


Working conditions of social workers graduates from Universidad Mariana in Pasto-Colombia. Between job insecurity and the impact on professional practice

Carlos Lasso-Urbano  

Doctor in Alternative Conflict Resolution Methods. Social worker
Universidad Mariana. Pasto, Colombia
calasso@umariana.edu.co

Silvia Berenice Rocío Moncayo-Quiñonez 

Doctor in Social Work. Social worker
Universidad Mariana. Pasto, Colombia
smoncayo@umariana.edu.co

Ana Lucía Coral-Domínguez 

Master in Education from Diversity. Social worker
Universidad Mariana. Pasto, Colombia
analcoral@umariana.edu.co

Abstract

The article reveals the working conditions of social workers, who graduated from the Mariana University of Pasto, Colombia, between 2015-2020 working in the municipalities of Pasto, Tumaco, and Ipiales, department of Nariño. The research was developed from a mixed paradigm: qualitative and quantitative, through the application of a survey and semi-structured interviews with professionals from the region on which the study was focused. The various circumstances they face in the framework of their professional practice were identified: outsourcing, low wages, and long working hours, as well as the impact on their mental health caused by the prevailing job insecurity.


It was concluded that it is urgent to implement the professional association of social workers in the department of Nariño to demand decent working conditions, and fair wages and to denounce the facts of precarization and labor flexibility present in public, private, and third-sector institutions.

Keywords: Social work; Working conditions; Job insecurity; Employing institutions.

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 **Correspondence:** Carlos Lasso-Urbano. Universidad Mariana. Street 18 # 34-104, Pasto, Colombia. Email: calasso@umariana.edu.co

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Condiciones laborales de profesionales de Trabajo Social egresados de la Universidad Mariana en Pasto-Colombia. Entre la precarización laboral y el impacto en el ejercicio profesional

Resumen

El artículo da a conocer las condiciones laborales de trabajadores sociales, egresados de la Universidad Mariana de Pasto, Colombia, entre los años 2015 y 2020 que laboran en los municipios de Pasto, Tumaco e Ipiales, departamento de Nariño. La investigación se desarrolló desde un paradigma mixto: cualitativo y cuantitativo, mediante la aplicación de una encuesta y de entrevistas semiestructuradas a profesionales de la región en la que se centró el estudio. Se identificaron las diversas circunstancias a las que se enfrentan en el marco de su ejercicio profesional: tercerización laboral, bajos salarios y extensas jornadas laborales, así como los impactos provocados en su salud mental producto de la precarización laboral predominante en la actualidad. Se concluyó que es urgente la puesta en práctica de la agremiación profesional de trabajadores sociales en el departamento de Nariño para la reivindicación de condiciones dignas de trabajo, salarios justos y para denunciar los hechos de precarización y flexibilización laboral presentes en las instituciones públicas, privadas y del tercer sector.

2 **Palabras clave:** Trabajo Social; Condiciones laborales; Precarización laboral; Instituciones empleadoras.

Summary: 1. Introduction, 2. Methodology, 3. Findings, 3.1 Working conditions of social workers, 3.2 Salary earned, 3.3 Dissatisfaction of basic needs, 3.4 Emotional state and work overload, 3.5 Length of the working day, 3.6 Lack of material resources and transportation, 3.7 Employing institutions of Social Work professionals, 3.8 Dissatisfaction with the type of contract, 3.9 Work motivation that the employment institution encourages or does not encourage, 4. Conclusions, 5. Bibliographic references.

1. Introduction

The study of the working conditions of Social Work professionals has become a fundamental need not only for Social Work Schools but also for professional groups and organizations, to the extent that precariousness, outsourcing, and labor flexibility are increasingly evident due to neoliberal policies. Indeed, these policies go against the interests of the working class, being represented through the violation of their labor rights, the privatization of state-owned companies, and the cut in social spending (Lasso-Urbano *et al.*, 2023). As a result, increasing degrees of uncertainty affect most Social Work professionals, resulting from the lack of job stability, the increase in temporary contracts, low salaries, and high levels of unemployment. This situation has affected professional practice since no conditions are required for intervention processes to be developed by the expressions of the “social question”.

According to Espinosa (2023), social workers are immersed in the social and technical division of labor as part of the class that lives from Work. Not only are they salaried, but they are also hired to carry out social intervention functions within the framework of the execution of social policies by public and private organizations, so they are in charge of selling their labor power in exchange for a salary. Additionally, the author highlights that “The working conditions made up of a type of employment contract, salary, social security, an extension of the working day, work organization, environment, occupational safety, and health” (Espinosa, 2023, p. 83), which are often subjected to precariousness and violation of rights by the employer sectors.

The precariousness of working conditions also significantly impacts on the subjective well-being of social workers due to the low level of satisfaction generated by not being able to satisfy their primary conditions, which are necessary to acquire minimum survival levels. Therefore, subjective well-being has to do with the comprehensive evaluation that these professionals carry out, in this case, regarding their quality of life, represented through achievements, experiences, aspirations, and emotional aspects, among other aspects, about the satisfaction they achieve in the face of material or objective well-being (Jaramillo, 2016; Veenhoven, 1994).

Job insecurity occurs in state institutions, the private sector, and NGOs, given that the logic of neoliberalism has had a significant impact on the set of working conditions (Quintero-Londoño *et al.*, 2022). In addition, these logics have had an impact on social policies, which have been subjected to the reduction of resources directed towards them, so that the second and third sectors (private companies and NGOs, respectively) have ended up assuming the role of the State in their design, implementation, and evaluation. In other words, the responsibility for addressing the manifestations of the “social question” through social policies ceases to be the responsibility of the State. It begins to be assumed by the third sector and by private enterprise (López-Giraldo *et al.*, 2022), so they have been focused, fragmented, and without providing substantive answers to the manifestations of the “social question” (Montaño, 1998).

It should be clarified that social policies emerge as a response within the framework of monopoly capitalism to the social, political, and economic problems caused by the society of capital (Netto, 2003). They have historically been characterized as the main scenario of employability of social workers. However, they have undergone tremendous transformations from late capitalism to the neoliberal model due to the counter-reform of the State. Consequently, the dismantling and redirection of social policies has directly impacted on the professional practice of Social Work due to the shrinking of the professional labor field.

In the department of Nariño, Colombia, the working conditions faced by these professionals are not unrelated to those that occur at the national level. The situation is even more alarming when these conditions are examined in municipalities such as Tumaco and Ipiales, where the risks of practicing the profession are much higher because of high levels of violence—the persistence of the armed conflict and the extensive presence of illegal armed groups. Even when professionals have faced situations of risk, vulnerability, and emotional affectation, salaries and types of hiring are pretty precarious.

