, understood as that tension between the subjective, interwoven with language and the body, and inscribed in the symbolic (12), the other's field (culture and difference) makes it essential to cultivate a critical, respectful, and democratic attitude to remain attentive to what is happening in the families and the community.

A team was formed comprising researchers: a psychoanalyst, an organizational psychologist, students from research groups, and community members. Community consensus enabled the project, and together they agreed on the method, schedule, and equal participation based on inclusion. The work unfolded in three phases open to discussion and modification. First, families wishing to participate in the program were invited to send a representative. Second, the project was presented, and it was agreed that the conditions would not be fixed rules but rather guiding principles for building stable relationships among participants. For the researchers, it was necessary to adopt a Socratic attitude, that is, to listen attentively and respectfully to the community's concerns, without providing answers, but rather to maintain a dialogical disposition to generate and devise alternatives. This is why it was important not to rush to understand or offer opinions; it was necessary to allow both the family and the community, so as not to make promises that did not align with their realities (13). This maieutics served as a connecting point between the communities' knowledge and scientific research. Based on these meetings, a series of logs were created, written with simplicity and precision, and shared at each meeting to revisit the topics discussed and allow participants to provide their approval. Finally, together with family members, topics relevant to family strengthening and community development were identified. No training sessions were held because the community pointed out that they end up being an overload of uncritical, decontextualized information that serves

unrealistic ideals; as an alternative, guided discussions were organized using the community workshop methodology to conduct participatory analysis that led to the identification of problems and their solutions. The meetings were held weekly at the Fupaydes Foundation’s facilities. Below is a description of the participants: (Table 1).

Table 1. Description of the participants

Women	Men	Families	Personal development workshops	Strengthening entrepreneurial disposition workshop
18	2	20	10	20

Source: Made by authors

Among the effects of the methodological experience, one can mention the expression of feelings through statements such as “I won’t be able to,” “I won’t succeed,” and “I won’t be able to take advantage of this opportunity.” The embroidery exercise helped them recognize obstacles and opportunities. In the reflection, it emerged that what is essential to acquiring a profession is perseverance and the willingness to start over. “The tangle” called into question how the thread is handled, since a snapped or broken thread indicates excessive force or a lack of care. These elements were used to create metaphors and discuss experiences in which circumstances demand attentiveness, tying knots where necessary, and letting go when the situation warrants it. This was the case for a migrant woman whose departure from her country meant abandoning her sewing factory and giving up on the idea of a settled life. She had to “start over.” After having had a place of her own, she was forced to “live off someone,” to look for work, to endure xenophobia and racism, and to watch as doors closed in her face. These experiences influenced her ability to build her dreams under the new circumstances and to embark on a new venture without losing her desire or will to live.

This methodology was evaluated by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (CIEI) of the Autonomous University of Bucaramanga, meeting the regulatory quorum, and the request and submitted documentation were APPROVED: CIEI-UNAB 011-2021, as recorded in Act No. 0145 of May 21, 2021, granting ETHICAL APPROVAL. Definition of Risk: Based on Resolution No. 008430 of 1993 of the Ministry of Health, this research is considered a minimal-risk study. There is no conflict of interest or funding conflict in this research.

Results

This investigation showed that the IAP and ASD methodologies turned the work into a living laboratory

for training, strengthening community action, and seeking solutions grounded in each person’s history.

Among the key outcomes obtained, one included understanding the diverse modalities of family ties situated in context and the effects of language in deconstructing reality. The work also generated reflective spaces for symbolization, autoethnography, the establishment of bonds and the taking of a stance with regard to projects that involve the family and the community.

On understanding family ties and the effects of language.

The defining characteristic of family ties is ongoing recomposition. The modern family was governed by affective logic, whereas the postmodern family depends on a sexual agreement. New family structures include single mothers, siblings acting as parents, same-sex couples, children conceived through assisted reproduction, and others. “The future family must reinvent itself once again” (14).

