

MOBILITY OF CARE AROUND A MUNICIPAL DAILY CARE CENTER IN CUENCA, ECUADOR¹

MOVILIDAD DEL CUIDADO ALREDEDOR DE UN CENTRO DE DESARROLLO INFANTIL
MUNICIPAL EN CUENCA, ECUADOR

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Históricamente, ha existido una desigualdad en las condiciones de movilidad entre hombres y mujeres que derivan principalmente de los roles de género que ejercen en la sociedad. Generalmente, son las mujeres las responsables de realizar las actividades del cuidado, tales como encargarse de los infantes. En este contexto, resulta importante estudiar la movilidad del cuidado en diferentes ámbitos. Para reflexionar sobre esta temática, se tomó como caso de estudio los alrededores del Centro de Desarrollo Infantil Municipal 27 Febrero en la ciudad de Cuenca-Ecuador. Se aplicaron cuatro instrumentos: encuestas caso-tipo a padres/madres de familia, herramienta de código abierto para la evaluación en microescala de entornos eMAPS, observación directa no participante y entrevistas semiestructuradas. Se encontró que, si bien la calidad del entorno urbano influye en las condiciones de movilidad del cuidado, en los desplazamientos desde y hacia el centro educativo existen otros factores que resultan más relevantes como el modo de transporte utilizado y la seguridad personal.

Palabras clave: espacio público, movilidad, género, rol del cuidado

Historically, there has been an inequality in mobility conditions between men and women, which derives mainly from their gender roles in society. Generally, women are responsible for caregiving activities, such as caring for children. In this context, studying the mobility of care in different areas is vital. To reflect on this issue, the environment around the 27 Febrero Municipal Child Development Center in the city of Cuenca-Ecuador was used as a case study. Four instruments were applied: Case-type surveys to parents, open-source tools for the micro-scale evaluation of eMAPS environments, non-participant direct observation, and semi-structured interviews. It was found that, although the quality of the urban environment influences the mobility conditions for caregiving when traveling to and from the educational center, other factors are more relevant, such as the means of transportation used and personal safety.

Keywords: public space, mobility, gender, role of caregiver

I. INTRODUCTION

In their Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs, the United Nations established the need to ensure more equitable and accessible mobility for all people, recognizing inequalities, including those caused by gender. However, there is evidence that shows, on the one hand, that women and men have different mobility patterns (Gutiérrez & Reyes, 2017). On the other, women's mobility is conditioned by factors, especially safety, which forces them to use particular strategies to get around, such as being accompanied by a family member, investing more in safer transport systems (García, 2022), or traveling greater distances to avoid places considered as dangerous (Figueroa & Waintrub, 2015), among others. That is why it is essential to study the relationship between gender and mobility to have evidence that supports public policy regarding urban design and planning of school zones.

According to González-Alvo and Czytajlo (2022), the incorporation of mobility studies with a gender perspective in Latin America arose from the inequalities that characterize the social structure of cities. These inequalities show the differences in mobility patterns between men and women, which arise mainly from the gender roles imposed by society. Men have had paid jobs to support the household, i.e., productive work, and women, on the other hand, have been engaged in household care and reproductive tasks (Montoya-Robledo et al., 2020; González-Alvo & Czytajlo, 2022).

Montoya-Robledo et al. (2020) show that women perform 75% of household or care tasks. According to Heather et al. (2019), society still depends on women as the primary family caregivers in the Ecuadorian case. While women perform 40 hours of unpaid work, men contribute approximately 10 hours. The authors point out that, according to data from 2014, it is women in Latin America who work more than men, and in the case of Ecuador specifically, there is a ratio of 61 hours of total work, paid and unpaid, for women, versus approximately 54 hours for men.

Care activities also involve particular conditions in the daily movements of those who carry them out, primarily women. Studies on the mobility of care in Latin America reveal interesting data which confirm this. For example, Chaves et al. (2017) in Buenos Aires detected that women with small children face mobility challenges, from the "lockdown in motion" because they cannot leave their homes to the "work in motion," organizing routines for all their responsibilities. The phenomenon is also intersectional. Namely, those who have the least

resources face the worst conditions. Gutiérrez and Reyes (2017) state that, in poor neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, women carry the burden of care and lack time for other activities. Similar findings were observed in the poorer neighborhoods of Santiago de Chile, where women feel trapped between the responsibilities of home, work, and raising children (Jirón, 2007).

Trips to drop off and pick up children from educational institutions are a fundamental phenomenon when studying the mobility of care. In this context, this article aims to identify the factors that affect the mobility of care conditions in the surroundings of a Municipal Child Development Center located within Mercado 27 Febrero in Cuenca, Ecuador.