Research on working conditions leads to the recognition and reflection of a situation that is not alien to most professionals, such as precariousness, outsourcing, and labor flexibility, and invites us to think about union and collective strategies aimed at making this problem visible. In this sense, studying the issue contributes to the positioning in the professional debate of aspects such as the need to advance in the definition and legitimization of a fair salary range, decent working conditions, the quality of employment, and the impact of work overload on mental health, among other characteristics.

In line with the above, this article aims to present part of the results obtained within the framework of the research called *Working Conditions of Social Workers, graduates of the Universidad Mariana between 2015-2020, who work in Pasto, Tumaco, and Ipiales*, which was aimed at understanding the current working conditions of Social Work graduates of the Universidad Mariana between the years 2015-2020 and who exercise the profession in the municipalities of Pasto, Ipiales and Tumaco, in the Department of Nariño, in order to devise strategies that contribute to the professional association and the strengthening of the university-graduate relationship.

2. Methodology

According to the objectives set out in the research framework, it was developed from the qualitative and quantitative paradigms; that is, a mixed paradigm was integrated to obtain sufficient information to respond to the research problem and the objectives set. What has been pointed out the mixed paradigm, according to Hernández-Sampieri *et al.* (2003):

(...) It represents the highest degree of integration or combination between qualitative and quantitative approaches. Both are intermingled or combined throughout the research process, or, in most stages (...), it adds complexity to the study design. However, it contemplates all the advantages of each approach. (p. 21)

Initially, the documentary review was carried out since the bibliographic search of the background was carried out, where journals, books, book chapters, research and reflection articles, and press archives on the following elements were examined: working conditions; characteristics of the socioeconomic model; relationship of the working conditions of Social Work professionals with the socioeconomic model; social policies; the subjective well-being of Social Work professionals and the scenarios and areas of professional intervention of Social Work in the places in which the research was focused. From this, a database was built to know the public, private, and NGO institutions in which social workers work and graduates between 2015-2020 working in the municipalities of Pasto, Ipiales, and Tumaco. This database analyzed aspects such as the institution in which he/she works, the time he/she has been in the institution, personal data, and year of graduation from the Social Work Program of Universidad Mariana.

A bibliographic review was also developed that allowed the theoretical approach of categories such as Work, neoliberalism, working conditions, Social Work, quality of life, subjective well-being, and professional organization, through which it was intended to conceptually understand the particularities, complexity, contradictions, and historicity of the reality that was investigated. It is clarified that as the research progressed, new categories emerged. Within the framework of this component, reading cards, and relational charts were made, which made it possible to approach the topic to be investigated.

Based on the primary sources, information was collected through a survey and semi-structured interviews since the research sought to know first-hand the working conditions, forms of hiring, type of Work performed, salary assignments, and work scenarios of Social Work professionals who graduated from Universidad Mariana between 2015 and 2020 and who work in the municipalities of Pasto, Ipiales, and Tumaco.

The survey questionnaire, which had 35 questions, was built from an operationalization matrix and assembled in *Google Forms* to guarantee its application. It was sent to 65 professionals who met the criteria of having graduated from the Social Work Program of Universidad Mariana between 2015 and 2020 and were working in the municipalities of Pasto, Tumaco, and Ipiales. However, of the total number of people to whom the questionnaire was sent, 35 social workers from the three aforementioned municipalities answered it.

On the other hand, the script of questions for the semi-structured interview was prepared with the support of the categorization matrix in order to ensure coherence with the objectives set. The semi-structured interview was conducted with 8 Social Work professionals who work in the three regions where the research process was developed; among the selection criteria of the

interview, participants were that they are working in one of the three municipalities, that they are practicing the profession in one of the different areas of professional intervention, that they work in both public and private institutions and NGOs, that they are available to participate in the research. It should be clarified that the professionals who participated in the semi-structured interviews did not participate in the completion of the questionnaire. The research was carried out with graduates of the Social Work Program of Universidad Mariana since the research professors work in it, and the need to recognize and understand the working conditions of its graduates is identified since no research had been carried out at the University on this subject.

Table 1. Study participants.

Interviewed Professionals	Municipality	Type of Institution	Intervention Area
Professional 1	Grass	NGO	Family
Professional 2	Ipiales	Private	Family
Professional 3	Grass	Public	Community
Professional 4	Ipiales	Private	Bless you
Professional 5	Grass	Public	Community
Professional 6	Grass	Private	Bless you
Professional 7	Tumaco	NGO	Human rights
Professional 8	Grass	NGO	Group

Source: own elaboration.

On the other hand, it should be mentioned that a considerable number of professionals who graduated between 2015 and 2020, residents of the three municipalities, were unemployed at the time the research was developed. The data obtained through the survey questionnaire were analyzed through SPSS. In contrast, the information obtained with the application of semi-structured interviews was interpreted through *ATLAS.ti*, which facilitated the identification of the inductive categories and the construction of the categorical networks.

Study Population

The research participants (both in the semi-structured interview and in the development of the survey) are professionals who graduated from Universidad Mariana between 2015 and 2020. The majority are women (90.69%), 62.79% are between 25 and 30, and 20.93% are between 31 and 36. 34.88% are from socioeconomic stratum 1, 38.88% are from stratum 2, and the rest of the study population is in strata 3 and 4.

3. Findings

The main findings in the research process are presented below, based on the results obtained from the analysis and interpretation of qualitative and quantitative information.

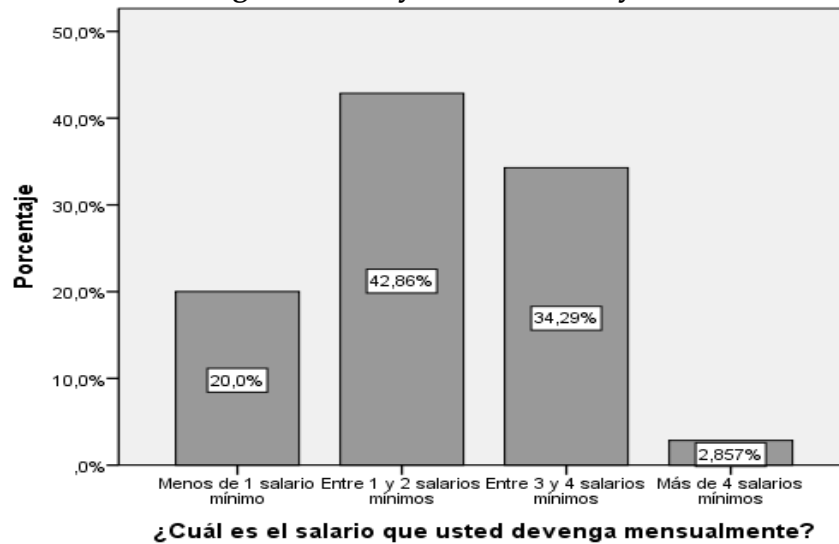
3.1 Working conditions of social workers

The working conditions of these professionals have suffered significant impacts as a result of the neoliberal policies that have been implemented in Colombia since the early nineties of the twentieth century, which has also had an impact on the loss of the quality and universality of social policies (Estrada-Álvarez, 2006; Plazas-Neisa, 2021). The effects have become evident through job insecurity, underemployment, low wages, and long working hours, which have undoubtedly impacted professional practice (Quintero-Londoño *et al.*, 2022).