The following case is illustrative: a woman arrives at a meeting with four children, two belong to a neighbor, and the others to a woman who leaves early for work. The neighbor gives her some money, but she has not reached an agreement with the other woman; the children sit on her doorstep and being a believer, she does not turn them away, she feeds them and says, “It was like becoming their grandmother”, to protect them from neglect and abuse. At times, institutional protocols do not account for these particularities; instead, they seem to be aimed at imaginary communities where harmony and participation prevail. These situations demonstrate how communities make arrangements to improve their ways of life, build capabilities to do and to be, in order to lead a dignified life within the available opportunities (15).

The conversation enabled an analysis of obstacles and traumatic traces from their lived experiences, which function as the psychological substrate of fears and inhibitions that hinder the development of capabilities. Belonging to a group oriented towards sharing projects and difficult times constituted a psychosocial support network, as “the way in which the family organizes, responds and copes with its demands depends on its functioning styles” (16).

Creating spaces for reflection and symbolization

The main outcome of the *Bordados* initiative was the creation of psychosocial reflective spaces that enabled female heads of household, men, and young people to engage in meaningful work and open up opportunities to earn an income (Figures 1-2). It also led to the emergence of symbols, as “embroidery” served as a metaphor for

repairing the subjective and social fabric. For one participant, it meant “having a craft so as not to go hungry”, leaving behind precarious informal work and working from home. This touches on key dimensions of dignity—home, work, and art. Ospina (17) echoed

Picasso wrote: “For me, a home is a workshop or it is nothing”. It is not the same to have the chance to be at home with one’s children while working as it is to be exposed out on the streets.



Figure 1. Embroidering dreams
Source: prepared by the authors.



Figure 2. Embroidering dreams
Source: prepared by the authors.

One cohesion activity was named by participants “The Box of Dreams” (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The dream box
Source: prepared by the authors.

A small basket was provided in which they wrote down their goals. A ritual was created to build meaning around their history; those who wished to could express what was causing them pain. Participants said it was important to allow themselves a sense of freedom so as not to be defined by the past, and thus to persevere and overcome

obstacles. The burning ritual allowed them to give the past a different place, without forgetting it, using it as the foundation for a new beginning. The symbol was “rising from the ashes” and the fire illuminated this new opportunity (Figures 4 and 5).



Figure 4. Burning memories
Source: prepared by the authors.



Figure 5. Burning memories
Source: prepared by the authors.

In the box, they kept the symbols and tools of their new project. “El dechado”, which according to the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) (18) is “a model to be imitated”, served here as a repository of perseverance, as the fabric bore witness to repeated attempts to start anew and the patience required to achieve fine embroidery. As the dechado was completed, the possibility emerged for the university and the community to forge a partnership with a hand-embroidery company called Bordino. Following quality tests, several participants secured employment contracts and piecework commissions (Table 2).

Table 2. Participants and achievements in the program

Number of participants	Achieved results
2	Started their own businesses.
4	Hired directly for the partner company.
6	They opted for piecework.
8	Continued developing independent productive activities, such as mechanics, tailoring and product sales.

Source: prepared by authors

As researchers, it was meaningful to accompany these meetings and pose questions respectfully, within the ASD framework, which promotes the principles of “dignity” (because every human being is an end in themselves), “autonomy” (to recognise that each person defines their own project) and “freedom” (to make decisions). In short, the aim was for each person to recognize in their own resources the most viable possibilities for turning this experience into a meaningful project (19).

New ways of taking a stance based on reflection and serendipity

In order to foster a desire for personal and community transformation, a box was brought in and each participant

was asked to describe its contents. Inside the box was a magnifying mirror, which took them by surprise. They described seeing pain, a will to live and opportunities. They also reported shame, uncertainty and a firm resolve to reflect on the stories they had woven in Nuevo Girón. This revealing moment occurred without the fascination that hearing another’s pain can produce in some. Students and researchers accompanied this process and shared their experience with “the magic box” (Figure 6). What emerged was the interesting idea of thinking of life as an autoethnography within the methodological possibility of reading society through a biography (20). Reflection focused on the development of skills and on awareness of their rights as citizens and agents of change.



Figure 6. The magic box
Source: prepared by the authors.

