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Among the farm, the factory, and home: productive and reproductive work of female migrant farmworkers in Mendoza (Argentina) and its impact in the health-disease process

Entre la finca, la fábrica y la casa: el trabajo productivo y reproductivo de trabajadoras agrícolas migrantes en Mendoza (Argentina) y su incidencia en la salud-enfermedad

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ABSTRACT Starting in the last decades of the 20th century, deep transformations have occurred in Latin American agricultural work, with decisive impacts on workers' health. These processes have had specific implications for female agricultural workers, who face the precarious working conditions common to all agricultural workers as well as inequalities that affect them distinctly. This article seeks to analyze the productive and reproductive work of migrant female farmworkers residing in Mendoza (Argentina), in order to elucidate the impact of this double workload on their health-disease processes. Fieldwork was carried out in 2014 in the agricultural town of Ugarteche, Luján de Cuyo, using a qualitative method supported primarily in a biographical approach. With the collaboration of feminist theoretical tools, we analyzed the relation between work and health based on the way these processes are narrated by migrant women. The results show that the work processes impacting their health include both employment and reproductive labor, and describe the harm, diseases, and illnesses linked to combined work in farms, factories and homes.

KEY WORDS Women, Working; Agricultural Workers' Diseases; Occupational Health; Working Conditions; Argentina.

RESUMEN A partir de las últimas décadas del siglo XX asistimos a profundas transformaciones del trabajo agrícola en América Latina, que han incidido decisivamente en la salud de las y los trabajadores. Estos procesos han tenido implicancias específicas para las trabajadoras agrícolas, quienes afrontan la condición de precariedad laboral del sector, a la vez que experimentan desigualdades que las afectan distintivamente. Este artículo propone analizar conjuntamente los procesos de trabajo productivo y reproductivo de trabajadoras agrícolas migrantes residentes en Mendoza (Argentina), buscando dilucidar la incidencia de esta doble carga en su salud-enfermedad. A partir del trabajo de campo, realizado desde el año 2014 en la localidad agrícola de Ugarteche, Luján de Cuyo, mediante un enfoque cualitativo apoyado primordialmente en la estrategia biográfica, y con la colaboración de herramientas conceptuales feministas, analizamos las relaciones entre trabajo y salud desde la forma en que estos procesos son narrados por las mujeres migrantes. Los resultados muestran, por una parte, que los procesos de trabajo que impactan en su salud incluyen el empleo y las labores reproductivas, y por otra, describen los daños, enfermedades y padecimientos vinculados al trabajo conjunto en fincas, fábricas y hogares.

PALABRAS CLAVES Mujeres Trabajadoras; Enfermedades de los Trabajadores Agrícolas; Salud de los Trabajadores; Condiciones de Trabajo; Argentina.

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INTRODUCTION

Starting in the last decades of the 20th century, deep transformations have occurred in the work field, creating decisive impacts on workers' health-disease processes. In Latin America, neoliberal globalization has led to land redistribution processes, deteriorated working conditions of agricultural wage earning workers, greater inequalities in terms of access to basic living needs, and migration of farming families linked to emerging precarious conditions of agricultural paid work. These processes have not affected both sexes equally. Wage earning female farmworkers face the precarious working conditions common to all agricultural workers, but they experience sex-gender based inequalities that affect them distinctly. For instance, they lack insurance for reproductive work, they experience workplace violence, they are assigned to the worst paid jobs, or their working qualifications are not properly valued since they are considered to be "natural" female abilities.

The increasing participation of women in migration waves and agricultural work has not entailed a break in the traditional sexual social division of labor: female workers have been reassigned as part of devalued labor[1] and housework instead. In addition to undertaking long working days at the farm, female migrant farmworkers in Mendoza are the main responsible individuals for doing everyday housework and for taking care of their family. This takes place under circumstances of economic deprivation and of limited access to public health services and social protection policies due to their migrant condition.[2] The working characteristics mentioned above have an impact upon the female migrant farmworkers' health-disease process: their lifetimes are marked by different harm, diseases and illnesses, and they do not receive proper treatment at the health institutions where they may go.

Several research studies focused on female farmworkers' health examine the occupational hazards to which they are exposed, such as the effects of manipulating agricultural chemicals and pesticides,[3,4] working long days, being paid by piece rate, as well as being deprived of social security coverage.[5,6] Other research studies analyze the difficulties that female workers meet to have access to health services and the condition of their reproductive health.[7,8,9,10,11] Most of these research studies are focused on wage labor but often they do not acknowledge the house workload assumed by women. As a result of the gap found in the available research studies, this article seeks to analyze both productive and reproductive work of female migrant farmworkers residing in Mendoza with the aim to elucidate its impact on the health-disease process. Considering the female workers' biographical narratives, this article analyzes the connection between work and health by taking into consideration the combined working conditions in farms, factories, and homes.

METHODOLOGY

This article presents the findings of a wider and still in progress research study about the experiences of female migrant farmworkers in Mendoza linked to health-disease-care processes. Such research study, entitled *Salud, Ruralidad y Género: El Encuentro entre los Saberes Populares y los Saberes Médico Hegemónicos en Espacios Rurales en Mendoza, desde una Perspectiva de Género* [Health, Farm, and Gender: The Meeting between the Popular Knowledge and the Hegemonic Medicine Knowledge in Rural Zones in Mendoza from a Gender Perspective] is conducted thanks to a PhD grant provided by the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET) [*Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas*] from Argentina.

From a methodological perspective the research is conducted qualitatively and it is primarily built upon a biographical approach so as to have access to the experiences lived by subordinate subjects and social groups

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who have been historically deprived of public discourse.[12,13] By resorting to life stories, it is possible to obtain information about certain lifestyle aspects that would be difficult to discover through other research techniques. These aspects include everyday life and emotions, which are particularly suitable to conduct a research study from a gender perspective.[12] The fieldwork on which the research study is based has been conducted since 2014 in the town of Ugarteche, Lujan de Cuyo district, located in the northern oasis in the province of Mendoza in Argentina, 40 kilometers away from the capital city. This area is an enclave of bordering countries and internal migration that also helps to maintain an important agricultural tradition around vineyards and vegetable crops.[14] The community of this region came into existence through a continuous migration of Bolivian workers and it is currently a socially complex territory with a limited number of public institutions and services, growing poverty problems, as well as precarious housing and infrastructure conditions. This is a heterogeneous scenery surrounded by vineyards assigned to the production of export wine, vegetable crops destined to domestic and international trade, and a small percentage of the horticultural production destined to local fairs.