3.2 Salary earned

Regarding the salary earned monthly, the results show that 42.86% of the Social Work professionals surveyed earn between 1 and 2 minimum wages, 34.29% earn between 3 and 4 minimum wages, 20% earn less than one minimum wage; on the other hand, 2.86% earn more than four minimum wages. According to the aforementioned data, it is striking that a considerable percentage receives between 1 and 2 minimum wages monthly; even another sector does not even receive a minimum wage. This leads to them being forced to look for additional Work in order to earn a salary that is actually in line with the needs that must be met, so they end up being subjected to situations of greater vulnerability as workers (Sobral-Stüber, 2022), in addition, such a situation becomes an aspect of great concern, especially when we are talking about workers with a five-year vocational training (Vidal-Moplina, 2008). The following figure presents the above data (see Figure 1).

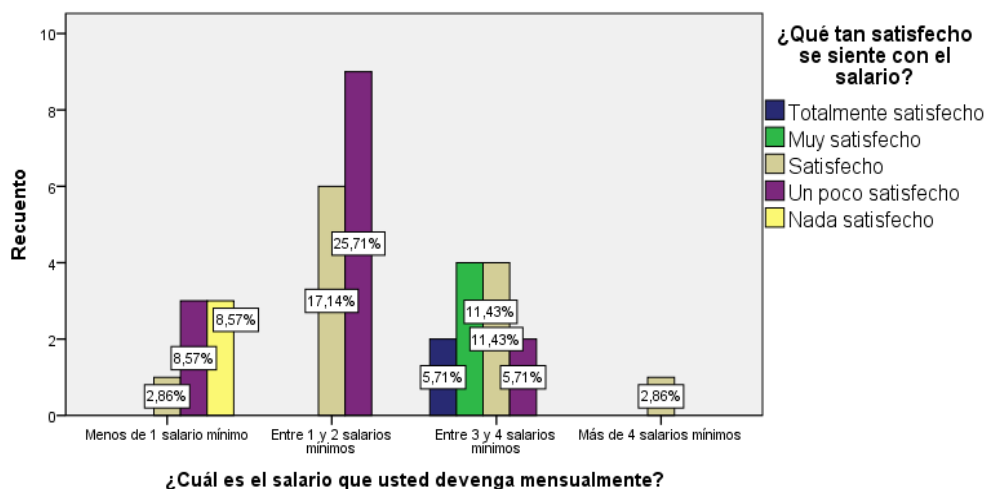
Figure 1. Salary earned monthly.



Source: own elaboration.

According to the crossing of variables between salary earned monthly and satisfaction with the salary earned, the most relevant data of the survey allow us to recognize that 25.71% of those who earn between 1 and 2 minimum wages are somewhat satisfied with their salary. In comparison, 17.14% of those who receive between 1 and 2 minimum monthly wages are satisfied. On the other hand, 11.43% of those earning between 3 and 4 minimum wages are delighted, while 11.43% of those receiving between 3 and 4 minimum wages are satisfied. Finally, 8.57% of those who earn less than one minimum wage are somewhat satisfied, while 8.57% of those who receive less than one minimum wage are not satisfied with their monthly salary. The following figure shows the data above (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Satisfaction with salary vs. salary earned.

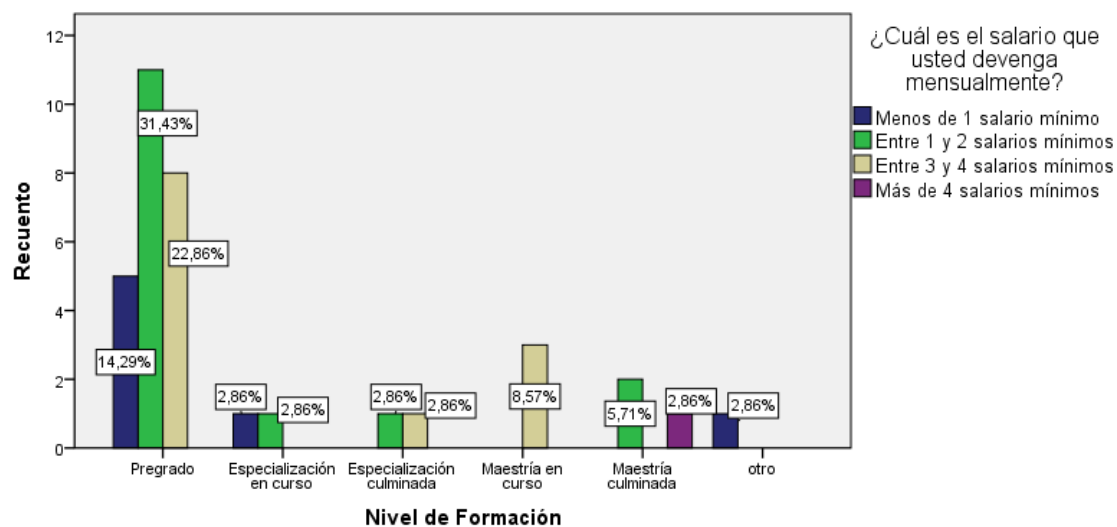


Source: own elaboration

When the variables of monthly salary of Social Workers, graduates of the University (...), and the level of training they have are crossed, it is evident that 31.43% who have an undergraduate level of training earn between 1 and 2 monthly minimum wages, another 22.86% who have an undergraduate level of training receive between 3 and 4 monthly minimum wages, while the remaining 14.29% who have an undergraduate level of training earn less than a minimum wage. It is also noteworthy that 5.71% of the surveyed professionals, despite having a completed master's degree level, earn between 1 and 2 minimum wages; the same happens with 2.86% of the respondents who have a completed specialization and earn between 1 and 2 minimum wages.

The foregoing allows us to infer that developing professional qualification processes such as specializations or master's degrees is not an aspect that guarantees salary increase or job stability, which may have an impact on Social Work professionals not being motivated to pursue postgraduate programs, including specialization, master's degrees or even doctorates, to the extent that it implies the investment of economic resources, but also of time and that at no time will affect the salary level. Of course, when reviewing the level of education of the respondents, it is found that 68.57% have the level of professional training, 8.57% have a master's degree in progress, 8.57% have a completed master's degree, while 5.71% are pursuing a specialization, and 5.71% have a completed specialization. The data obtained when establishing the relationship between training level vs. earned salary are presented below (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Relationship between level of education and salary earned monthly.