Work also focused on building trust, that is, being able to be with others and to have faith in them. Hence the emphasis on valuing the personal diary and how personal narrative contributes to understanding community experience. The metaphor of the caterpillar and the butterfly was explored (Figure 7), highlighting the importance of facing transformations in the way we think and live. The caterpillar stage is a crucial moment. The processes leading up to the chrysalis’s rest represent an intense internal activity that does not cease until a butterfly emerges. Participants described difficulties as the caterpillar’s slow, laborious steps. Faced with what seemed like a dead end, each person experienced a “flutter of wings” that made it possible to see things differently. At that moment there was a flash of “serendipity” or happy coincidence. In the midst of reflection, a monarch butterfly fluttered across the room. This was a sign that it was necessary to cultivate enthusiasm, patience and perseverance, that goals are achieved little by little, and that life is transformation.



Figure 7. The caterpillar and the butterfly
Source: prepared by the authors.

The Saeta strategy was linked to an entrepreneurial mindset. A married couple took the step of opening a mechanical workshop in their home — an important

outcome of the reflective participation, where community issues were discussed and how each person could take a stance, whether through indifference, concern, or the possibility of consolidating a decisive and joint action for a transformation of community identity.

A clothesline as a strategy for desire grounded on real possibilities

It was important to support how desires are constructed so that they do not become unattainable ideals, debts, guilt and depression. Someone suggested: “No dreamer is too small, and no dream is too big.” Participants drew the outline of a garment and wrote down their aspirations and how to achieve them. A “clothesline” was set up (Figures 8-9), which gradually filled with initiatives and fears expressed in sayings such as “You can’t live on dreams alone”, or “Nowadays, everyone’s selling pyjamas”. They concluded that when obstacles are fed, there is no room for desire.



Figure 8. Clothesline
Source: prepared by the authors.



Figure 9. Clothesline
Source: prepared by the authors.

A woman who thought she had everything sorted out said: “I never imagined I’d end up on a skills course to create a job for myself.” She lost her husband during the pandemic and was left unsure of what to do. She understood that now was the time to forge opportunities. She wanted her children to see her move forward. She designed a ruana because she needed warmth; she felt alone and abandoned by her husband (Figure 10).



Figure 10. The ruana
Source: prepared by the authors.

Then there is the case of A, a Colombian woman who lived in Venezuela for many years. She explained that she has had to use cloth diapers for her son. What initially felt humiliating to her gave her the idea of devising some cloth diapers that are easy to wash and environmentally friendly (Figures 11-12). Her experiments are proving successful. On “El Tendedor”, she spoke of having her own brand.

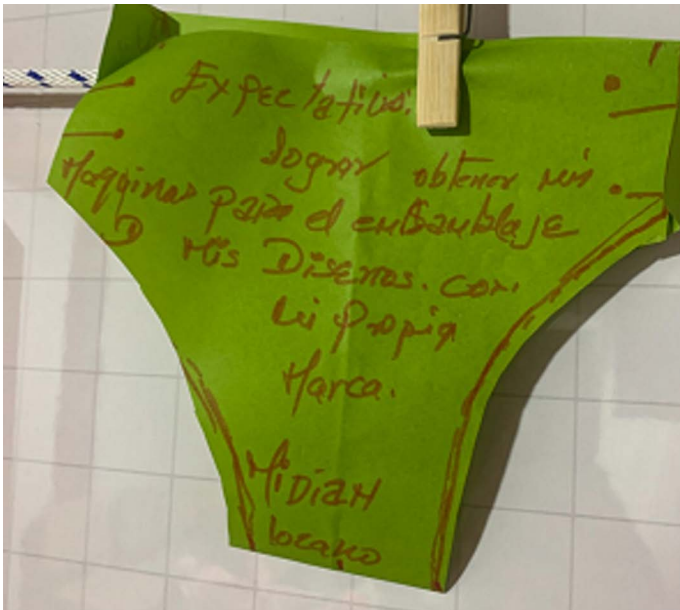


Figure 11. The diaper
Source: prepared by the authors.



Figure 12. The diaper
Source: prepared by the authors.

Discussion

The research on mental health, family strengthening, and community development carried out in Nuevo Girón yielded a set of findings that allow a discussion with

other studies and community-based experiences. From a qualitative and descriptive standpoint, this section shows how, based on the study objective and findings, it is possible to adopt a critical position regarding how research is conducted within communities.

