

## Intersecting vulnerabilities. Elderly care provided in the domestic environment

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**Abstract.** This article analyses to what extent the forms of hire in the elderly care sector, as defined by recent Spanish law, enable this work to be professionalised. Using a qualitative piece of research based on semi-structured interviews with a variety of social actors involved in the social organisation of care, we embark on the comparative study of those types of hire that have been particularly affected by the legal changes: private hire by families and the Home Help Service. Our conclusion is that in domestic environments, the physical, emotional and moral aspects that characterise care pose specific barriers to professionalisation and these impact most notably on the special vulnerabilities of migrants employed in domestic care. The high expectations raised by the new legislation about the sector's professionalisation have failed to be realised.

**Keywords:** care; vulnerabilities; gender; work; professionalisation; moral; emotions; migrations.

[es] Vulnerabilidades entrecruzadas. El cuidado de personas mayores en el ámbito doméstico

**Resumen.** Este artículo analiza en qué medida las formas de contratación previstas por la legislación española reciente, en el sector del cuidado de las personas mayores, permiten la profesionalización de este trabajo. A partir de una investigación cualitativa, basada en entrevistas semiestructuradas con una variedad de actores sociales involucrados en la organización social del cuidado, se aborda un estudio comparativo de los tipos de contratación que se han visto particularmente afectados por los cambios legales: la contratación privada por las familias y el Servicio de Ayuda a Domicilio. La principal conclusión es que en los entornos domésticos, los aspectos materiales, emocionales y morales que caracterizan el cuidado plantean barreras específicas para la profesionalización y que estas impactan de manera muy destacada en las vulnerabilidades particulares de las personas migrantes empleadas en el cuidado doméstico. Así que las grandes expectativas suscitadas por la nueva legislación respecto a la profesionalización del sector no se han cumplido.

**Palabras clave:** cuidado; vulnerabilidades; género; trabajo; profesionalización; moral; emociones; migraciones.

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**Cómo citar:** Martín Palomo, M. T.; Zambrano Álvarez, I.; Muñoz Terrón, J. M. (2020). Intersecting vulnerabilities. Elderly care provided in the domestic environment, *Cuadernos de Relaciones Laborales*, 38(2), 269-288.

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## Introduction<sup>4</sup>

The care of people has created employment for several decades. In particular, elderly care has continued to be a major source of remunerated work in most modernised societies despite the crisis. With the population ageing, the need for care has grown and become more intense and demanding (Durán, 2018). However, this does not mean that these are jobs of quality, especially when they are performed in the domestic sphere (Díaz, 2016; Díaz & Martínez-Buján, 2018; Hobson, Hellgren & Serrano, 2019). The increase in the demand for care caused by demographic ageing can no longer be met by family networks, whose role is increasingly being supplanted by the immigrant female working population. (Moré, 2017).

In Mediterranean countries, the increasing needs for care has until now apportioned a major role for families, together with a limited and scarce public service network and the recourse to the market. This market offer comprises national women from lower classes and immigrants from poorer countries. Some authors (Bettio et al., 2006; Lyon & Gluskmann, 2008) have explored comparatively the interrelationships between Care Regimes and female migrations in southern Europe to explain the growing recourse to immigrant women in the domestic care sector. They concur that the proliferation of monetary transfers administered directly by families has encouraged the hire of female domestic workers. Based on the case of Italy, Bettio et al. (2006) argue that immigrant women are replacing national women in providing care work; Díaz and Martínez-Buján also confirm that domestic work contracted privately by families is no longer a “shelter” for national women (2018). Under the heading *Configurations of Care Work*, Lyon and Gluskmann (2008) say that, with respect to Southern European countries with a strong familist tradition, the commodified work of immigrants in the domestic sphere has now taken prominence. This rising demand attracts a large number of migrants, a good proportion of them employed in the domestic sector. Many of these female workers come from Latin America (León, 2013).

The professionalisation and commodification of domestic elderly care are processes that do not necessarily go hand in hand (Torns, 2014). Professionalisation makes it possible to clearly distinguish the skills and knowledge incorporated into care work of the cultural qualities associated with femininity, and to identify them as specific qualifications (Gómez Bueno, 2001). This in turn lends the work dignity and recognition. Meanwhile, the commodification of care raises the problem of how the qualifications required are regarded and remunerated, as well as that of the working conditions in which this work is performed. In general, this type of work is highly feminised, with low remuneration and, overall, a minimal level of recognised qualifications. Domestic elderly care is affected, on the one hand, by the low regard that all care work has historically suffered, in that to perform it the knowledge and skills, as the cliché goes, acquired in the construction of feminine identity are put into action. On the other hand, specialised and technical knowledge is increasingly necessary in domestic elderly care (Martín Palomo & Gómez Bueno, 2018; Díaz & Martínez-Buján, 2018), while many of the skills it requires carry strong relational

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<sup>4</sup> The first version of this article was presented as a paper at the 13<sup>th</sup> Conference of the European Sociological Association, Athens, 2017. We thank Carlos Prieto and anonymous reviewers for their careful reading of this text and their suggestions; however, the final text is exclusively the responsibility of the authors.

and emotional connotations. In fact, caring practice entails the interconnecting of a variety of affective, moral and corporal dimensions in a complex, situated way. These make care a job in which the relational aspects are placed in the foreground, taking on central importance (Martín Palomo, 2008).

In Spain, the development of forms of care that are different or complementary to the type of care provided intensively by families has been propitiated by the convergence of various factors. These include two recent legal measures. The first, is the Law of the Personal Autonomy and Care for Dependent Persons, 2006. The second, Royal Decree 1620/2011 of November 14, regulates the special employment relationship of service within the family household. In this context, the demand for some care services that were already being provided in the domestic environment, such as the Home Help Service and the hiring of care services in the private market has expanded as a result of sociodemographic changes based on three core processes: the growing incorporation of women into the labour market, the demand for care generated by population ageing and the increasing number of migrant women prepared to respond to care needs.