The study is structured in five parts: first, it comments on the concept of mobility in general and care in particular. Secondly, the case study and the methodology used to collect the information are detailed. Thirdly, the results obtained from applying four instruments are presented: case-type surveys, an open-source tool for the microscale evaluation of eMAPS environments, non-participant direct observation, and semi-structured interviews. Fourth, the data obtained are triangulated to establish the main findings. Finally, the conclusions and recommendations are presented.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Mobility, gender, and care

The concept of mobility includes the characteristics of supply (mode of transport, infrastructure) and those of demand (age, gender, distance, economic possibilities, and physical conditions) (Miralles Guasch, 2002). The term mobility replaced transport because it considers the population's needs to move from one place to another, not only the capacity of the means of transport (Herce, 2009). That is why it can be said that there is an inequality in mobility between different population groups, as some have more facilities to access specific modes of transport, which allow them to reach their destinations in better conditions and in less time. Therefore, they have more opportunities compared to more vulnerable groups such as children, older adults, disabled people, women, and people with limited resources, among others (Miralles Guasch, 2002).

In the case of historical inequalities caused by gender, some concepts emerged that allowed us to look closer at them regarding the use and appropriation of public space. Such is the case of "feminist geography,"

which arises in the field of urbanism and spatiality to address the problem of women's invisibility in the configuration of spaces. This approach recognizes and questions the absence of the role played by women in the organization and design of urban environments (Soto Villagrán, 2018). Similarly, urbanism with a gender perspective implies "giving a place to women's participation in decision-making processes, as well as making inequalities visible in different dimensions (political and symbolic material) both in the city and urban planning processes or management" (Gonzalez-Alvo & Czytajlo, 2022, p. 37).

The differences caused by gender roles, particularized to everyday mobility, have been studied from the concept of "the mobility of care." That is the one that relates care activities to daily trips (Sánchez de Madariaga & Zucchini, 2019), trips related to the care of children, older adults, and disabled people, as well as errands and purchases and that, therefore, involve non-pendular trips, with multiple destinations, organization of routines, among other conditioning factors. By way

of example, in the Latin American case, the study by Heather et al. (2019) on the use of public transport by women in Quito, Santiago, and Buenos Aires found that trips for care made in this mode of transport, amount to 47% during the week and 64% on the weekend. This represents the second most cited reason for travel, so transport planning should not ignore these daily needs. This type of travel is greatly affected by the dispersed growth of cities since the distances between facilities are increasing. Adding to the lack of adequate public or private transport, this can generate significant limitations in people's access to their destinations or use services (Sánchez de Madariaga & Zucchini, 2019; Jirón & Gómez, 2018).

III. CASE STUDY

The Municipal Child Development Centers (CDI, in Spanish) in Cuenca are free facilities for comprehensive child development, initial education, and pedagogical

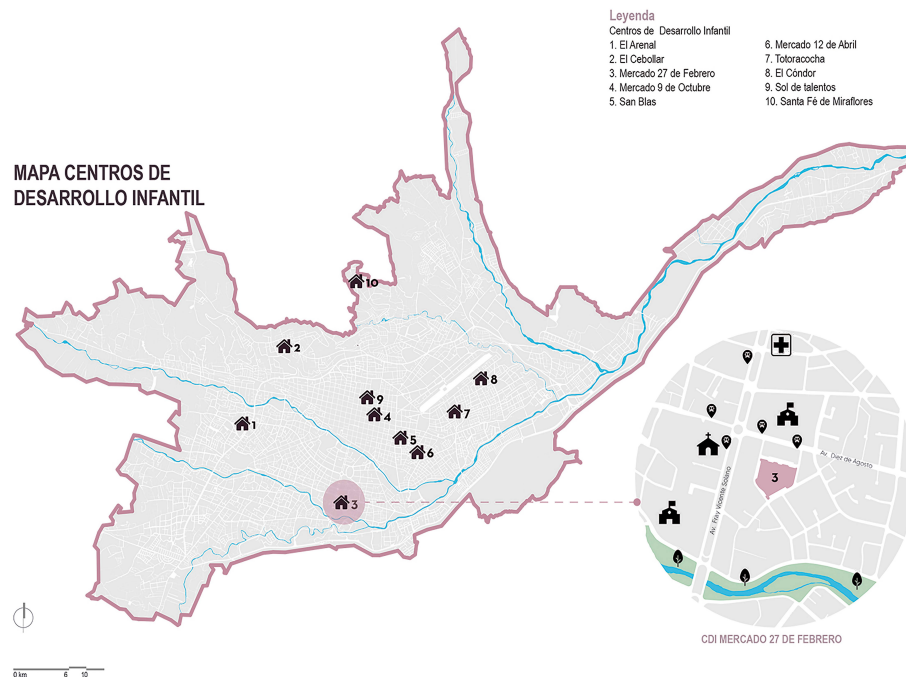


Figure 1. Location of Municipal DCIs in Cuenca - Ecuador Source: Preparation by the authors.