Source: own elaboration

Regarding professional qualifications, it is pertinent to quote what was expressed by one of the interviewed professionals who points out:

From my experience, I can see that it is vital to have a professional qualification to access a specialization and a master's degree. However, unfortunately, in the labor field, it is not evidenced because a professional or a person with a master's degree has a better salary than a person with an undergraduate degree; from my experience, I have evidenced it that way. In my case, I have a colleague who has a specialization. We are in the same area, function, and earning the same. I do not have a specialization, so I do not show a difference in the salary. (Professional 5, personal communication, October 10, 2022)

However, it is striking that when the interviewees were asked about the salary earned, most of them expressed disagreement (Professional 1, Professional 2, Professional 4; Professional 5, Professional 8, Personal communication, October 10 and 11, 2022), as they emphasize that it is not enough to meet basic needs, so they have had to prioritize some of these over others. In addition, they consider that their salary is not proportional to the functions or activities carried out as a Social Work professional. Given the above, it is essential to mention what was pointed out by another of the Social Work professionals interviewed, who expresses the following:

Social Work does wonders there; for example, I should earn about three million pesos for everything that I have had, go up and down, give it, and do the assistance, administrative part because I take care of my family. I started to be an administrative person to well only that, because it depends on you, ah you have another little house there solve it, you don't have this, do it, and it's time, so I say that this Work is challenging to have this salary, I'm afraid I have to disagree. (Professional 3, personal communication, October 10, 2022)

That is to say, in addition to having a low salary, they must carry out various activities, tasks, or functions simultaneously, which constitutes a polyvalent job (Antunes, 2001). This assumes, in part, the Work that must be carried out by several people, even performing functions that do not necessarily correspond to the Social Work professional.

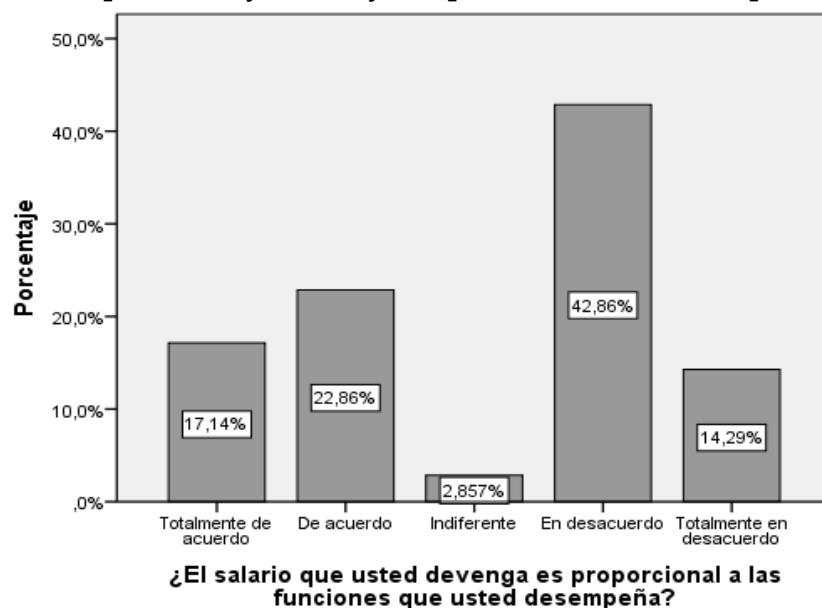
Indeed, developing multiple activities or functions for a low salary highlights the high levels of labor overexploitation to which some Social Work professionals are subjected (De Carvalho, 2021). According to another of the interviewees, "I believe that the salary remuneration is not by all the activities that are carried out, it is I would believe that it is a fundamental salary for all the activities and functions that are carried out" (Professional 5, personal communication, October 11, 2022).

Cademartori *et al.* (2019) mention that the labor market for social workers is currently characterized by four fundamental aspects: a. reduction of wages, which directly impacts living conditions; b. job instability expressed through short-term contracts, which affects programs and work areas; c. increase in multiple jobs, i.e., the professional is forced to work in more than one

work scenario to have a decent salary that allows him to satisfy his living conditions; d. With an increase in underemployment, professionals are widely presented with unemployment, part-time employment, or hourly contracting situations, which leads to low wages.

By what was stated in the interviews about the multiple functions that these professionals must perform, the answers in the survey when asked if the salary they earn is proportional to the job functions they carry out, 42.86% disagree, 22.86% agree, 17.14% agree, and 14.29% state that they disagree. In other words, most of those who completed the survey disagreed with the salary they receive before the multiple functions they perform as professionals. The following figure shows the data indicated (see Figure 4).

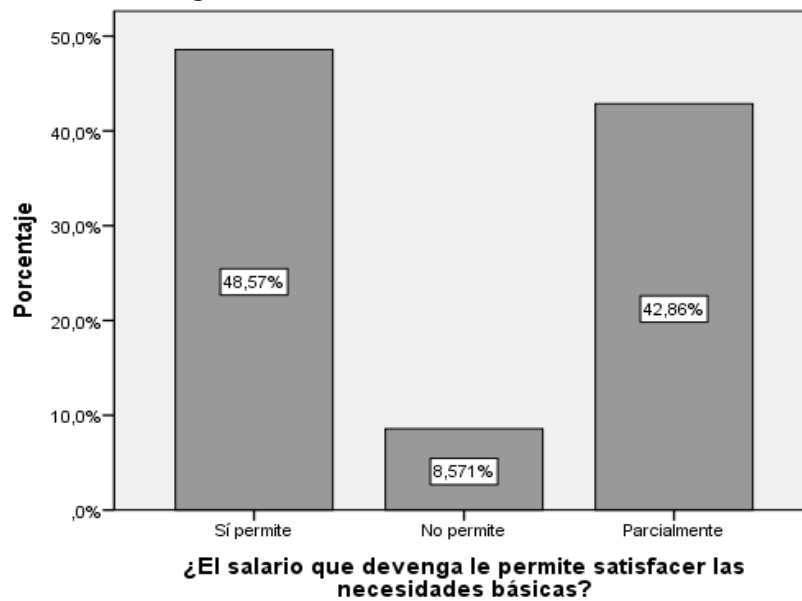
Figure 4. Proportionality of salary compared to the functions performed.



Source: own elaboration.