In Spain, *the Intercultural Community Intervention Project* (21) highlights, in terms of intervention, education, health, and civic relations. Although this experience was influential due to its sustainability and coverage, the family-strengthening proposal presented here was distinguished by its psychosocial component as a foundation for relational work. This required engaging with the affective responses that emerge when encountering difference—namely, enmity, jealousy, envy, among others—not as flaws, but as resources to be worked through under more favorable conditions for family and community work.

In Mexico, *the Family and Community Perspective project* (22) was grounded in research on the family and its social dynamics in relation to discrimination, vulnerability, and poverty. A critical and differentiating element, compared with the family-strengthening program was the intention to move away from idealizing social reality in ways that overlook failure in community actions. From a psychosocial perspective, such “failures” are better understood as opportunities to reorganize initiatives. In Guanajuato, *the Psychosocial Support Proposal with Migrant Families* (22) implemented a model focused on psycho-affective health centered on women. Its purpose was to provide tools to cope with the downturn caused by changes in family dynamics. In Nuevo Girón, by contrast, it was necessary to consider the residual effects of migration, grief, and painful memories that remain as obstacles within the subjectivities of those who had to forge a new sense of belonging and new possibilities.

In Chile, *the Individual, Family, and Community Psychosocial Support program* (23) comprised “actions aimed at strengthening skills and abilities, as well as competencies in the spheres of family, educational, productive, and community life” (24). A distinguishing element was the deliberate decision to avoid the label “vulnerable population,” which was never used because, for the community, it functioned as a segregating signifier. Nationally, Universidad Católica Luis Amigo, through its initiative *The Discipline of Colombian Family Development: A Dialogue Between Scientific Knowledge, Family Intervention, and Family Support* (25), demonstrates an effort to articulate scientific knowledge and family life. It focuses on constructing narratives both to generate knowledge and to guide intervention and support. It also adopts a critical distance from family life-cycle approaches and from the structural-functionalist tradition, recognizing the family’s capacity and agency in

producing social change. This point was compatible with the present experience; however, that initiative leaves aside the component of everyday violence, its place, and its transformative potential in the formation and dynamics of families and communities.

As a critical-epistemological contribution, it is noteworthy that the work dynamics made possible in this research resisted treating the community as an object of study—that is, in terms of passivity and insufficiency. Nor did the work adopt the label of “vulnerable population,” given its victimizing character, as the community itself stated that they did not feel represented by that signifier. A respectful stance was maintained toward the potential of community capacities, without fostering unsustainable illusions, while remaining open to strengthening relationships with oneself and with others. Accordingly, the guiding policy of the work was reflection on subjective obstacles and the creation of personal and community capacities.

This practice stands in opposition to the extractivism to which communities are exposed when researchers focus on “impacting” large numbers of people, filling out attendance sheets, and taking photos, without attending to processes inscribed in the community’s own logical time. When work is carried out to consolidate databases through surveys that do not represent community feeling but rather interests in producing statistically framed results so they appear scientific, the particularities of social reality are excluded and the possibility of a community process is foreclosed. When photos or videos are prioritized to portray the community through its poverty in the media, so that researchers and institutions appear as saviors of the most needy, an aid-based approach is ultimately reinforced. This produces, in people, a loss of trust in their own capacities and promotes poverty as a spectacle, because scarcity is used as a resource to showcase deprivation rather than processes. The work is done by the community that rises every day to face the conditions of its reality, and formal university research gives structure to these processes so they can be transmitted.

Conclusions

The psychosocial support program, grounded in Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies and designed to contribute to family strengthening and participation in community processes, provided an opportunity for research, action, and active engagement by the Ciudadela Nuevo Girón community. The program’s impact is ongoing, as each action carried out within the family generates reverberations at the community level.

The opportunity to consolidate reflection through the embroidery methodology made it possible to consider the

importance of beginnings, the timing of processes, the need to work through frustration, and the development of a readiness to begin again despite entanglements and difficulties. Diversity brought to the surface social obstacles and their corollary in subjectivities.