The fieldwork is composed of two sources. On the one hand, there are narratives from consecutive in-depth interviews with five female workers residing in Ugarteche. Following the criterion of maximizing the range of differences, the interviewees were selected from a group representing a wide range of individual experiences[11]: women aged 29 to 52, having varied agricultural work experience (in farms and packaging factories). There is an internal migrant (from the province of Salta), while the other interviewees come from different Bolivian rural areas. On the other hand, a group of migrant women, who gather during the agricultural work low season, either for learning the traditional *tejido andino* [embroidering technique typical of the region of Los Andes] or making warm clothing for their families or to sell, were observed for two years. This type of investigation has helped to provide a closer look into their daily lives, the relationship to each other and with other members of the community, and how they manage to support their families when they are unemployed.

Several pieces of the data mentioned in this article have been described in a previous research study aimed at analyzing the role that Bolivian migrant women have when taking care of a family member suffering from a disease.[2] The participants have provided their consent to disclose all the information regarding the activities already mentioned. Furthermore, the entire research project has been assessed by the National Scientific and Technical Research Council grant committee, which includes the review of ethical aspects for the research study. Pieces of transcriptions from the narratives of the interviewees, who are identified by pseudonyms in order to protect their identities, are presented throughout this article.

From a theoretical point of view, the relation between work and health is the primary topic of social research on health. In fact, work has been considered, since the middle 1970s, one of the major determinants of the health-disease process in communities of people[15,16] by Latin American authors specializing in social medicine and collective health. From these perspectives, the health-disease process is not only about clinical diseases but also about different levels of physical and psychic distress. The relation between health and disease, more than a clinical condition, is the occurrence of historical processes and it must be approached starting from specific groups of people classified in terms of their participation in critical social processes.[17,18] Similarly, regarding research on women, several academic papers have been written focusing on a critical analysis of health-disease processes, the relation between women and healthcare services, and the impact of the sex-gender-based inequalities in the health system. In the same decade, a few topics, such as the connection between productive and reproductive work, the sexual division of labor, and the effect on women's lives[19] became the center of debates among

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feminist thinkers. By the end of the 20th century, taking all these traditions into account, research studies on women workers' health proved to be right and as a result a wide variety of theoretical and empirical research studies were introduced.[20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27,28] In this article, several conceptual contributions are addressed, which help to understand the relation between work and health, and their implications for the sexual division of labor.

Following the feminist theory, gender-based discrimination is not considered biological nor fixed data but: "one of the most widespread ways of human exploitation deeply rooted in the personal interaction among genders, in the basic social institutions – such as family – as well as in economic and political spheres"[29] [own translation]. The subordination of women adopts diverse shapes depending on how it may be linked with other systems of social dominance – such as social classes and racialization[30,31] – and it rests principally on an economic basis defined by the organization of production and reproduction.[29] The sexual division of labor – assigning men primarily to productive work and women to reproductive work based on strongly unequal social sex-gender relations[19,32] – has been regarded as the principal topic of this debate. Assuming that the sexual division of labor is naturally rooted in women's physiology and in their role in biological reproduction, feminists have argued that women do not choose subordination in the social division of labor "naturally," altruistically, or willingly, or else due to their allegedly less productive abilities. In fact, their subordinate condition has been historically built to maintain men's social power.[33]

Debates about the conceptualization of work are connected to the sexual division of labor debate. Starting in the 1970s, feminists research studies have stated that classical economic theories, by limiting the concept of work to good manufacturing, ignored the productive work in the household and how it is related to the reproduction of capitalism.[34,35,36] This bias prevents the visualization of the vital economic contribution that women provide to social reproduction, thus strengthening their subordination.[35] As noted by the author, "to designate as work only market activities and not to count housework as actual work have helped to consolidate a different appreciation for both the activities and the individuals who perform them"[37] [own translation]. Moreover, this poor appreciation is expressed in women not receiving any remuneration at all, as well as the excessive workload (for free) that they perform. Furthermore, this is a paradoxical undermining of work if the social implications surrounding these activities are taken into consideration, given that households are not only maintained through income, but also through the reproductive work destined to the production of the basic living goods and services for the family members. This work is performed primarily or exclusively by women.[37,38]

Along with the acknowledgment of women's work at their homes, feminist and gender-based research studies contributed to visualizing women's active participation in the production field. Research studies on such participation bring the debate of the feminization of several social phenomena into the spotlight: migration, survival, and rural wage labor. Research studies on migration affirm that as from the end of the 20th century a process of "feminization of migration waves" started, which entails both an increase in the number of women taking part in population movements autonomously, and also a process of making their role in human history visible, which had remained anonymous within classical theories behind the name of family companions.[39,40,41]

According to Saskia Sassen[42] the transformations in the number of women in migration waves may be interpreted as the "feminization of survival," as she calls it. Sassen states that the increasing levels of women integrating cross-border circuits are linked to the effects of southern countries structural adjustments and rising unemployment, which events have increased the pressure on women in finding ways of providing for their households. This context explains

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the emergence of a wide variety of global alternative circuits for generating income that work within the so called informal economy and they include both legal and illegal activities: from organized "exports" of female care workers, nurses, or domestic service workers to human trafficking involving sexual and labor exploitation. It is concluded that feminization of human survival refers to the fact that domestic and community economies increasingly rely on women. Governments also need the remittances produced by women in bordering circuits.[42]

In turn, Sara Lara[43] mentions the feminization of rural wage labor. Lara highlights that in Latin America the productive transformation of agricultural work occurred along with the feminization of work within non-traditional farming activities. The agro-export sector had a predominant role due to its "comparative advantages" sustained by the climate, natural resources, and cheap and extremely flexible manual labor that began to replace the lack of technological machinery. The agricultural field of that region in Mendoza based its integration into the international market on a "wild" flexibility from manual labor, which keeps large groups of people – especially young migrant women – in temporal jobs, facing long unemployment periods and poor working conditions.[43]