3.3 Dissatisfaction with basic needs

Salary is a fundamental aspect that makes it possible to satisfy, to a large extent, the basic needs of Social Work professionals and, in many cases, those of their families or the people in their care. Regarding the above, several professionals interviewed emphasized that the salary earned is insufficient to meet their needs (Professional 2; Professional five and Professional 6, personal communication, October 10 and 11, 2022). Of the people surveyed, 48.57% state that their salary satisfies their basic needs, and 42.86% allude that it partially satisfies basic needs. In comparison, 8.57% of those surveyed consider that it does not allow them to satisfy these needs; for greater clarity, see the following figure (see Figure 5). Indeed, salary is one of the main motivations that social work professionals have in their professional practice.

Figure 5. Satisfaction of basic needs.

Source: own elaboration.

3.4 Emotional state and work overload

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Another aspect highlighted by most of the people interviewed is the Work overload the employing institutions expose them to. They state that there are many functions that they must assume as social workers, expressing the situations of exploitation and domination that arise in their daily Work. This has led to demotivation with the work carried out, significantly impacting their mental health (Benach *et al.*, 2023). By the way, it is necessary to bring up what was expressed by professional 8, who points out, “In the clinic, it is super heavy, sometimes it interferes with my rest schedule, sometimes I want to throw away the cell phone, I want absolutely no one to call me because the workload is hefty” (Personal communication, October 11, 2022).

In line with the above, the data obtained with the survey show that when asked about the emotional impact of the work functions performed, 54.29% state that their emotional State has sometimes been affected, 28.57% allude that rarely, 8.57% refer that constantly, finally, 8.57% of the respondents have not been affected.

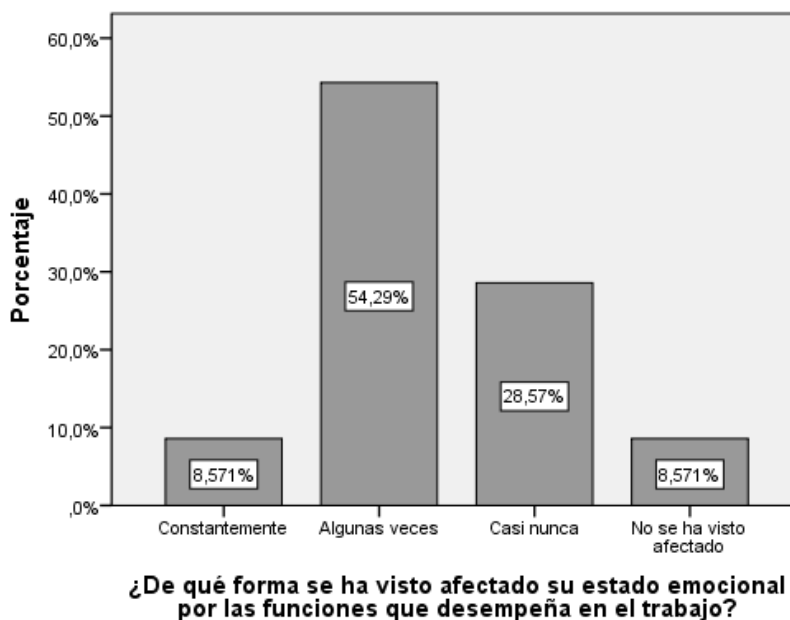
According to the participants in the study, work overload is a very critical factor because, in addition to leading to the sacrifice of time spent on rest or food, it generates decay, stress, or apathy around the functions that are carried out as a Social Work professional, which undoubtedly affects the emotional field (Gardey *et al.*, 2020). Emotional affectation is the result of work overload, job insecurity, stress, and also the multipurpose Work that the worker faces in

their daily lives, which causes the deterioration of physical and mental health. Given the above, Plazas-Neisa (2021) states that:

This situation implies an exhaustion of activities since in order to meet the contractually established goals, he can work uninterruptedly from Sunday to Sunday, he must pay social security, which implies a reduction in "fees," he does not have vacations, which can strongly affect socio-emotional health; understanding the contexts of humanitarian drama in which the social worker carries out his professional practice. (p. 233)

After all, work overload and the demand to achieve goals as a determining condition for receiving the salary cause concern and anxiety in the socio-emotional State of these professionals, which has also transcended into an emotional confrontation. In general, employing institutions must pay more attention to this affectation, which undoubtedly impacts their professional Work. The data presented above shows the figure where they can be examined in more detail (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Affectation of the emotional State due to work functions.



Source: own elaboration.

3.5 Length of the working day

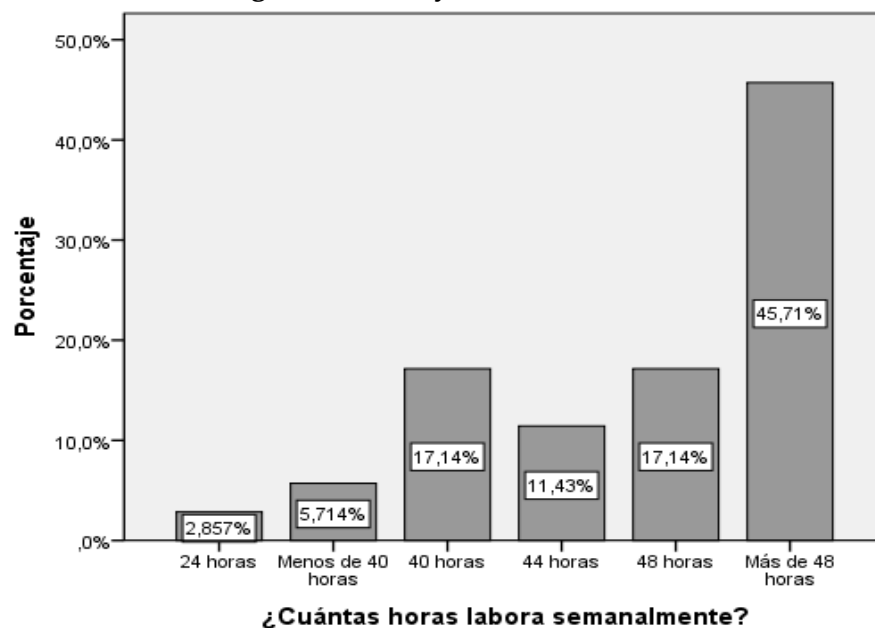
Another relevant element has to do with the hours worked weekly. The total hours in the employment contract to develop the functions do not necessarily correspond to the hours that must be fulfilled or allocated for that purpose. Concerning the people surveyed, the data obtained show that 45.71% work more than 48 hours per week, 17.14% work 48 hours per week, and 11.43%

work 44 hours per week; on the other hand, 17.14% of the professionals surveyed work 40 hours per week, that is, 74.28% of the respondent's report working more than 40 hours per week. After all, such a situation also leads to exhaustion and demotivation at the work level and with employing institution as a result of long working hours, accompanied by low wages and temporary contracts (Ferrere, 2009). In this sense, one of the people interviewed says:

One works 24/7, really; I could not give an exact time, and I could not give an exact number of hours because there are weeks that one has many situations while others do not; yes, then I could not give it, but if there are enough hours that one works, within this field. (Professional 1, personal communication, October 10, 2022)

Given the above, it is inferred that many times, people end up working more than the hours stipulated in the labor contract, that is, overtime, which is generally not paid with money or time, thus sacrificing time for rest, leisure, or sharing with the family (Estrada-Álvarez, 2006). However, the data obtained from the abovementioned survey can be seen in detail in the following figure (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Weekly hours worked.