Phenomena such as forced displacement and migration revealed their influence on the formation of bonds. The nuclear family is no longer the paradigm. Other reasons for association and bond-building emerged such as survival, caring for children and older adults, and sustaining everyday life. This entails spontaneous and unprecedented forms of collaboration in which affective dynamics such as enmity and distrust may also emerge. The displacement of patriarchy became evident: women were the most invested in building capabilities to be and to create a dignified life within their opportunities. The capabilities approach (15) provided epistemic support, as new life projects were built through the *Bordados* and *Dejando huellas* strategies. Embroidery functioned as a metaphor for the repercussions of symbolic and social weaving across the personal and the familial. In this way, the psychosocial process was placed at the service of group cooperation and fostered a climate of trust to speak about difficulties through strategies such as the dream box, the magic box, and rebirth.

Another noteworthy element that subverts the logic of positivist and epidemiological social research is that the community is neither treated as an object of study nor viewed through a deficit lens. Rather, the community represents a potential of unique capabilities sustained by a set of histories and circumstances that converge in a territory. When the possibility of recognizing in the other a being of desire—one not solely dependent on the satisfaction of basic needs—is lost from view, research and actions become assistentialist, and external agents (through photos, signatures, and videos) exoticize poverty and portray themselves as protagonists and redeemers.

The psychosocial support program, from the perspective of PAR and the Do No Harm approach, there are no “vulnerable communities,” because community cohesion itself confronts vulnerability. There are communities that have been harmed, and the task of community work is to build and protect the rights to a dignified life. The researcher is not the protagonist of anything; their presence gains value when it contributes a distinctive way of understanding and discussing situations with respect and contextual awareness, and when they know how to step back without abandoning the process so that the community can take ownership of it. The importance of this project lies in the subjective and community resources that participants developed to, from their own reality, commit to their desire and life project, recognizing that transformations at the individual level resonate within community bonds.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Funding

No external funding was received for this study beyond the authors' own resources..