In connection with the foregoing, María Mies[44] thinks that limited access to the economic benefits of formal employment and the responsibilities of having to provide for the basic living needs for themselves and their children combined together facilitate super-exploitation of women. The concept of super-exploitation is deeply rooted in Marxism and it has caused several debates. Although this article does not seek to exhibit those debates, authors that addressed these concepts after Karl Marx will be mentioned briefly. One of the most important authors is Claude Meillassoux, who describes the relation between the domestic community and capitalism within the economy of colonized countries in his book *Femmes, greniers et capitaux* ["Maidens, Meal, and Money"]. He also states that the result of the domestic community being exploited by capitalism is the reproduction of the labor force that is not taken into account within expenses. This exploitation is not temporary, but inherent in capitalist reproduction and at the same time it is a longer and cumulative version of the original exploitation. In turn, María Mies[44] expresses in her book "Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour" that the capitalist production process is formed by the super-exploitation of unpaid workers (both women and male farmers) over which the exploitation of paid workers is held up. According to Mies, this entails super-exploitation because it is not based on the (capitalist's) appropriation of the surplus work, but it is based on the time and work necessary for people's own survival, which also wage does not compensate, but it is primarily determined forcibly or by coercive institutions. Mies focuses her concern on women in the South of the world, especially women from rural areas, and the characteristics of their work within capitalism. Finally, Ruy Mauro Marini, in his book *Dialética da dependência* ["Dialectics of Dependence"], uses the notion of super-exploitation to explain the relocation of work value from periphery countries to core countries, which is supported by the extraordinary appropriation of the added value in periphery countries. In Marini's words, super-exploitation is defined by a greater exploitation of the workers' physical force and it tends to be translated into the fact that the labor force is underpaid.

The notion of super-exploitation has also been used by other female authors, such as Silvia Federici,[38] to address the condition of female workers in the South of the world regarding the survival of their families while facing increasingly precarious working and domestic conditions, which require women's physical effort to be intensified and their work days to be extended. These categories show that women's integration into paid employment in the countries in the South of the world, as producers of cheap goods for export, is the result of their struggling to be part of the productive work and to support

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themselves. In addition, this is a situation linked to restructuring the world economy[36] based on an accelerated expansion of the work market, the growth of the proletariat, and the recreation of the sexual division of labor in the production sector.

These addressed facts enable researchers to acknowledge the limitations of those approaches that examine the relations between women's work and health without taking into consideration domestic-reproductive responsibilities, while only taking into consideration wage labor. Therefore, a number of topics will be analyzed below, such as working conditions of productive work, particular characteristics of the reproductive work performed by female farmworkers in Mendoza, and the connections and tensions between both sectors, to later describe the harm, diseases, and illnesses linked to their work.

Women's wage labor in agriculture: integration of migrant women in feminized and racialized sectors within the agricultural work market

Neoliberal globalization and structural adjustment processes have definitely changed agriculture in Latin America. The control that the multinational capital has over agriculture came along with the expelling of small and medium scale producers, a growing spread of wage labor and rural work precariousness, as well as the continuous migration waves from the countryside to the city or across bordering countries.[47] The level of rural migration and the number of female farmworkers began to increase in this context.[48,49] The 21st century made these tendencies stronger and – in Argentina – it established an utterly unequal rural sphere regarding the farmers' possibilities of having access to biotechnological modernization.[50,51]

"Modernization" of production coexists with activities which were already considered to be extinct: apart from flexibilized and precarious conditions, almost slave working conditions still exist.[52] Another feature of the regional agricultural work market is the use of manual labor based on a deep sexual and racial division of workers. In other words, it consists in "organizing work without making use of direct violence – that is to say, physical violence – giving place to a type of subjugation in which social class, gender, and ethnicity come together [...]; such work organization does not only validate the place that women have at work, but also within society"[49] [own translation]. This is evident in Argentina where Bolivian migrants – based on their sex, gender, social class, and ethnicity – have primarily entered the informal labor market in the agricultural, commerce, and domestic service sectors,[53] as well as other sectors like textile sweatshops linked to sexual and commercial trafficking and slavery.[54]

In Mendoza the rising presence of migrants from Bolivia and the north of Argentina has become common in different vine stages, vegetable and fruit production. Starting in the 1930s – but particularly from 1950 onward – the number of Bolivian migrant workers in vineyards began to increase rapidly.[55] More recently, specific employment niches have been created for women to work as temporary manual labor in the agricultural industry of goods for export.[56] In addition, the province of Mendoza endures a peculiar legal situation in which, as a result of the pressure exerted by viniculture business associations, the federal statute protecting agricultural work is no longer in force for that productive sector, which is the largest and the most dominant in that province. In accordance with the Agricultural Labor Standards Act No. 26727, those activities subject to collective bargaining agreements prior to an Executive Order implementing agricultural activities that was issued in 1980 could continue to operate under those frameworks. This is the case of the viniculture industry in Mendoza, where businessmen rely on the collective bargaining agreements of the 1970s that would exempt them from complying with the new scheme, which is clearly more beneficial to workers' rights.

Those women who have told their life stories have lived different experiences and are part of households with particular characteristics.

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Sandra is the youngest and has migrated most recently. She arrived in Mendoza in 2006 from her birthplace Potosí. She is 29 years old and mother to five children, whose ages range from 3 months old to 15 years old. She lives with them and her husband. Sonia, who is 35 years old, migrated from Potosí to Argentina at the age of 16 with her parents and siblings. She is not currently with her partner and lives with her four children, aged between 5 and 18. She is the only one of the interviewees who has lived and worked in urban areas, working as a domestic maid when she was a teenager. Rita is a 37-year-old woman from Potosí who arrived in Argentina at the age of 14 with her elder sister. They both moved across different places of the country working in tobacco, carrots, and vine cultivation. She started a love relationship at the age of 18 with the man she lives with at present. She also lives with her five children (aged between 2 and 19 years), and her granddaughters (6 months old and 3 years old). Rita is the head of the household given that her partner, who was a construction worker, suffered an occupational accident that prevented him from working again. In addition, Rita is the primary caregiver in raising her granddaughters. Rosa is a 40-year-old woman and the only interviewee born in Argentina, in the border town of Santa Victoria, province of Salta. She left her birthplace when she was 22 along with her partner and her 1-year-old baby in order to work as *"a seasonal worker in the carrot crops,"* according to her own words. Currently, she lives with her husband and three of her four children and she is a dedicated grandmother to three granddaughters. Alba is 52 years old, the eldest of the interviewees and has lived the longest in Mendoza. She migrated for the first time when she was 8 with her whole family. She went back to her town, Cochabamba, three years later and stayed there for four years with her mother and siblings after the sudden death of her father. At the age of 15 she went back to Mendoza *"we were in the farming tents, we worked and I took care of my siblings and sent them to school,"* she mentioned. At present, she lives with her husband, a son and a granddaughter. She is the only one of the five women who has retired from wage labor to devote herself to raising her granddaughter. A common characteristic among all the interviewees is that they belong to indigenous communities and were part of rural domestic units at their birthplaces. They have worked the land and grazed the animals since they were children. In addition, these Bolivian women's first language is Quechua. Sandra and Rita, in particular, learnt to speak Spanish fluently after they arrived in Argentina. It should be highlighted that although the interviewees' partners and husbands were farmworkers in the past, currently none of them works in the agricultural field. Instead, they work as self-employed men in construction and transportation.