Source: own elaboration.

3.6 Lack of material resources and transportation

Another aspect that stands out is that many professionals have to assume the cost of material resources for developing their activities and transportation for their travel to where they carry out their social intervention processes. In other words, institutions are detached from this

responsibility to the worker. Not only is it enough that the salary is low, but they must also cover institutional expenses because, as one of the professionals interviewed emphasizes:

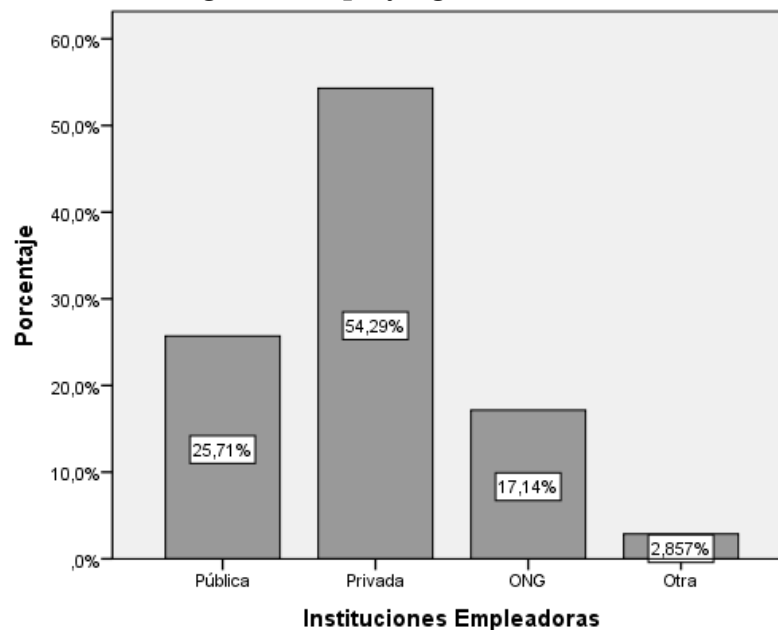
I am currently working with the leadership seedbeds, which seek to promote leadership in adolescent boys and girls and train people in participation and community action boards. I plan to do them in the rural part. So, for example, there is always a problem with transportation, so there are times when we have to pay for it ourselves or when bosses say: "Well, I'll take it." Well, that's when you say: Now what do I do? For materials, for example, we don't have, so there you say: I buy a billboard, I have markers, and that's how we have to or things like that, so it's always quite limited. (Professional 4, personal communication, October 10, 2022)

In other words, many professionals earn precarious salaries and must take out a certain percentage to comply with the assigned activities.

3.7 Institutions employing Social Work professionals

Regarding the employing institutions of the social workers participating in the research, the results obtained through the survey application allow us to recognize that 54.29% work in private institutions, 25.71% work in public institutions, and 17.14% work in an NGO. Indeed, there is evidence not only of the rise in the employability of these social workers by the private sector and NGOs but especially of the privatization of social services, primarily provided by the for-profit private sector and private non-profit (Consejo General del Trabajo Social, 2022). For their part, four interviewed people worked in private institutions, three worked in public institutions, and the other professionals worked in an NGO.

Historically, the State has been characterized as the principal employer of social workers. However, with the implementation of neoliberal policies, it has been dissociated from its responsibility, so the private sector and NGOs, the second and third sectors, respectively, are beginning to assume this responsibility. In this way, not only the implementation of sectoral and low-quality policies takes place, but also the shift to philanthropic efforts of the "social question", which significantly impacts the popular sectors and the working class (Montaño, 2005). The data referred to in the previous paragraph can be seen in detail in the following figure (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Employing institutions.

Source: own elaboration.

Concerning the precarious working conditions in public institutions, it should be noted that this aspect has ended up affecting the field of state social services since social policies and programs are of low quality, of a welfare-oriented nature, and specific elements since their implementation ends up depending on the time of hiring of the professionals in charge of their implementation. In this regard, it is worth highlighting what Vidal-Molina (2008) alludes to, for whom "professional work is mediated by the changes that have taken place in society and this the profession cannot ignore them, nor face them with their backs to understand the type of intervention that will take place" (p. 81).

For this author, the vulnerability and precariousness of working conditions have now become an integral aspect of the lives of most Social Work professionals, since in addition to the fact that it is a situation that has become naturalized, people have learned to live with these conditions, without it generating any questioning.

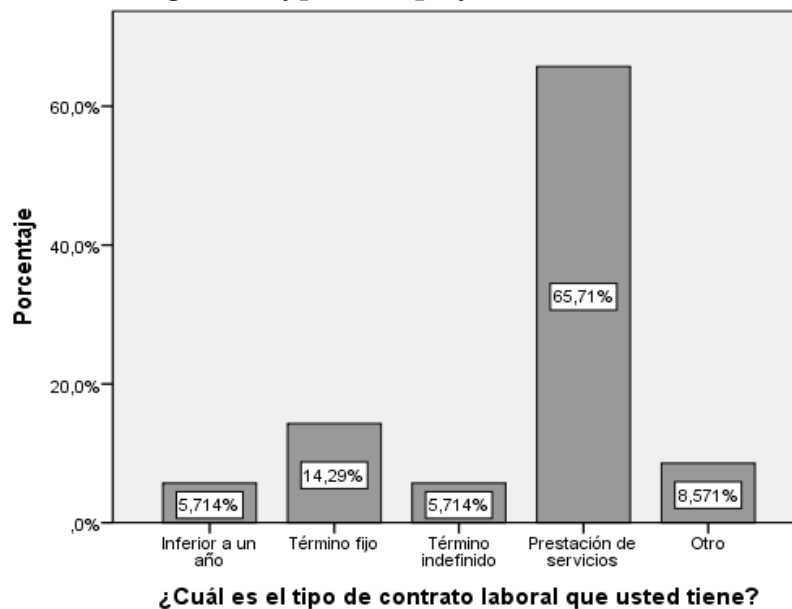
3.8 Dissatisfaction with the type of contract

Dissatisfaction with the type of employment contract is another recurring situation in some of the professionals interviewed and surveyed. According to the information obtained, 65.71% of the respondents have a contract for providing services, 14.29% have a fixed-term contract, and only 5.71% have an indefinite-term contract.