The Law of the Personal Autonomy and Care for Dependent Persons gave rise to the development of the nationwide *Autonomy and Dependency Care System*, as its application is delegated to the governments of Spain's different Autonomous Communities. The Autonomy and Dependency Care System distinguishes between two major types of resource: (a) public services: telecare, home help, residential centres, day centres, personal assistants; and (b) benefits of three types: (i) one with which people in need of care can "reward" the services provided by a relative with whom they live (an *Economic Benefit for Family Care*, or PECEF, Spanish acronym for *Prestación Económica para Cuidados en el Entorno Familiar*); (ii) one linked to buying a care service on the market; and (iii) one devoted to covering the expenses that arise from hiring a Personal Assistant. This financial assistance was exceptional; it provided for those situations in which other types of services were not available to respond to care needs. However, there have been cases where this assistance has been used to remunerate the care provided by irregular migrant female workers who suffer huge wage insecurity and no recognition of rights (Martín Palomo et al., 2018). The Economic Benefit for Family Care is not understood by the Law as a wage for the carer, but to help the person in need of care to pay in some way for the care received from a relative with whom they live. This enables many women, who were already taking care of their relatives, to receive a certain monetary payment for it. However, it has been criticised for reinforcing the role of women as carers, helping to reproduce the sexual division of work in families. In effect, the Economic Benefit for Family Care has generated a process of refamilisation of care that reinforces existing inequality structures of gender, ethnicity and social class (Martínez Buján, 2014) among the most impoverished and vulnerable social groups. In Spain, where families had already assumed that role in the care of their elders (Colectivo IOE, 2005), the extending of this type of financial assistance (the *Economic Benefit for Family Care*) has favoured a growing trend towards the privatisation of care through domestic service (Martínez-Buján, 2011). For several decades, this tendency has been underpinned by the hiring of migrant women, many of them in an irregular situation in Spain, often to work in a regime in which they live with the person or persons for whom they care (Anderson, 2000; Escrivá, 2000; Parella, 2000). Thus, familism appears to have encountered new forms of expression with the commodification and

development of public services under the Autonomy and Dependency Care System, and more specifically through the mass application of some of the types of financial assistance to the care-receiver established by the Law of the Personal Autonomy and Care for Dependent Persons (Martínez-Buján, 2014).

This article focuses its analysis on the domestic sphere as this is the space that best reflects the singular intertwining of affection, morals and emotions involved in care work (Salazar Parreñas, 2001) that contributes to making it so difficult for it to be professionalised (Martín Palomo, 2008) and that makes this work so vulnerable (Martín Palomo, 2016). Accordingly, it has been necessary to investigate to what extent the different forms of recruitment and hire affect the professionalisation of domestic elderly care. For this, it must be remembered that there are two main types of care work in terms of type of hire: (i) families privately hiring carers, who in many cases are migrants and above all live with the care-receiver; and (ii) hire mediated by companies or directly by the administration for the Home Help Service, a public service provided in the domestic sphere.

The results of the study we conducted in Andalusia<sup>5</sup> are presented here as an example for analyzing how vulnerabilities cross between caregivers and carereceivers. In Andalusia, it undertakes a qualitative microsociological approach (analysing the discourses of different social agents), whose aim is to discover the characteristics of the paid elderly care work provided in the domestic environment. The intention is to answer the question as to what extent the form of recruitment in the domestic care sector enables such work to be made professional. To this end, it compares two types of hire that have been especially affected by the recent legal changes mentioned above: private hire by families and the Home Help Service.

Andalusia is one of Spain's poorest regions, in which the strong familist culture common to the whole country prevails. Even in a context of economic crisis and high female unemployment, it has seen an intense process of commodification of domestic elderly care. This is largely due to the role played by financial assistance in the provision of care in the region.

## 2. Research methodology

The nationwide study of which the results of the study presented here form part aims to discover how care is organised in different Autonomous Communities. It focuses on three aspects: state, market and families, analysing the role played by each in the various regional care configurations. For the Andalusia study, we adopted two methodological approaches: one, the review of secondary sources and recent legislation in order to contextualise the discourses produced; and, two, the production of primary data with a qualitative approach conducted in the region, through semi-structured interviews with different social agents involved in the provision of elderly care.

This methodological design and the fieldwork itself identified new social actors and processes that help understand how domestic elderly care is being reconfigured

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<sup>5</sup> This paper has been prepared within the framework of the Project CSO2012-32901 entitled *Geographies of care work. Implications of its privatization for job creation* ("Geografías del trabajo de cuidados. Implicaciones de su privatización sobre la creación de empleo"), financed by the National RDI Plan of the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, during the period 2013–2016.

in Andalusia, where the migrant population is taking an emerging leading role. In our fieldwork, we conducted a total of twenty-five semi-structured interviews. Profiles were arranged in four strands, according to the discourses regarded as relevant to the study: (i) social protection management professionals i.e. high-ranking politicians, Autonomy and Dependency Care System managers, social workers<sup>6</sup>; (ii) managers of care centres for adults with daily care needs i.e. directors of residential centres and day centres, social workers<sup>7</sup>; (iii) paid carers in homes, day centres and residential centres, including domestic carers, geriatricians, physiotherapists<sup>8</sup> and (iv) representatives of the associative movement in support of human dignity i.e. female lawyers of sociopolitical movements, representatives of domestic employees, trade union representatives<sup>9</sup>.