Beyond the diversity of such life stories, at present the interviewees who are still actively employed work in two types of activities: vineyards or "the farms" – as they call them – in agricultural tasks and in selection and packaging barns of fresh export fruit or "the factory" – as described by them. Occasionally they combine these activities with other tasks performed in tomato, onion, and garlic crops. Being able to work in the factories is linked with a certain type of stable domicile in Mendoza after long periods of having lived in different places due to seasonal work in the citrus, tobacco, and vegetable production fields. Given that they live in the province permanently, they have quite a relative regular level of work throughout the entire year. Between September and December, they perform different labor activities in the vineyards, such as pruning, tying vine grapes, clearing out the yards, setting up and down hail protection nets, or repairing drip irrigation hose pipes. Starting in January, they are in charge of fruit selection and packaging in the factory, until March approximately, when these workers return to the vineyards for the harvest, while also taking working days at the packaging barns, as long as the production endures. This season ends around May, and during June, July, and August migrant women devote themselves to looking for alternative ways of income through different activities, which primarily include

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selling their own elaborated products in the local fairs (textiles, embroidered clothes, and food). This season is not an inactive period of time for women, as some research studies on agriculture day laborers describe,[7] although they face a decline in the number of wage labor hours and an increase in the number of reproductive and care work.

This article is focused on farms and factories given that the work performed by women as self-employed workers during the agricultural work low season shows such diversity that it would require a particular analysis. The farms and factories are places with different working conditions, they have different significance for the female workers as well. Although these productive activities are governed by different occupational regulations, several general standards are applied. In Mendoza, especially in the town where this research study is focused, both farms and factories are increasingly employing migrant women. This situation is surrounded by ethnicity[57] and gender myths or stories. Several research studies have described the job classification processes that Bolivian workers have to face, according to which they are attributed an inherent ability to perform agricultural work supported by their higher working capabilities, physical endurance, and submission.[57,58] Other female authors have analyzed gender-based stereotypes endorsed by agro-industrial businessmen who hire women because they consider that they have "inherent" abilities concerning kindness, care, and commitment with the final product of their work.[58,59,60]

As for the migrant interviewees, although these discourses are part of their perception of the characteristics that they have as workers, other elements are also present in their narratives that describe the significance of their work in farms and factories:

> *…Bolivian women work because we want to, because we need to, we have the need to. We, Bolivian people, are likely to put effort in our work more than anything. You see, we're 30 women here. Now ask me, how many people from your country work here? You go to a farm and the supervisors are our fellows* [Bolivian people]. *You go to the vineyard and the supervisors are our fellows. Our fellows are also in the garlic crops. Why do they want our fellows more? Because we're honest and hardworking people. That's the only reason I can give.* (Sonia, 35 years old)

Among the characteristics to which businessmen are inclined when they employ migrant Bolivian workers, Sonia highlights such attributes as honesty and working ability, but she also describes that the effort that they make at work is linked to *being in need*. Hence, her way of thinking brings up living conditions and working possibilities available to migrants. Regarding their bosses' preference for employing women, the interviewees state the following:

> *In the vineyards too, they only want women. They don't want men because they're lazy, they aren't responsible… that's what our supervisors say. "I'd rather work with women than with men because women are responsible workers," they say.* (Rita, 37 years old)

Another interviewee highlights the following:

> *Long ago the vineyard was for men only, but now there are a lot of women. We make our bosses' work easier… we don't talk back much, men complain about the hour load, they want to leave… we work to get the work done, to finish it. We, women, get the work done faster than men. Women even do the pruning now.* (Sandra, 29 years old)

Similarly, Rosa confirms what the other interviewees have described. She also states the following:

> *They say they don't want men in some farms because they don't do their work right. And at the factory, oh, well! Lots of women, much more women than men.*

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> *There are a few men, they don't work on the* [conveyor] *belt. Only women work there. All men work with the machines, they do the cleaning. Or maybe the supervisors... are only men.*

Regarding the role of their supervisors at the factory, one of the female workers highlights how they control women:

> *They tell you that they're filming with the camera and they'll call the supervisor right away. Because now they use all the cameras to keep an eye on people, and see if they're working or not... all cameras. They don't let you eat anything... they banned everything.* (Rita, 37 years old)

These extracts show that women actually have certain characteristics, such as responsibility, speed, and perseverance in doing their work (while *"men complain"* women *"get the work done"*), which would justify their higher presence in the vineyards and the conveyor belts. In turn, these stories demonstrate a sort of naturalization of such discourses and meaning attribution by the female workers. As a whole, the women's stories provide clues about how the sexual division of labor takes shape in the agriculture field in Mendoza. On the one hand, Rosa's story describes the sexual distribution of hierarchical posts and jobs, which results in a higher number of women working in the fruit selection sector, while men are in charge of inspecting them. On the other hand, Rita describes the control to which they are subject, coinciding with Elena Mingo's research,[56] suggesting that most of the responsibility and commitment that women show in the workplace may be a result of self-discipline, linked to a higher control over female labor in general. In conclusion, the narratives presented above reveal that both farms and factories are sectors which are not alien to sexual division of labor processes. These processes are translated into the creation of gender-based hierarchized occupational segmentation, higher female presence in subordination jobs, and naturalization of female workers' qualifications.