Regarding Social Work professionals who have a contract for the provision of services, 20% are in the public sector, 34.29% in the private sector, and 11.43% in NGOs; on the other hand, 14.29% of those surveyed who have a contract for the provision of services are located as follows: 2.86% are working in public institutions, 8.57% in private companies and 2.86% in NGOs. It is striking that only 5.71% of those surveyed have an indefinite-term contract, which is presented only in the private sector. On the other hand, the opposite is happening in public institutions, where more outstanding guarantees should be guaranteed in hiring.

This situation shows not only the precariousness of the types of contracts but also the lack of guarantees in the labor market faced by social workers and university graduates. The above data are shown in the figure below (see Figure 9).

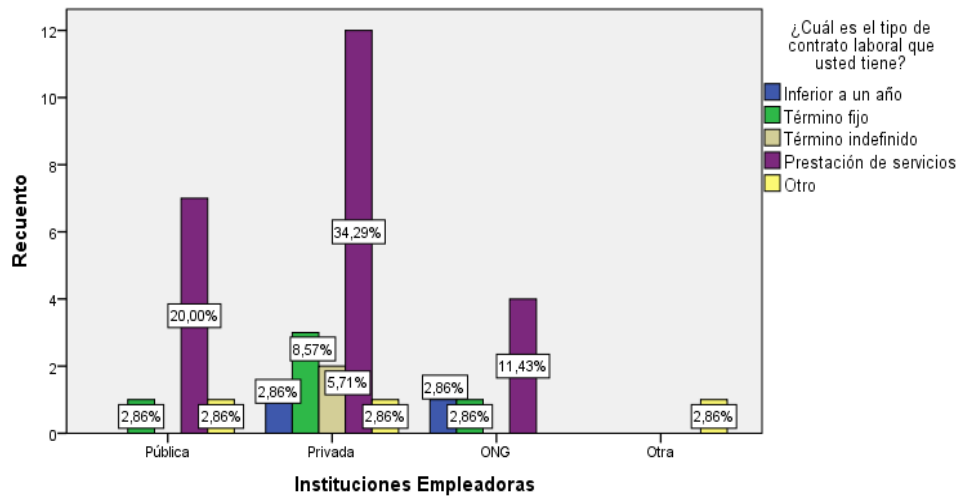
Figure 9. Type of employment contract.



Source: own elaboration.

When comparing the employing institutions, it is evident that in both public and private institutions, precariousness in labor contracting is a recurrent situation, as are labor flexibility and outsourcing. Additionally, it should be noted that short-term contracts are not only a recurring issue but have been universalized within the professional guild of Social Work since contracts of less than one year prevail, which expresses the job insecurity faced by these professionals in times of neoliberalism (Quintero-Londoño *et al.*, 2022). The data obtained by crossing variables between the type of employment contract and employing institutions can be seen in more detail in the following figure (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Crossover between the type of employment contract and employing institutions.



Source: own elaboration.

Regarding the type of employment contract, it is pertinent to quote what was expressed by some of the interviewees, who stated the following:

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There is a situation not of the company but with the contracting done with the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare ICBF. They are contracts that are made for one year, six months, sometimes for three months, and they renew it. Sometimes, that only generates a little stability. Well, you say May has arrived. What will happen with this operator? That situation does affect the work environment a little at a general level. (Professional 1, personal communication, October 10, 2022)

But well, don't let it be so drastic that it's six months and you have to leave, because how can you get rid of the fear that you won't be out of a job? So, let's say that they hire us for a longer term of one year because most of them are for six months, almost all the contracts at least that it is for one year, and one says ready this year. I am going to perform my functions, and I am going to plan them from the beginning of this and this way. (Professional 4, personal communication, October 10, 2022)

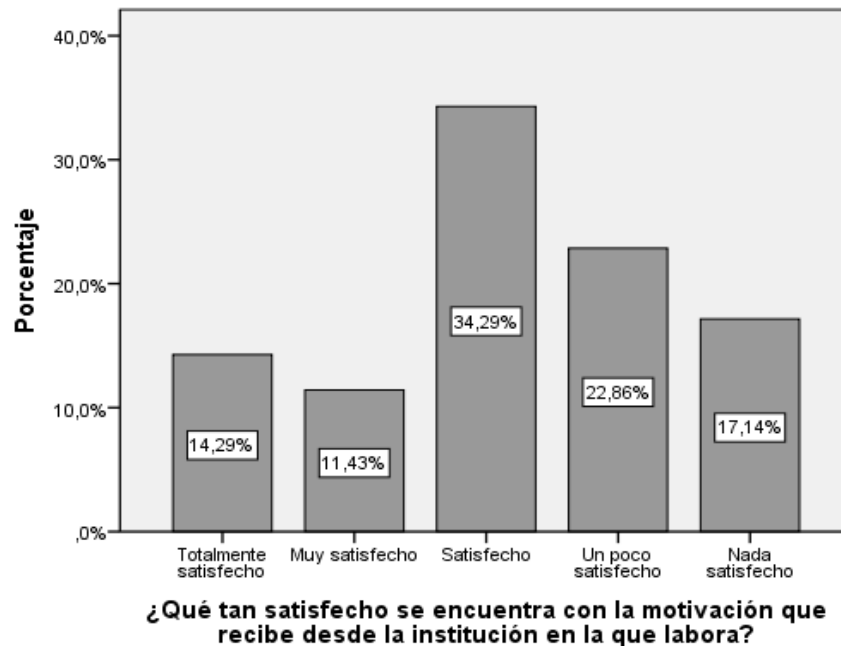
The statements made by the interviewed professionals show the situation of uneasiness and concern that they face once the employment contract is terminated. In some cases, the renewal occurs; in others, it occurs after a particular time or even, in several cases, such renewal does not take place, generating higher levels of job insecurity; to tell the truth, the labor contracting carried out by a state institution such as the Colombian Institute of Family Welfare ICBF through third parties is a policy aimed not only at making conditions precarious but also aimed at dissociating itself from any responsibility with its workers, which becomes a repressive policy against the working class. Unfortunately, in Colombia during the last two decades, temporary contracts for the provision of services have been on the rise, impacting the economic conditions of these

professionals, as well as their families, as well as the continuity and quality of social policy (Ladino-Mosquera *et al.*, 2023).