With the aim of compensating for the possible bias that each channel of contact generates, a variety of sources has been used in order to establish initial contacts: trades unions, intermediary organisations in the domestic sector, domestic work associations, NGOs, churches, public organisations and informal contacts. The snowball method has been employed, although only one contact has been made for each channel used. Analysis of discourses focused on the role of workers in the domestic elderly care. The managers and social workers informed us about the contributions made by Law of the Personal Autonomy and Care for Dependent Persons, Royal Decree 1620 and the Autonomy and Dependency Care System with regard to domestic elderly care, as well as the specific difficulties in its implementation and unmet objectives even when they are provided for in the legislation. They also provided information on the difficulties experienced by immigrant women in finding decent work and wages especially when they have not regularised their administrative situation. The representatives of the associative movement in support of human dignity were crucial to discovering the situation of immigrant women as carers of the elderly in the domestic sphere. The interviews with those who work as carers in domestic environments offered the view of those who work in this field. The number of interviews conducted was guided by habitual saturation criteria in the different groups studied.

### 3. Results and discussion

The opportunities to professionalise the sector offered by the legislative changes introduced by Law of the Personal Autonomy and Care for Dependent Persons in 2006 and Royal Decree 1620 in 2011 have not helped to generate quality employment in domestic elderly care. This is the most important result we have drawn from the research and it is discussed below. The results and discussion are organised as follows: firstly, analysis of the characteristics of the context in which domestic elderly care

<sup>6</sup> Social Services and Dependency Agency (E17); Telecare Office (E21); Office for Dependency Care (E10); Social Worker, Office for Dependency Care (E2); Social Worker, City Council (E3); Social Worker, Health Department (E11).

<sup>7</sup> Director of Private Home Assistance Company (E23); Nursing Home Director (E15); Social Worker, Nursing Home (E18); Service Head of Private Home Assistance Company (E8); Coordinator for Social Services, Home Assistance Company (E9); Nursing Home Director (E12); Day Centre Director (E14).

<sup>8</sup> Male Home Carer (E4); Migrant Home Carer –Peru (E6); Migrant Home Carer –Honduras (E13); Migrant Home Carer –Bolivia (E22); Day Centre Assistant (E7); Nursing Home Physical Therapist (E16); Home Carer (E19); Home Carer (E24); Carer in Public Home Assistance Company (E25).

<sup>9</sup> Social Development Office (E1); Trade Union Representative (E20); Association of Domestic Workers (E5).



work takes place; secondly, the characteristics of the sector and the impact therein of current legislation; and finally, comparative analysis of how the progress made in the professionalisation of the sector operates according to two different types of hire: the Home Help Service and private work offered by families.

### 3.1. Familism and domestic care work at the crossroads

In Southern Europe, and within Spain, Andalusia is unique in terms of what we are investigating. It is a crossroads, a complex mixture of familism, growing social inequality and exploitation of migrants in domestic elderly care. The region displays a set of singular socioeconomic conditions that require special examination. As evidenced by the recent report of the FOESSA Foundation (2014), Andalusia is one of Southern Europe's poorest regions. It has high internal inequality, both geographically and between different social groups, and has Spain's highest unemployment rate. Average household income is significantly lower than the country average, as are average income per capita and average income per consumption unit. The poverty and exclusion rate is 38.3%, Spain's second highest, despite other regions having lower or similar income levels (FOESSA Foundation, 2014). With regard to unemployment, data from 2019 in the Survey of the Active Population shows that Andalusia's unemployment figures continue to be well above the national average and among the highest in Spain: 21.19% overall, compared to 14.10% in the country as a whole. Meanwhile, female unemployment in Andalusia is 25.52% compared to 15.99% nationally (INE, 2020).

Family culture is especially prevalent in Andalusia, where it combines with a limited provision of services for elderly care. This means that care is delegated to the family, as the basis of a "passive" policy centred on monetary transfers to families (Zambrano et al., 2015). Thus, according to data as of December 31, 2019, 29.74% of assistance received for care of the elderly in a dependent situation corresponds to the Economic Benefit for Family Care, i.e. a quarter of assistance is for the elderly person be taken care of in their home by a family member, being *Economic Benefit for Family Care* 17.72% for the total national (ADCS, 2020). In keeping with this family culture, the elderly choose primarily to receive care at home, ideally in their own homes, and to remain there for the maximum length of time possible, cared for by their relatives if possible (CIS, 2014). In this familist model, only a decade ago the hiring of someone from outside the family for elderly care was not common, being accessible only to families with more resources. In fact, according to the Survey of Disability, Personal Autonomy and Dependency Situations (whose Spanish acronym is EDAD), on comparing the situation in the different Autonomous Communities, Andalusia ranked second in terms of the percentage of people cared for solely by the family among the total number of over-65s in a situation of dependency and occupied 14th place with regard to users of the Home Help Service. According to this survey, those engaged in care work included: the daughter (89.53%), the spouse or partner (46.68%), another relative (18.72%), the son (15.91%) and a domestic employee (15.48%). Only 4.68% of the over-65s in situations of dependency used social services, making the region twelfth among the Autonomous Communities and tenth in terms of the over-65s who have a domestic employee; 98% of domestic care employees in Spain were women and 71% were foreign females. At the end of 2015, the Home Help Service was attending in Spain to 326,043 over-65s, of which

70% were concentrated in Catalonia, Andalusia, the Madrid Region and Castile and León. The coverage rate was 3.77%, with the Madrid Region (5.67), La Rioja (5.52), Catalonia (4.87) and Andalusia (4.87) being the Autonomous Regions with the highest rates. From 2000, the number of users grew considerably, rising from 139,384 to 326,043. This represents an annual average growth of 12,444 users. With regard to the coverage rate, this increased by 1.78 over the period, from 1.99% in 2000 to 3.77% in 2015 (IMSERSO, 2016). For migrant women, the administrative situation, irrespective of whether they have “papers”, greatly affects their conditions and types of labour insertion (Anderson, 2000). In this regard, immigration legislation, which is increasingly restrictive in Spain in terms of residence rules, has impacted considerably on the situation of female migrant workers who provide domestic elderly care (Gil Araujo & González-Fernández, 2014).