Concerning the female interviewees, the double "appraisal" given to women by their employers based on their gender and migrant status does not result in better working conditions. In fact, they face all the usual precarious working conditions, such as labor instability, lack of social security coverage, and low wages.[52] It is convenient to wonder whether these working conditions only affect migrant women – or they affect women distinctly – given that most literature and statistics data available make reference to the generalized precariousness of farming working conditions. Nevertheless, as stated at the beginning of this article, sex-gender-based inequalities imply lower working conditions for female farmworkers.

Concerning labor instability, several previous research studies have established that jobs exclusively for men are the best paid and have the highest probabilities of access to permanent employment, which applies to export agriculture in all Latin America[61]: the Chilean fruit growing sector, the tobacco production in the province of Jujuy,[63] the citrus fruit production in the province of Tucumán,[63] and the agricultural industry in Mendoza.[56] Regarding social security protection, Argentine agricultural work is characterized by the lack of social security insurance and low levels of registered employment, which levels are even lower regarding women employment.[63] The National Registry of Agricultural Workers and Employers (RENATEA) [*Registro Nacional de Trabajadores y Empleadores Agrícolas*] was a governmental entity within the Federal Department of Labor and was active from 2012 to 2015. Its attributions included registering farmworkers, monitoring employers' compliance with mandatory liabilities, and functioning as inspectors in charge of controlling compliance with labor laws. In this regard, the RENATEA commission, based in Mendoza, in 2015 issued a report highlighting the low rate of registered women compared to registered men.[64] Finally, regarding payment, although no official data is available to

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analyze sex-gender-based inequalities in the Argentine agricultural work, research studies on wage earning female workers in the Latin American intensive agriculture export describe that – primarily – women do not even earn the minimum legal standardized wage.[61]

However, what are the perceptions that female workers have of their working conditions? Regarding labor instability, they state that hiring them annually as temporary workers – even if they work every year for the same employer – is a common habit among employers, both in farms and packaging factories. This results in a reduction of rights and social security protection, especially those related to reproductive work. Moreover, Act No. 26727 identifies three ways of employment in the agriculture sector: seasonal, permanent intermittent [working repeatedly for the same employer], and permanent worker, each one with progressively higher labor rights. Although the female interviewees would belong to the second category, employers often register their employees as seasonal workers in order to avoid paying social security taxes and leaves relevant to each category.

Despite the assumption of the allegedly great production variability, year after year female workers do not know whether they will be summoned to work, during which season, and under which conditions. According to businessmen, these factors depend on the production volume. Hence, women must face unemployment during occasional low production periods: *"Every year I have to ask the crew leader or the supervisor for a job. Maybe if there's work to do, he says yes. If there isn't, he says no."* (Rita, 37 years old)

One aspect addressed by the women interviewed regarding employment registration is that it is conditioned by the crew leaders, who act as intermediaries to hire both male and female workers for vineyards. Moreover, they are often migrants and neighbors or acquaintances of the workers. At the factory, women consider that supervisors fulfill the same function that crew leaders fulfill regarding the hiring of workers. The presence of these intermediary men makes the actual employer invisible, who the workers have not ever met in person although they have worked at the same exploitation site for years, and it limits the possibilities of filing legal claims due to illegal employment conditions. The female workers interviewed state the following:

> *You see, now we don't talk with our bosses; we talk with the crew leaders. Only one person talks with the boss. I don't know how they're related... we ask the crew leader for a job. He doesn't pay pension contributions, he doesn't pay anything at all* [...] *I don't feel good asking, "Are you paying for my pension scheme?" I don't know... I'm embarrassed to... I don't know, we're foreigners and... How could I ask him? I'm embarrassed to ask. After all, he is giving me a job.* (Alba, 52 years old)

In turn, Rosa states: *"Getting signed up* [meaning being registered within formal employment] *is up to the crew leader because he calls you and sometimes he... doesn't even sign you up."* The relations between workers and crew leaders or supervisors are not exceptions to the sex-gender-based subjugation logic that force women to face verbal, physical, sexual, and economic violence. Rita describes:

> *In the factory where I worked, they didn't let you speak either. But the supervisor there, I think they were two, if he knew you well, he talks and plays with you. But if you're talking and he doesn't know you, he comes and tells you off.* (Rita, 37 years old)

A research study on the relations between "brokers" [men who are in charge of hiring workers] and female workers has described sexual harassment in the workplace and wage payment segregation, as well as birth control processes, such as forcing women to present certificates of sterility in order to hire or terminate them in the event of pregnancy.[65]

Payment is an aspect of agricultural work that differentiates male workers from female

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workers, given that how much workers are paid for the tasks performed is related to exhausting working hours and excessive workload to get a basic compensation.[49] Female workers argue that being paid on a piece rate basis implies that achieving specific amounts of money is only possible through intensifying physical effort, employing all the family members, or even increasing working hours. All those options are frequently implemented all together:

> *Look, we've worked with my children... we filled a container, put it on the truck, and they gave you a token. And I saw my children already have a kind of bag full of tokens... God, see... I couldn't do all the work alone* [...] *I filled up the containers and they came and carried them* [...] *they ran and ran. You've got no idea how they ran. They took some minutes to rest and started over. They didn't rest, not even 10 or 15 minutes... I kept harvesting and filling up the containers until they could rest. I carried the container on my shoulders and they emptied it in the truck.* (Alba, 52 years old)

Although the family team working strategy enables the workers to earn higher income, it sometimes means that women do not receive any of the income as the employers give it to the man of the family:

> *When I first arrived* [in Mendoza], *I worked in the garlic field with my dad and my siblings, the whole family. But only my dad earned money, I don't know how much. He kept all the money and he gave me nothing. I didn't know what money was. When I started to work on my own, he took away my money, the money I had to buy something for my daughter.* (Sandra, 29 years old)

Another worker addresses payment per item:

> *They pay you for what you do, the work. For example, the carrot bags you do. They pay per bag, by piece rate. If you work, you earn money. If you don't work, you earn nothing because some days there's no work. There isn't work every day. In the vineyard, they pay you by piece rate or day. But per day they give you a lot to do anyway. Sometimes you have to work your fingers to the bone to get done what they ask* [...] *they give you a lot, they push it. You earn more by piece rate than per day, but also you have to work your fingers to the bone because they give you very heavy work and you can't finish it. Some can do it, especially men, they finish it... I don't know why, maybe they work their fingers to the bone or they don't do it right.* (Rosa, 40 years old)

Several of the aspects described so far help us to acknowledge the fact that the agricultural work that female migrants perform in the factories and farms occurs within the context of a labor market that leads them to have the most unstable jobs, no access to social security protection and earn extremely low income. The principal characteristics of reproductive work and how it coordinates with female farmworkers' productive work will be described below.