3.9 Work motivation that the employment institution encourages or does not encourage

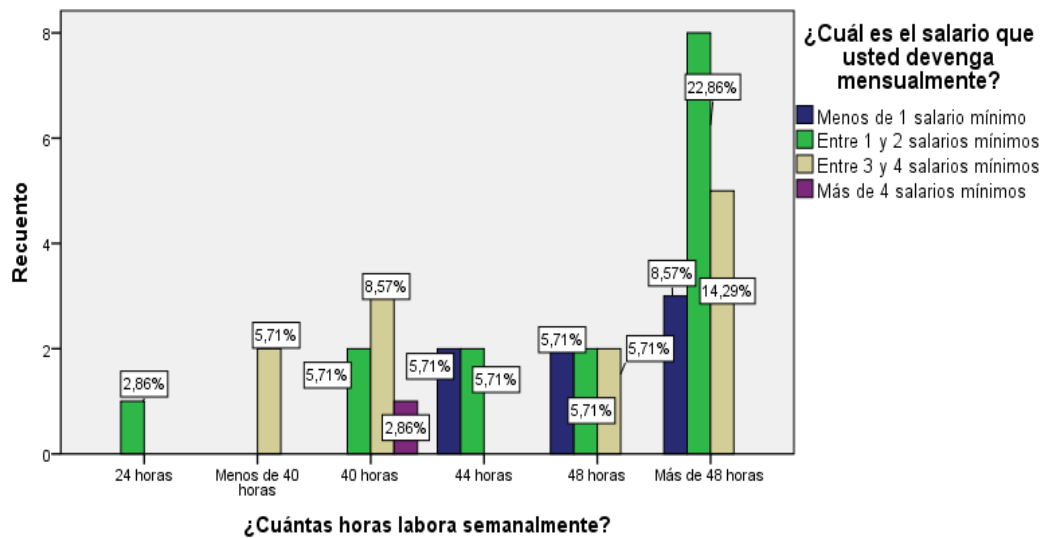
Another aspect that can be identified is the work motivation that employers encourage. When asking respondents how satisfied they are with the motivation promoted by the institution in which they work, among the most relevant data, it is evident that 34.29% are satisfied, and 22.86% feel satisfied. In comparison, 17.14% say they are not at all satisfied. The low lack of motivation is related to low salaries, the absence of professional promotion policies at the institutional level, and the type of hiring, among other components, which leads to social workers being dissatisfied with this type of situation. The data set can be seen in the following figure (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Satisfaction with the motivation promoted by the employing institution.



Source: own elaboration.

Faced with the crossing of variables between hours worked weekly and salary earned monthly, the most relevant data show that 22.86% of professionals work more than 48 hours a week and earn between 1 and 2 monthly minimum wages, another 14.29% work more than 48 hours a week receive between 3 and 4 monthly minimum wages. In comparison, another 8.57% who work more than 48 hours earn less than a minimum wage. The complete data on the cross-referencing of the variables weekly hours worked vs. earned salary can be seen in the following figure (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Weekly hours worked vs. earned salary.

Source: own elaboration.

The above allows us to infer that many respondents must work long hours, which sometimes exceeds 48 hours per week, accompanied by precarious salaries, and several professionals still need to earn a minimum monthly wage. Indeed, the working conditions faced by Social Work graduates from Universidad Mariana between 2015 and 2020 allow them to recognize the degrees of precariousness, outsourcing, and labor flexibility predominant in the labor market of the municipalities of Pasto, Tumaco, and Ipiales.

Undoubtedly, what was presented in the municipalities subject to the study is not far from what is happening at the national level, as evidenced by the results published by the National Council for Education in Social Work (CONETS, 2021) of the 1,710 professionals at the national level who participated in the study on working conditions of social workers in Colombia, 41.5% are contracted for the provision of services, followed by 24.1% for an indefinite term, and 23.3% for a fixed term; in addition, 36.7% work between 41 and 48 hours a week, and 24.3% work more than 40 hours a week, and finally, 44.6% of professionals surveyed report that they suffer from work overload. This shows the need to reflect on working conditions and take collective action to face this situation, which is becoming increasingly acute.

4. Conclusions

The working conditions of social workers are a situation of great concern within the professional guild of Social Work. Especially when they face situations of precariousness and labor flexibility, poor wages, long working hours, underemployment, emotional effects due to work overload, among other aspects, this research process allows us to conclude that not only is there precariousness in the working conditions of the Social Workers interviewed, but also the

instability in terms of hiring since they have contracts for the provision of services for a term of less than one year, even four months, being a constant the lack of guarantees in terms of social security.

With the development of the research, it was possible to recognize the State of the working conditions of graduates of the Social Work Program of the Universidad Mariana between 2015 and 2022. At a general level, it is evident that low salaries predominate, even though in many cases there is postgraduate training, contracts for the provision of services, long working hours, the impact on mental health faced by most of the people surveyed, and interviewed, as a result of work stress. Likewise, it is evident that the salary earned does not allow basic needs to be met, so many times, Social Work professionals must choose to attend to one over the other, significantly impacting their quality of life and subjective well-being.

Given the long working hours faced by those who participated in the research, it is necessary to point out that most of them work more than 40 hours a week, without necessarily the salaries being by them, since most Social Work professionals who work 48 hours a week or more earn less than a salary, or between 1 and 2 minimum monthly wages. In line with the above, among the graduates of Social Work at the Universidad Mariana, although it is true that relevant aspects with respect to the employing institution are recognized, it is also true that in many cases, the disagreement with the salary earned, type of contract or level of satisfaction received from the institution are a constant.

Based on the above, it is essential to promote reflection and debate on the working conditions to which social workers are currently exposed. Universities must be aware of the problem since it undoubtedly impacts the degree of interest of those who study an academic program such as Social Work. Although the State has historically been the leading employer of these professionals, employability on the part of the second and third sectors currently predominates because the State has dissociated itself from its commitment to face the manifestations of the social question.

Finally, it is suggested that the professional union be constituted as a necessary space in the department of Nariño so that as Social Work professionals, they reflect on aspects such as working conditions and professional practice in order to be able to face precariousness, flexibilization, and labor outsourcing.

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Authors' Contribution statement

Carlos Lasso-Urbano: conceptualization, formal analysis, research, methodology, resources, writing (original draft), writing (review of the draft and revision/correction); Silvia Rocío Moncayo-Quiñonez: conceptualization, formal analysis, research, methodology, resources, writing (original draft), writing (review of the draft and revision/correction); Ana Lucía Coral-Domínguez: conceptualization, formal analysis, research, methodology, resources, writing (original draft), writing (review of the draft and revision/correction).

Conflicts of interest

The authors unequivocally state that there is no conflict of interest in the writing or publishing of this article, reinforcing the integrity and impartiality of the research.

Ethical statement

The authors do not have any type of ethical implication to be stated in writing and publishing this article.

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