The growing employment demand for elderly care in the domestic sphere has, however, introduced a variation on the family care model by progressively extending the presence of female migrant domestic care workers into other social strata (Hellgren & Serrano, 2019). This appears to have been favoured largely by the monetary transfers made through the application of the Law of the Personal Autonomy and Care for Dependent Persons, compared to what was indicated prior to the application of this law by Elin Peterson who identified this resource in the middle classes, therefore making it a means of social differentiation (2007). The data is significant. In Andalusia, the financial benefit is the most used resource after telecare. According to information from the Autonomy and Dependency Care System, as of December 31, 2019, the distribution of the various public benefits in Andalusia was: telecare service (30.62%); Economic Benefit for Family Care (24.46%); Home Help Service (29.74%); residences (8.41%); attendance at day/night centres (4.67%); payment linked to hiring a service in the private market (1.53%), Personal Assistant, 13 persons (0%). Andalusia is in 14th place among the 17 Spanish Autonomous Communities, in terms of those benefiting from residential care. The Economic Benefit for Family Care has been used *de facto*, either in some cases to monetize the care provided by the family carer, or in many other cases to hire, illegally and very precariously, women from outside the family to do so (Martínez-Buján, 2014; Martín Palomo et al., 2018). In the former, for many women who were already carers of their relatives, financial assistance is received as “a kind of wage”<sup>10</sup>, specifically for 9,012 women in 2019<sup>11</sup> in Andalusia, and 56.546 at national level (ADCS, 2020). In the latter, in which financial assistance is used to hire women from outside the family, the impact on female migrant care workers has been negative because it has contributed to make the domestic care sector more insecure (Martínez-Buján, 2014). This observation is corroborated by the social agents interviewed in this study.

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<sup>10</sup> The maximum sums of the economic benefits corresponding to Grade III (High dependence) were 487 euros a month (level 2) and 390 euros (level 1) (See Royal Decree 727/2007 of 8 June on criteria for determining intensities of protection services and the amount of economic benefits of the Law of the Personal Autonomy and Care for Dependent Persons).

<sup>11</sup> For each assistance, individual agreements are signed between the person who receives the assistance and the Autonomy and Dependency Care System. See Special Agreement of Non-Professional Carers of those in a situation of dependence. Ministry of Health, Consumer Affairs and Social Welfare. Online: <http://www.seg-social.es/wps/portal/wss/internet/Trabajadores/Afiliacion/10547/10555/51635>.

### 3.2. Decent work? Challenges in applying the legislation in force

Royal Decree 1620/2011 of November 14, which regulates the special employment relationship of service within the family household, gave a number of rights to domestic workers. These included care work (having a contract, recognition of a minimum wage, paid holidays, weekly free time, certain hours of rest, among others). In 2012, a Royal Decree-Law<sup>12</sup> was approved that would enable these female workers to undergo a transitional period of progressive alignment to the General Social Security System. However, still not enough progress has been made to fully align both regimes (Díaz & Martínez-Buján, 2018).

Occupational circumstances are especially difficult for female immigrant workers, who suffer most from the infringement of their rights in this sector. According to data of the Active Population Survey (EPA, 2019), the domestic employment sector contains 428,700 people in Spain, of which almost all are women (98.00 %). A certain proportion (almost four of ten) of those employed in the sector in 2019 are foreign workers registered in the social security system, i.e. 170,444 persons in absolute terms, of which 99.25 % are women. (Ministerio Trabajo y Economía Social, 2019). Even though Spain is one of the countries with the highest number of domestic employees in Europe along with France and Italy (ILO, 2013: 35), it is indeed a country in which the group is valued the worst. It is estimated that a considerable proportion of female domestic employees work without a contract (García Sainz, 2011). In fact, according to the Dependent Care Survey (CIS, 2014), only 21% of those in a situation of dependency who have employed someone at home to respond to their care needs have drawn up a contract; 49.2% have not drawn up a contract but have an informal agreement.

Those female care workers in domestic environments who are hired privately are registered in a specific Social Security contribution regime—the Special Regime for Female Domestic Employees – in which they have no right to unemployment benefit. Nor are there any guidelines for action in the case of work accidents, as reported by the Basque Country Association of Female Domestic Workers<sup>13</sup>. The Special Regime for Domestic Female Domestic Employees suffers from great inequalities with respect to the other employment regimes and, moreover, approximately a third of these female workers are not even registered. On December 31, 2019, there were a total of 395.683 people registered throughout Spain. But beyond whether they appear or not in the General Regime or in the Special Regime, the situation of female workers is made insecure by contract breaches, which the competent Labour Inspectors do not appear to be majorly involved in investigating.

In principle, there are certain types of hire that could be more favourable to promoting the professionalisation of domestic care work. This applies to the Home Help Service. When it is the public administration that provides this service, either directly or through the subcontracting of the work, although it continues to be an insecure job, the rights of female carers are usually respected. This also enables care to be provided in a more professionalised manner as in

<sup>12</sup> Royal Decree-Law 29/2012, of 28 December, on the improvement of management and social protection in the Special Regime for Domestic Employees and other financial and social measures. On line: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rdl/2012/12/28/29/con>

<sup>13</sup> Basque Country Association of Female Domestic Workers. Online: <http://ath-ele.com/es/> <http://ath-ele.com/es/>



order to be hired in this service, female workers must receive specialised training provided and/or recognised by the bodies that administer the Autonomy and Dependency Care System. This contrasts with when they are hired privately and directly by families. But, despite this, outsourcing with companies has become the main work management tool for local public administrations, with the consequence that both working hours and types of contract are more flexible. In principle, more dignified working and wage conditions are ensured, as this obliges them to sign up with public administrations. However, the companies that provide Home Help Service are not scrupulous in their attitude to female workers' rights. This lack of respect applies, of course, equally to both female migrants and national women, who have again sought employment in this sector because of the crises and who view the former as serious competition (Martín Palomo & Gómez Bueno, 2018). The Home Help Service sector is newly developed in Spain and probably needs more forceful regulation because working and wage conditions, as well as the care provided, depend on the specific demands and conditions imposed by each council or other type of local administrative body (associations of municipalities, for example) when municipalities are very small. Working conditions and content may vary, depending on whether the service is provided directly by the municipality or is subcontracted either through a small cooperative or a large company.