References

1. Baeza S. Familia y género: las transformaciones en la familia y la trama invisible del género. *Praxis Educ (Arg)* [Internet]. 2005;(9):34–42. Available from: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=153120512004>
2. Baudrillard J. La violencia de lo global. En: Baudrillard J, editor. *Power infierno* [Internet]. París: Galileo; 2002. P. 63–83. Available from: <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ctheory/article/view/14557/6007>
3. Baudrillard J. Violencia política y violencia transpolítica Capítulo 14. En *Los límites de la Estética de la representación* [Internet]. Bogotá: Universidad del Rosario; 2006. Available from: <https://repository.urosario.edu.co/server/api/core/bitstreams/c695852f-7a36-4ff4-b55d-2bdb2c4687c9/content>
4. Organización Mundial de la Salud. ¿Cómo define la OMS el concepto de salud? [Internet]. Ginebra: OMS; 2025. Available from: <https://www.who.int/es/about/frequently-asked-questions#:~:text=%C2%BFC%C3%B3mo%20define%20la%20OMS%20el,ausencia%20de%20afecciones%20o%20enfermedades.%C2%BB>
5. Colombia, Congreso de la República de Colombia. Ley 1616 de 2013 [Internet]. Bogotá: Ministerio de Salud y Protección Social; 2013. Available from: <https://www.minsalud.gov.co/sites/rid/Lists/BibliotecaDigital/RIDE/VS/PP/ENT/servicios-salud-mental-colombia-ley-1616-2013.pdf>
6. Rodríguez-Puentes AL, Estrada-Ramírez F, Reverón-Peña CA, Zapata-Cancelado ML, Vásquez OP. Acción sin daño y reflexiones sobre prácticas de paz: una aproximación desde la experiencia colombiana [Internet]. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia; 2009. Available from: https://www.bivipas.unal.edu.co/bitstream/10720/363/1/L-221-Rodriguez_Ana-2009-N_1-205.pdf
7. Naciones Unidas. Objetivos y metas de desarrollo sostenible [Internet]. Nueva York: UN; 2025. Available from: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/objetivos-de-desarrollo-sostenible/>
8. Galeano-Marín ME. Estrategias de investigación social cualitativa: El giro en la mirada (segunda edición) [Internet]. Medellín: Universidad de Antioquia; 2012. Available from: https://libros.udea.edu.co/index.php/editorial_fcsh/catalog/book/452
9. Foucault M. Seguridad, territorio, población [Internet]. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica; 2018. Available from: <https://www.uv.mx/tipmal/files/2016/10/M-foucault-seguridad-territorio-poblacion.pdf>
10. Marchioni M, Morín-Ramírez LM. Proyecto de intervención comunitaria intercultural (ICI): una experiencia avanzada en el terreno comunitario. *Quaderns Anim Educ Soc* [Internet]. 2014;(20). Available from: https://quadernsanimacio.net/ANTERIORES/veinte/index_htm_files/intervencion%20comunitaria.pdf
11. De la Cuesta-Benjumea C. La reflexividad: un asunto crítico en la investigación cualitativa. *Enferm Clin* [Internet]. 2011;21(3):163–7. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enfcli.2011.02.005>
12. Gallo H. *Psicoanálisis e intervención psicosocial*. Medellín: Universidad de Antioquia; 2017.
13. Gallo H, Ramírez ME. *El Psicoanálisis y la Investigación en la universidad*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Grama; 2012.
14. Roudinesco E. La familia en desorden [Internet]. México: Fondo de cultura Económica; 2005. Available from: <https://www.inisa.gub.uy/images/llam-psic/roudinesco-la-familia-en-desorden.pdf>
15. Nussbaum MC. *Crear capacidades. Propuesta para el desarrollo humano* [Internet]. Barcelona: Paidós; 2012. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvt7x63g>
16. Medellín-Fontes MM, Rivera-Heredia ME, López-Peñaloza J, Kanán-Cedeño MEG, Rodríguez-Orozco AR. Funcionamiento familiar y su relación con las redes de apoyo social en una muestra de Morelia, México. *Salud Ment* [Internet]. 2012;35(2):147-54. Available from: https://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0185-33252012000200008
17. Ospina W. *El taller el templo y el hogar*. Colombia: Literatura RANDOM HOUSE; 2018.
18. Real Academia Española (RAE). *Diccionario de la lengua española*. Dechado [Internet]. España: RAE; 2025. Available from: <https://dle.rae.es/dechado>
19. Vela-Mantilla MM, Rodríguez-Fernández JE, Rodríguez-Puentes AL, García-Muñoz LM. Acción sin daño como aporte a la construcción de paz: propuesta para la práctica [Internet]. Bogotá: Fundación para la Cooperación Synergia, COSUDE; 2011. Available from: <https://www.undp.org/es/colombia/publicaciones/accion-sin-dano-como-aporte-la-construccion-de-paz>
20. Iniesta M, Feixa C. Historia de vida y ciencias sociales. Entrevista a Franco Ferraroti. *Perifèria Rev Recerca Form Antropol* [Internet]. 2006;5(2). doi: <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/periferia.162>
21. *Obra Social Fundación “la Caixa”*. Proyecto de intervención comunitaria intercultural. [Internet]. España: Obra Social; 2011. Available from: <https://lacaixafoundation.org/documents/d/la-caixa-foundation/memoria-sostenibilidad-2011-pdf>

22. Sistema DIF Jalisco. La perspectiva familiar y comunitaria: la familia y la comunidad como ejes estratégicos de la agenda pública y social [Internet]. Guadalajara: DIF; 2011. Available from: https://transparencia.info.jalisco.gob.mx/sites/default/files/editorial_seleccion.pdf
23. Martínez-Mendizábal D, Estrada-Maldonado S. Propuesta de acompañamiento psicosocial con familias migrantes. Sinéctica [Internet]. 2014;(43):1–14. Available from: http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1665-109X2014000200010&lng=es&tlng=es
24. Fundación SES. Acompañamiento psicosocial, individual, familiar y comunitario [Internet]. Santiago de Chile: Fundación SES; 2016. Available from: <https://scioteca.caf.com/bitstream/handle/123456789/1417/Acompa%C3%B1amiento%20psicosocial%20individual,%20familiar%20y%20comunitario.pdf>
25. Viveros-Chavarría EF, Rodríguez-Bustamante A, Herrera-Saray GD, López-Montaña LM. La disciplina del desarrollo familiar colombiano. Un diálogo entre conocimiento científico, intervención familiar y acompañamiento familiar [Internet]. Envigado: Universidad Católica Luis Amigó; 2018. doi: <https://doi.org/10.21501/9789588943428>