Reproductive working conditions: the household as a workplace and the division of home and employment as an unclear and controversial boundary

The neoliberal reform of the State and the late 20th century financial crises had an impact on employment and production, and they also had decisive effects on the way families and communities had to manage strategies for their daily support. The increase in the number of women entering the labor market, the continuation of a rigid sexual division of labor, the methodical cutbacks in social protection and health policies, and the families' need to employ all of their family members to face up to situations of poverty led to an increase in free and paid work of women. The lack of access to public health services and

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child care resulted in appalling conditions and greater responsibilities in female domestic work, which constituted a sort of cushion against state retraction.[38,66]

The statistical information collected from time-use surveys on this subject is available in different Latin American countries. The results confirm the greater number of women assigned to care duties and house work. These results show that the amount of paid and unpaid working time is inversely proportional in men and women, and they highlight that the working time for care duties increases for low-income workers, as well as less educated individuals, migrants, and rural residents.[66] This is relevant given that the conditions in which women perform their reproductive work are not uniform. Instead, depending on their social class, race, or ethnicity and nationality, the number of hours that they devote to their reproductive work, the instruments that they have for its development, and the access to the services that contribute to these tasks are highly variable.

The stories of female migrant farmworkers about the organization of domesticity support the data mentioned above: they are shown not only as the principal responsible individuals but occasionally they are also the only members of the household in charge of the basic tasks for the survival of their families. Women perform such tasks with little support from the public services due to the limited access that they have because of their migrant condition.[2] Their responsibilities at home do not excuse them from excessive amounts of workload in the production area. In addition, they have maintained working pace patterns in the farm equal to those of men since their childhood. When they return to their houses, they are in charge of domestic work, which becomes an excessive burden in contexts of scarce resources.[49]

Among the reproductive tasks that they assume almost exclusively, taking care of their children is identified as a strictly maternal responsibility. Thus, working outside home and its consequences in child rearing should be faced by women or their female relatives. Female workers frequently make different solidarity agreements and arrangements either with their older daughters, sisters, or female neighbors, or through hired child caregivers.

> *I used to live as a seasonal worker, and I had to leave my daughter with my sister. She lived in Tupungato. Maybe on Saturdays I took her to the farming tent for one day or two, or on a holiday. Then I left her once again and sometimes I went to see her. Sometimes, I couldn't see her for two weeks, but I always came to see her; that was heartbreaking for me.* (Rosa, 40 years old)

Facing the care requirements of their children and the lack of public daycare centers in their community, attending workplaces with young children is another option although it is not always possible. Alba said that, from a very early age, her children went with her to the farm: *"I carried the food on my back; fresh water, juice for the kids, tea or* yerbeado [also known as *mate cocido*, infusion made from yerba mate] [...] *I carried all those items warmed up on my back with the baby in my arms; the youngest kids would walk."*

In the case of female farmworkers, another element to be considered is the special way in which productive and reproductive work are combined. Based on their experiences, it can be seen that the division of home and work, production and reproduction is not as clear as it is often assumed. Home is shown as the place of arduous working days, while the workplace may be considered the place for living, caring, and developing domesticity. Going from one field to the other does not imply the interruption of work but its continuation. This situation exists due to the fact that many purposes related to the work field are accomplished at home as well as several activities connected with reproductive work – such as child care – occur in the workplaces, especially in farms or *chacras* (a word derived from the Quechua *chakra,* which refers to a small piece of land destined to agriculture).

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One of the interviewees addresses this situation:

> *We lived like that in the carrot crops with a group of workers, we were seasonal workers, we used to live right there in the* chacras*, where the carrot crops are. There we set up the tents at the edge of the crops* [...] *We prepared the food right there where we stayed, in that same little tent where we slept.* (Rosa, 40 years old)

Another female worker highlights the following:

> *Since the kids were five or six years old I was already taking them to the* chacra*... At that time, there wasn't such a thing as "children cannot work," or anything like that; all of them were able to come with me, so we all went to work and I put the food in a container* [...] *so that they could eat well and keep working. And they did work... I spent all day away from home, with my kids.* (Alba, 52 years old)

However, these unclear boundaries between the productive and reproductive activities that characterize the work in farms and *chacras* become difficult for female workers when performing tasks at factories. This is a situation that puts them against the rigid division between home and work. Factories constitute a place of rigorous controls in which the presence of their children, for instance, would be unacceptable. Moreover, employee time and attendance regulations at factories are more severe than in farms, where being absent for one day does not result in employment termination and they are able to return to work. As stated by Mariarosa Dalla Costa,[67] within our social organization, family and factory work as "ghetto-like" sections. For this reason, it is not surprising that the passage from one field to the other proves distressing. Rosa states that during the working period at the factory she cancels any type of doctor appointments, either for her or her family, as she is not authorized to be absent from work:

> When I finish my shift at the factory, I do all the check-ups because that's when I have time to go, because they don't let you go... when you're working, you can't go. You don't have time to go. There´s no option, I have to finish my work, then I take my little daughter with me and I also get all my check-ups done. I´ve never been to an emergency room while being at the factory; I was lucky I never got sick.