In general, paid female carers, like family carers, have learned the trade in a self-taught manner, based on daily practice. This experience began to be recognised from 2011<sup>14</sup> as a formal qualification, with the obtaining of the professional certificate that, in turn, allows them to access "professionalised" care jobs. The female workers of the Home Help Service must possess three thousand hours of demonstrable experience, or have studied a socio-health module, which includes varied content, such as the psychosocial aspects of care, the implications of personal attention, home management or social skills. Since the implementation of the Law of the Personal Autonomy and Care for Dependent Persons, companies and public administrations have sought, with these mechanisms for certification of experience, to operationalise the care activity that leads towards its professionalisation, starting by formalising the experience acquired. Since December 2016,<sup>15</sup> anyone who wants to work in the Home Help Service must possess the certificate.

### **3.3. The difficult professionalisation of domestic elderly care work**

The type of recruitment and hire are the strands by which the segmentation of domestic work caring for the elderly has been analysed: direct hire by families, either as a live-in or an external employee; and the Home Help Service, with the intermediation of the public administration and of companies.

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<sup>14</sup> The issue of these certificates is regulated by the Order of 11 November 2011, which creates the Andalusian Register of Certificates of Professionalism and Accumulative Partial Accreditations and establishes the procedure for their registration and issue.

<sup>15</sup> Resolution of 2 December 2018, of the State Secretariat for Social Policy, Families, and Dependency and Autonomy Assistance, on common accreditation criteria to ensure the quality of the centres and services of the System for Autonomy and Dependency Care. Official State Gazette n° 303. 17 December 2008.

### 3.3.1. Migrants in domestic care work hired privately in households

Care has remained a dynamic sector, even in the toughest times of the economic crisis (ILO, 2015; Díaz, 2016; Hellgren & Serrano, 2019). However, it has been impossible to ensure respect for the working and wage rights of those who, hired privately, care for the elderly in the domestic sphere, where the hiring of migrant women has taken on unusual importance in the region, even in a context of high female unemployment.

The working and wage conditions of the migrants performing these jobs are generally not the same as of national women. Among other reasons, this is because there is a lack of recognition of the minimum rights of many of the non-national women that would enable them to back up their demands. Thus, two decades after reports of numerous examples of abuse and exploitation of the migrant workers working in the sector (Oso, 1998; Gregorio, 1998; Escrivá, 2000), such situations persist. A recent study conducted in Madrid and Barcelona confirms that a quarter of female immigrant carers have held some sort of contract and that only 2% worked for care companies, which places female care workers in a highly vulnerable situation (Hobson et al., 2018).

In recent years, there has been an increase in visits [to the Social Development Office for advice] by foreign women who live at their care receivers' homes. Many have been fired when they have started asking questions, in order to get a little information about their rights and to claim free time. This is free time that they are due: holidays, or days off on public holidays. Many sackings are due to this. (E1, Social Development Office)

In the elderly care sector in the domestic sphere, it is possible to identify two very different types, who also have very different work and wage conditions (analysed in detail by Anderson, 2000). There are live-in workers, who reside in the same dwelling as the elderly people for whom they care; and there are also external workers who are normally hired by the hour in several homes during the week. In general, live-in domestic workers tend to be those migrants who need to regularise their administrative situation and who take on this work in the hope of obtaining their "papers" and saving enough to cover the expenses of their relatives, who usually reside in their countries of origin, until they can regroup them in Spain (García Sainz, 2011). This all appears to indicate that for immigrant women in an irregular situation the legislative change introduced by Royal Decree 1620 has hardly been of benefit.

When they manage to regularise their situation, these immigrant women usually seek a type of employment that is different to that of a live-in employee (Martínez Buján & Díaz, 2018). The social agents interviewed (E1, Social Development Office; E5, Association of Domestic Workers) say that the employment regime of female domestic workers residing in the same dwelling as the person or persons for whom they care is more insecure both in terms of working and wage conditions. In addition, situations of abuse and lack of respect for their rights are commonplace. The care of the elderly also entails a great emotional burden because it involves caring for them to keep them alive, to postpone and outwit death (Durán, 2018). When decrepitude, chronic diseases and the end-of-life horizon are continually present, this affects the daily life of the female care worker who knows that at some point the

employment relationship will end at some point and may do so unexpectedly. The levels of responsibility and dedication required are high and the mourning at such a loss is not only emotional, even though this may be the case, but it can also mean suddenly becoming homeless, jobless and lacking unemployment insurance, which places them in extremely vulnerable situations. Therefore, in the domestic care of the elderly, when working and wage conditions are insecure, it is understandable that they would tailor the duration of their residence at the home of the care receiver to these and other considerations. One choice is to remain longer in order to continue sending money to their relatives or saving up in order to regroup them. Alternatively, despite maintaining a close bond of responsibility and affection with the person they care for, when they have the opportunity to change jobs in order to improve their working conditions, they may choose to do so (Gregorio, 2017). In fact, insecurity is an invitation to change jobs but this is a source of suffering at work, precisely due to the moral responsibility that the bond with the care-receiver generates, which makes the female worker more vulnerable, removing her ability to better negotiate her working conditions. These are some of the dilemmas that female care workers face and that put a brake on negotiating better working and wage conditions.

Recent decades have seen a tendency to swap the position of live-in carers for work that does not involve cohabiting with the people for whom they care (Anderson, 2000; Salazar Parreñas, 2001; Oso, 1998; Gregorio, 1998; Martínez-Buján, 2011; Briones et al., 2014). Many studies such as those cited have also shown that apart from working and wage conditions, the moral and emotional pressures on the dedication of the female care worker are greater if they live with those for whom they care. Those interviewed relate how during the initial period of work as live-in carers they experience a mixture of feelings ranging from despair (due to the isolation, the distance from their relatives, the culture shock, the unequal power relationship with their employers) to an expectant wait (to get papers and to collect more money to improve the living conditions of their families, to have an independent home and enjoy “real” free time each day etc.). This set of expectations allows them to “endure” cohabitation in the same home with the person for whom they care for a flexible period of time. However, this usually becomes very tough for the employees, both due to the material conditions in which they live (twenty-four hours a day living in the home of another person with very different habits and customs), and the lack of independence, time, and often a decent space of their own. Thus, they express the need to free themselves of the mental burden that accompanies the times of availability, to disconnect, even for a few hours, from the affective demands, from the concern, from that permanent availability to perform caring work that also occurs in monetized care. This is especially true when the care-receiver is strongly dependent on someone else’s care, and in the case of internal employees this is intensified greatly. In addition, this is a relationship in which there is a great imbalance of power because, although the subsistence of the person in need of care depends to a large extent on the daily care provided by the migrant female worker, ignorance of her rights, as well as the channels in which to exercise them, places the latter in a position of special vulnerability. Thus, a sort of intertwining of vulnerabilities is generated: care of those who are highly vulnerable as a result of their dependency takes place with dedication and affection in conditions that are often highly disconnected in that these women are threatened with potential abuse or helpless to avoid dismissal as a result of this imbalance of power.

Some civil society entities – not trade unions precisely – are playing a very important role in denouncing these processes of vulnerabilisation in order to dignify working conditions and in configuring care provision in Andalusia (Martín Palomo et al., 2018). Female migrant workers are the most vulnerable among female workers in the domestic sphere (Hobson et al., 2018).

All our aims as a collective are to make visible the work of female domestic workers and the conditions in which they work, to empower ourselves as female workers, to bring tools to fight against vulnerability and to publicise the regulations of this work because these are often not known (E5, Association of Domestic Workers)

In cases where the end of the employment relationship is not accompanied by an agreement, it is usually very difficult for them to initiate a claim because of the helplessness they feel. Therefore, when they are forced to sue their employers, they ask the groups that advise them to accompany them to conciliation meetings to lend them support, or to tribunals, when these meetings do not produce an agreement. However, these social organisations lack the resources to do so. Accordingly, it is argued that with the contribution of more resources and organisations, especially with a clearer and more forceful involvement of the unions in the protection of the rights of female domestic care workers, greater progress could be made towards making this work more dignified.

For legal proceedings, the Bizkaia Association of Domestic Workers told us that if you are accompanied by a group from an association or by a union you achieve far more agreements (E1, Social Development Office)

The collectives involved in asserting the rights of female migrant domestic care workers celebrated Royal Decree 1620 when it was approved. However, its impact on getting care to be regarded as “a real job” has been less effective than expected (León, 2013). In fact, when hiring women as live-in workers, this legislation is not always respected. Working and wage conditions are accepted outside the remit of law, insofar as these women do not know their rights, cannot choose or fear not finding another job.

I started to work without a contract because I needed the money. To legalise my situation I needed a contract. The family refused and often you have to put up with things due to the need for papers. My schedule was not respected... I worked for three years from 8 am to 9 pm, even though the contract stated that I would not do overtime. (E22, Migrant Home Carer)

For many female migrant domestic care workers, concern about contributions to the social security or pension system fade in significance. They have other more urgent needs, such as collecting the resources to support their relatives in other countries, saving up to bring them to Spain, or having their own space. Planning for the future is almost a luxury and this will impact negatively on their retirement pensions (Olid González, 2017). In addition, many of them are obliged to work until they are old, although physically they are not able to do so, since their contribution bases are so low that they will have to prolong their presence in the labour market to the maximum in order to amass the minimum contributions that entitle them to a contributory pension. The crisis has pushed down wages and has affected their possibilities of

negotiating their working conditions in a sector that depends on highly individualised contracting relationships and where there is no collective agreement or strong collective bargaining to support agreements between individuals.

The crisis has also affected the numbers of hours worked (Hobson et al., 2018). Female workers and families drift, then, towards systems of gift and counter-gift, which within a relationship of unequal power, tend to be abusive. Therefore, the “prices” of domestic care services have been reduced at the toughest moments of the economic crisis, unlike other jobs, where the unions become involved to achieve better pay conditions in collective agreements, or at least to maintain them (Zambrano et al., 2015). Paradoxically, in just a decade, attempts at professionalisation have been made at the same time as care work becoming more insecure, making this type of care work an unattractive labour niche for national women (Hobson et al., 2018).

Before, they paid you a minimum of 800 euros as a live-in domestic worker, with a right to take one weekend off, either Saturday or Sunday or a day and half. And now you might get paid 600 euros (...) In exchange, they say “we give you food and other things” (E22, Migrant Home Carer).