A very important aspect is the difference regarding the way in which female workers are employed depending on the changes in reproductive workloads. When women are pregnant and have young children, they face a period in which, as the household and care demand increases, they are in unfavorable conditions for a negotiation with their employers. This implies the possibility of receiving a low income, not being "selected" by the crew leaders, or even being terminated. For this reason, female workers sometimes hide their pregnancies so that the crew leaders continue calling them for work or so as to avoid being terminated from the factory. They also mention that if the high labor season coincides with pregnancy or puerperium, they remain active in periods when a maternity leave should be granted. Rita explains that she went back to work after having a delivery by cesarean section – from which she had not been discharged – when her daughter was under one month old, in order to avoid losing her job at the factory for a season and to keep her position in the conveyor belt system. In contrast, Rosa remarks that she stopped working when she got pregnant or when her children were young: *"I went to work from time to time when I was pregnant* [...] *When the kids were young I stayed in the farming tent. From there, I went to the doctor's or had check-ups."* Sandra has the following reflection on this matter: *"When I'm pregnant I do little work, a month or two* [...] *you can work until the first four months of pregnancy without telling the crew leaders because, otherwise, they don't take you to work; it's a risk for them and our bosses."*

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The stories in this section relate to the super-exploitation category proposed by Mies[44] and Federici[38] to characterize the situation of female workers in the everyday reproduction of life. These passages show the countless strategies and exhausting efforts through which each of them faces, endures, and/or resists precarious working conditions and scarce resources to support their families and communities. In conclusion, the analysis in this section demonstrates that productive and reproductive work are usually overlapped on a daily and yearly basis, as well as on different stages of the interviewees' lives. At other times, these spheres become difficult and they make female workers choose between their productive and reproductive work. The overlapping and the tension between house and work spaces result in the intensification and extension of their working day, or in fewer possibilities to earn their own income. These aspects have an impact on their health conditions in different ways.

Working conditions and its impact on health: harm, diseases, and illnesses

It has been established in this article that the increasing participation of women as wage earning farmworkers is not necessarily a beneficial change in their living conditions, given that working for short periods of time and piece rate payment imply that earning a higher income is only possible to the detriment of female workers' physical health.[38,42] In turn, the conditions in which they perform their reproductive work also depend on the super-exploitation of their work.

The impact of these processes on female workers' health will be described below, taking three aspects into consideration. First, diseases and harms caused by work. Second, the difficult access to public health services linked to working conditions. Third, the different diseases and illnesses, which are not strictly part of a clinical profile but may be broadly understood as a part of occupational health. This classification is made in some research studies to cover several health problems linked to work and not just the diseases considered as such by medicine.[68]

Regarding the first aspect, in line with the findings in previous research,[4,7] female workers show multiple symptoms, such as recurrent harm or diseases associated with work in farms and at factories. Those include principally dermatologic and respiratory symptoms, due to the use of agrochemicals and pesticides, as well as posture-related pains caused by excessive physical workload. Furthermore, female workers describe the recurrent occupational accidents that they suffer and the harmful impact of being exposed to extreme temperatures:

> *At the factory, you aren't as hot as on the farm. You don't get tired of walking too much. At the factory, you get tired because you're standing all the time but it's not heavy work... I prefer the factory, although it's hot but... it's not that hard, or like the cold temperatures you get in the vineyard.* (Rosa, 40 years old)

In turn, Rosa describes that after having worked for seven years at the factory, she managed to reach the highest position in the production line (at the final quality assessment of canned food), which helped her to avoid contact with cleaning products that irritate the skin, eyes, and nose:

> *There are a lot of accidents: people faint, slip, bang their heads, hit their backs, and deviate their backs...* [They fall] *because there's a peach on the floor, there's water, bleach. It's very slippery. We always have to wash with detergent, with that... caustic soda... with very harsh detergents... they burn, the skin of your hands gets all peeled off. Awful... that's why I don't want to go to the conveyor belt* [...] *I think I got that when I first worked at the conveyor belt, it just appeared. It itches, it itches... it's the acid, a strong acid they give you to wash... your hands end up horrible. The skin gets very thin, you just touch it and it peels off* [...] *they tell us we have to*

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> *wear gloves but they don't last, they give us disposable gloves that aren't useful, they rip.* (Rita, 37 years old)

Another worker highlights the following:

> *The work at the factory isn't that heavy to me. But there are lots of chemicals… when you start working the first days, at night I feel my hands burning, they sting and then the skin starts to peel off* […] *it's worse when you don't wear gloves* […] *the thing is that we buy gloves, sometimes they give you gloves, sometimes they don't; so we exchange gloves with women from other shifts.* (Rosa, 40 years old)

During an interview conducted at the health center in Ugarteche, a female physician stated that she usually treats women with multiple work-related injuries. In addition, she highlights the following:

> I've seen first, second, and third-degree burns on hands because they don't wear gloves or because the chemical they use is so toxic it penetrates the glove. People, in their own interest, don't want to say they had an occupational accident.

The lack of rest hours is another constant feature mentioned by female workers as one of the working conditions that affects their health,[6,7] which is closely linked to a double shift working day. When the female workers were asked to describe a typical day at work, they stated that it generally starts early in the morning and continues past midnight:

> *I used to leave my five boys and I went to work across the river* […] *I worked there until midday and came back quickly to feed the kids and sent them to school. I finished eating and I cleaned the house, just like now, and hurried my way back to work. If there wasn't work to do there I got on the trucks. I arrived at six and the kids were already here. When I arrived, I made them supper in the evening. I did the laundry at night, let's say, I did the laundry until one in the morning. I went to bed and got up at five in the morning and cooked. My routine was cooking for them every day so the boys could go to school and my husband could go to work and I could work, too.* (Alba, 52 years old)

Female workers highlight that all these tasks combined force them to sleep fewer hours than the required hours of sleep. As a consequence, they show symptoms of chronic fatigue and body aches. Rosa remarks that the rotating schedule that she takes at the factory affects her sleep routine, especially during night shifts:

> One week you work in the evening, another week you work in the morning, and another week at night. They're three rotating weeks. I don't like working at night, I never liked it. The next day at home you can't rest because you usually sleep at night. I spend a week like this and I hardly sleep because I have no other choice than get up and get things done.