The reality from our perspective is that no contract is signed. They say you are in an internship period; they make proposals. Look, we will pay you 700 euros with no Social Security contribution. We tolerate this kind of situation due to the crisis (E2, Social Worker, Office for Dependency Care)

The interviews show how female live-in carers of the elderly become greatly involved in the care they provide in part because they cannot disconnect from being attentive to their needs and demands when residing in the same home. Families appreciate a carer who shows more concern for the welfare of the care-receiver than their own. In fact, care receivers and their closest relatives expect carers to provide care in the same affectionate and family atmosphere as family caregivers do, with the same availability and apparently without any limits. The care of the elderly person is “what matters”. Female care workers are expected to act as if they were family carers and are even ambiguously considered “as family”, which seems to divert attention from the fact that for the hired person this is a job. For female migrant employees in domestic care, this ideal of good care carries with it, therefore, high costs.

Sometimes they leave you with a person to care for and forget about them. They trust that you will take good care of them, but they also need the affection of their relatives and for them to be more attentive. You are the one that takes care of them, but you are not a member of the family. It’s a responsibility (E22, Migrant Home Carer)

Female carers, with time spent in a caring relationship, end up establishing an emotional bond with the elderly for whom they care and feel responsible for their well-being. Thus, for example, a migrant interviewed, after many years working as a carer for the elderly, says “I would kill for my old folks” (E13, Migrant Home Carer).

Due to the involvement inherent in a relationship that is usually long term, the emotional cost is easier to bear when the carer is a professional who once they have finished their day’s work returns to their own home. It is more difficult when the female caregiver resides in the same home as the person for whom she cares. The



responsibility of caring and a deeply internalised sense of duty means these live-in carers never disconnect. In fact, they face the tension between, on the one hand, responding to the other's care needs; and, on the other, fighting for decent conditions in the work they perform.

The disadvantages for example of live-in work is that it's all day in one house. I admit it's a bit overwhelming. In my opinion, it's better to work all day but at night sleep in your own house because when you sleep in the house where you work you also have to keep an eye on your old folks and you don't get enough rest (E22, Migrant Home Carer).

Despite this dedication and the connection built and its importance in ensuring the quality of care, it is unsurprising that families will replace an employee if they find another who is willing to work more hours or take on more responsibility for the same pay, or when they claim working or wage rights that challenge the existing contracting model. The threat of dismissal, which is retained in Royal Decree 1620 and allows the employer to terminate the employment relationship from one day to another without any financial cost, without having to provide any more justification than loss of confidence in the employee, generates huge potential vulnerability for domestic employees (E20, Trade Union Representative) and helps to make them more vulnerable.

In its daily demands, care work tends to exceed the limits of what is agreed because needs are also flexible. For instance, someone can be hired to look after one person, but then can be required to take care of two people and also to do household chores.

Sometimes you arrive and you find that they have left you dishes to wash up. I have washed up sometimes. But I also told them once: "Look, I was sent to help you, to move you, to take care of you". A friend told me that sometimes they asked her, while she was taking care of an elderly person, to go and pick up their daughter from the nursery." (E6, Migrant Home Caregiver)

For the elderly, care needs generally increase over time in terms of quantity and intensity, but this is often not taken into account by employers, who choose not to modify working and/or wage conditions accordingly (Martín Palomo et al., 2018).

### **3.3.2. Ambivalent intermediation: The Home Help Service**

The theoretical advantages of the Home Help Service with regard to recruitment and hire are less so in practice because this labour niche brings certain problems due to the fact that care is provided in domestic environments. Also, the context of crisis, wage adjustment and time pressures have tended to make female employees' working and wage conditions insecure, as well as the quality of the care they provide.

The day-to-day business of the women who work in this service is highly stressful as they have to move from one home to the next; in fact, the travelling time between one home and another in the planning of their schedules is not taken into account, as has been reflected in other studies (Moré, 2017; Martín Palomo & Gómez Bueno, 2018). Their job consists of visiting people in a dependent situation, providing them with care (washing mainly) and/or performing some domestic tasks detailed in a

contract at a pre-determined time. Tasks are not always as clearly defined as intended, while the conditions of service provision fail to respond to the need for company and communication felt by many older people, especially those who live alone and who can barely leave their homes. Due to the adjustment and pressure of time and the criteria of economic efficiency by which the services and shifts are organised, the care provided is more technical and functional than comprehensive. This affects both the female workers, who feel challenged by these requirements and would like to provide a truly professional service, and the elderly, who do not feel their needs and demands are being respected. This form of care, which entails less emotional involvement with the care-receiver, supposes for the latter a reduction in overall quality in the care received (Moré, 2017). Valued highly by the elderly, the relational aspects of care become secondary to the requirement to visit different homes at the prescribed times to attend a list of elderly people, who also expect more than a shower, a breakfast or a meal, or to have their beds made (Martín Palomo & Gómez Bueno, 2018). Changes in shifts, because of modified schedules or the tailoring of services, mean that workers are rotated around different homes, which makes it impossible to establish a relationship of mutual understanding between the carer and the care-receiver. A reduction in the affective aspect of care is usually perceived as a reduction in the quality of service, both by providers and receivers.

They call and tell you that from 10:00 to 11:00 you'll be taking care of this person, from 11:00 to 12:00 another and so on all morning. It allows you more freedom, but it is hugely tiring and stressful. And anyway, what kind of care can be provided at times? Sometimes care involves following up, knowing how the person is progressing. (E5, Association of Domestic Workers)

Insecurity can be explained by a failure to control company malpractice by the public administration that subcontracts its services. It is also down to the fact that female workers are unable to meet and become aware of these abuses, to organise and coordinate their labour demands, as their jobs are undertaken alone and there are no opportunities for the workers to get together in their day-to-day work.

For the people who attend to the demands of dependency every day, the hiring of female carers by companies has also signified a reduction in the hourly rate of pay for domestic help. There has been talk about the law of dependency and insecurity, about subcontracting all the time, about it not being cheaper, that someone has been taking a cut and that it was these companies (E10, Office for Dependency Care).

The weight of the traditionally menial culture of domestic work in Andalusia influences the forms of domestic care relationship nowadays with regard to care receivers and employers. This is because they show a tendency to reproduce old models in their daily relationship with the carer, even when outsourcing such as the Home Help Service mediates between them. This (neo)servility (Fraisie, 2000) manifests itself strikingly in those social spheres with their own experience in which they, or their mothers or grandmothers, have worked as "maids" (Martín Palomo & Gómez Bueno, 2018). Nevertheless, female carers themselves view working in the Home Help Service as an improvement on domestic care provided when they are hired directly by the families because the former recognises rights in terms of wage,

holidays and training. They can also access training courses on how to perform their work and how to protect themselves from the abuses that might occasionally occur on the part of families.

The financial conditions are better. We have our different users. But you do not have to run from one place to another all day. Everything is more controlled. We had meetings with a coordinator who updated us on the new laws; we had a chance to talk if something had gone wrong. She told us about how far we should go at work. We will be providing care, not doing other tasks. There is a lot of abuse; sometimes they ask us to do tasks for other relatives (E6, Migrant Home Carer).

However, many immigrants cannot access these jobs because of training requirements. To be hired by the Home Help Service, it is necessary to have a professional certificate in socio-health care, be a nursing assistant, or have undergone similar recognised training. In recent years, training has been provided, the minimum required to work in the Home Help Service, by intermediary companies and NGOs such as the Red Cross Volunteer Service. However, these programmes involve, in turn, certain requirements to be able to access them, such as medium-level qualifications or an equivalent (validated) qualification in the case of other countries. This represents an obstacle for those migrants who have been unable to get their training recognised in Spain. There are many immigrant women, especially the youngest, who have tried to combine work with training, but the demands of daily care have made this impossible. Only regularised migrant women who have free time can access the training that enables them to work in the Home Help Service. This is not the case for those who live in their care-receiver's home.

The Regional Ministry of Education has professionally certified female workers. The work was never regulated and there was no formal training. Now, a big effort is being made. The level of professionalism has increased greatly in a few years (E9, Coordinator for Social Services, Home Help Company)

#### 4. Conclusions

In domestic environments, the physical, emotional and moral aspects that characterise the paid care of the elderly create specific obstacles to professionalisation. This, together with a lack of visibility and recognition of care work, has made progress towards greater professionalisation impossible even when legal progress has appeared to suggest the opposite. Moreover, the economic crisis and the difficulties in implementing the policies put in place to apply the promising legislation approved in the past decade have undermined the original political aims. The incomplete professionalisation process that has resulted has major consequences for the quality of care provided to the elderly in situations of dependency, as well as for fairness and gender equality.

From the outset, the application of Law of the Personal Autonomy and Care for Dependent Persons has faced both the deep-rooted nature of a familist care culture and a tremendous crisis that obliged the implementation of the Autonomy and Dependency Care System on the basis of the progressive insecurity of care work as

a whole. The financial assistance provided to families appears to have helped to create an even more insecure care market (Martínez-Buján, 2014). Furthermore, the abusive legislation in Spain with regard to female domestic workers has left a framework of enormous vulnerability as a starting point for the incipient development of domestic elderly care as a dynamic employment sector. Coupled with the risk that a lack of valid Spanish residence documentation represented for many immigrant women, this has made them both potential employees in the care sector and those most susceptible to exploitation. Meanwhile, the Home Help Service presented as the channel that most favours the professionalisation of domestic care work is not easily accessible to migrant women. In Andalusia, unlike other European countries or other Spanish regions in which migrant women have acquired a recent prominence (Moré, 2017), the Home Help Service continues to be a sort of “shelter” for national women (Martín Palomo et al., 2018). These women prefer this type of work because their employment rights are formally recognised and they leave domestic elderly care to migrants as soon as they have the opportunity to do so. While national women have left this type of work largely due to the insecurity that has been generated in the sector in the context of the economic crisis, this has been only provisional – and exceptional as “external” workers – as they have seen how the economy is reviving. Their return to the sector, together with the savings that many families have had to make to cope with a crisis that hit Andalusia hard, have turned the region’s paid domestic elderly care sector into one of the most insecure and abusive in just a few years. Furthermore, the change in the law on domestic work in 2011 has not led to an improvement in working and employment conditions for domestic care workers. Even when working and employment conditions are respected, it has become significantly insecure as wages have suffered the downward competitive pressures of an excess supply, as well as the return of nationals to the more professionalised sector, that is, the Home Help Service. It is necessary to cross the frontier of family recruitment in domestic environments in order to find a more real recognition of the rights enjoyed by female care workers.

The context of insecurity leads female care workers to face dilemmas such as either asserting their rights or allowing themselves to be “exploited” in order to keep a job. Paradoxically, they provide care by preserving the dignity of the receiver and at the same time they tolerate unworthy working conditions themselves. In terms of employment protection and the recognition of rights, there is still a long way to go, especially when it is the families who do the hiring and when these women are still prey to a servile model of domestic work that the new legislation, Royal Decree 1620, has not managed to alter. In this regard, the Law of the Personal Autonomy and Care for Dependent Persons has fostered the development of a body of female professional care workers with regulated employment conditions that play an important role in the professionalisation of domestic care work and in the social representation of a female worker who is properly paid and protected from the abuses to which many in the domestic sphere are subjected. However, it continues to exclude some emotional, relational qualifications and skills that form part of care work. The legal measures that have been implemented over the past decade have reinforced a dual employment model for domestic care of the elderly: one, unprotected and insecure, with hardly any recognition of rights; another, with more recognised rights and better working and wage conditions, but that is more difficult for immigrant women to access. It is necessary to involve and mobilise administrations and other social actors

further in the construction of employment frameworks that strengthen the rights of these female workers and abandon the conditions of semi-slavery to which they are exposed.

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