Regarding access to the public health system, an important aspect of these stories is that such access is limited not only by the organization of public health services, but also by the working conditions which are in tension with health care. Not being formally registered employees prevents them from being entitled to request a sick leave or a leave to care for a sick family member. At the same time, hourly wage earning means that a day of rest or a day dedicated to the assistance of another person is a day without remuneration, which leads women to analyze whether it is convenient for them to lose this income in the event of a disease. Prior to a general consultation, women usually undertake healthcare strategies and postpone the search for medical attention to such an extent that they put their physical integrity at risk. The distance between workplaces, homes, and health institutions is claimed to be an additional difficulty:

> *They don't understand you at the factory; maybe you say "Can I change my*

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> *shift because I have to go to the doctor tomorrow? I have to take…" "That's not my problem, I don't know what you'll do. You have to keep your job, not me. I'll call another person and that's it." That's what they say because "people are begging me for work."* (Rita, 37 years old)

Another female worker describes the difficulties to have access to medical attention in a situation of miscarriage:

> [In the farm] *I got sick, I had a bleeding that got me three days in the farming tent and I couldn't go out, I couldn't even walk and nobody… I didn't tell anyone, I was scared and another part of me was ashamed, I don't know. After some days, I went to the emergency room because I could already walk… at the emergency room they told me I had had a pregnancy loss, they gave me some pills and from there I had to go straight to work to the province of Santiago del Estero.* (Rosa, 40 years old)

Furthermore, regarding occupational diseases and illnesses, the female workers' stories show multiple situations. One of the female workers refers to the distress caused by the strict monitoring and control of the working process to which they are subject at the factory. This leads to several of them valuing the work in farms as an area of greater freedom where there is allegedly less control from employers than at factories having strict rules. Moreover, the farm is presented as an environment of socialization where they can talk to other women:

> [At the factory] *you leave more tired than going to work to the vineyard… in the vineyard we walk, remove new sprouts but we're outdoors* [...] *it's quiet in the vineyard, I like working in the vineyard, you talk, you chat, make jokes, listen to music, laugh. It's quiet in the vineyard. But you feel like a prisoner here… you can't talk, you can't play, you don't have anyone to talk to because I'm alone there* [...] *They tell you that they're filming with the camera and they'll call the supervisor right away. Because now they use all the cameras to keep an eye on people, and see if they're working or not… all cameras. They don't let you eat anything… they banned everything.* (Rita, 37 years old)

Violence in the workplaces is usually another way of affliction highlighted by the female workers, which results in high levels of distress. This violence is manifested in two ways: because they are migrants and racialized people and because they are women working in a traditionally male environment:

> *When I worked in the tobacco crops, the boss' son took me to unload the* [tobacco drying] *stove. When I went down he started touching me and somebody told the boss. I was afraid to tell that… I thought maybe they'll fire me… I didn't talk, I said nothing about all the times he touched me because I was afraid to go to work with him, but I had to go because I needed to. If I didn't, where was I supposed to get a job?* (Rita, 37 years old)

Intense workload and precarious working conditions have been another aspect mentioned by the female workers as a reason for subjective suffering which follows physical exhaustion. Not being able to meet the basic living needs despite intense working days, the stress caused by household responsibilities, the arrangements for the care of their children which imply being away from each other are situations highlighted by the female workers as a form of distress:

> *Look, I got blisters. I cried in pain because I didn't know how to weed and I couldn't grab the weed because I got blisters in my fingers and I cried… you've got no idea how I cried… and I had to do it to survive… if I didn't, how was I supposed to survive?... Oh, God! Such blisters I got! And I looked at my hands and I cried in the middle of the land where I worked.*

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> *How hard it is to get something in this life! I cried and kept weeding; I didn't care my hand was hurt or bleeding, I kept working. And maybe the next day, I worked over here with other bosses.* (Alba, 52 years old)

Finally, care tasks of family members or dependent individuals suffering from a disease are the source of different forms of distress. In addition, the fact that the conditions in which this care occurs infringe upon the female workers' basic needs, they consider them as a straight limitation of their freedom. This is a significant aspect as the emotional distress that care work may cause is rarely contemplated. These care tasks are seen as a moral obligation and its impact is hidden beneath the individual's health[2]:

> *When* [my mother] *had anemia, we both spent about ten days at the hospital* [...] *I asked my brothers if they could take my place for a day because I needed to come and have a bath, change my clothes... they said no, they said they couldn't* [...] *You've got no idea how much I cried... I felt like I was in prison, because you know, when they're in hospital, you go to take care of them and you can't go anywhere... and I didn't go anywhere; there I felt I was locked up* [...] *so I stayed until she was discharged* [...] *I slept right there on the floor, although it was just summer... I hadn't even taken a blanket with me.* (Alba, 52 years old)

Through the female workers' stories, this article has attempted to describe the principal occupational diseases, ailments, and illnesses endured. The diverse care strategies that they unfold should be analyzed in depth. Despite the fact they have not been the subject of this article, it is necessary that they be studied if the aim is to have a complete outlook on the health-disease process in this group of women.

CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned throughout this article, the principal transformations, which occurred over the past decades in Latin American agriculture, have created an increasingly more unequal sector. Farmworkers are a critical example of the combination of old and novel forms of labor exploitation, such as the coexistence of piece rate payment and work flexibility, all of which resulted in critical consequences for the workers' health. It has been also highlighted that the labor market in which they are inserted is organized according to a social, gender, and racial division of manual labor, which leads migrant women to occupy the most precarious and lowest paid job positions.

Furthermore, from the female migrant farmworkers' stories, not only was it possible to describe the workplace as an area characterized by the sexual division of labor, but it was also possible to highlight a fact that feminists have been describing for decades: the work performed by women does not end when they leave the factories or when they come back from the farms. Instead, the working day overlaps intricately with the work that they perform for free at their homes, without which family and social reproduction would not be possible. This job, which is developed in conditions of economic deprivation and with little help from the government, is supported by the super-exploitation of women.

Concerning the impact of the overlapping and the tensions between productive and reproductive work on the health-disease process, female workers' experiences not only show occupational harms, diseases, and accidents in farms and factories, but they also reveal the subjective exhaustion and discomfort that they experience, which occurs when work and domestic work interfere with their rest periods, the care of their own health, or the possibility to have time for themselves. It has also been observed that the organization

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of the public health services and precarious working conditions combine and become an obstacle in female workers' access to health care when required.

This article has attempted to help understand the complex women's relations between work and health by using conceptual feminist tools and female farmworkers' life stories. One of the theories developed in this research study is that domestic and reproductive tasks constitute a form of work, not additional "activities" performed by women. Hence, the work processes that have an impact on their health are not limited to the work processes that occur within wage labor. It is argued here that if this aspect is not to be taken into consideration, the risk will be not acknowledging one of the primary aspects that cause diseases, illnesses, and suffering to female workers.

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