Figure 2. 27 Febrero Child Development Center. Source: Pablo Sebastián Rodas (2018).

support (Cuenca Mayor’s Office, n.d.). The municipal CDIs arose out of a concern for working mothers who had no one to care for their children or where to leave them during their working hours.

This research used the CDI inside the 27 de Febrero Market in the city’s south (Figure 1). It has 43 children and an approximate surface area of 500 m². This sector was chosen because it was one of the centers with the lowest score when performing a weighted assessment matrix that used indicators obtained from the Institute for Transportation & Development Policy -ITDP (2020), cited in Torres Maldonado’s research (2022). The criteria for each CDI were services or amenities, public transport, public space, and road conditions. In the market, an inter-parish terminal connects the southern rural area with the urban one.

Although the urban environment around the 27 Febrero Market has shortcomings, it is located in El Ejido, which is considered a modern city, where two important avenues cross. In its surroundings, the constructions are mostly less than four floors, and the use is mainly residential (Figure 2).



Figure 3. Isochrone for eMAPS application. Source: Preparation by the authors.

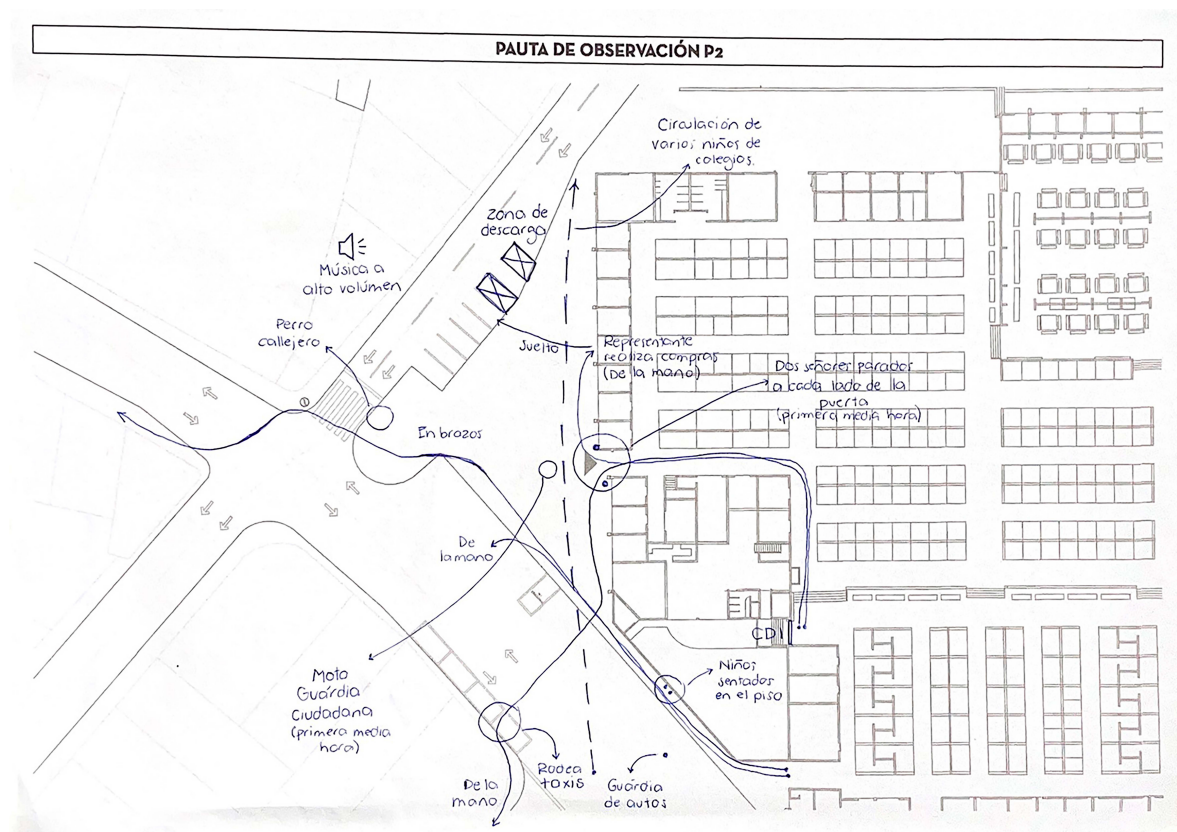


Figure 4. An example of a sketch made as part of the non-participant observation. Source: Preparation by the authors.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Four instruments were applied to explore the factors that affect the mobility of care conditions around the CDI of the 27 Febrero Market:

Case-type survey: This method was used to determine who takes children to and from the CDI and in which mode of transport. Twenty-five surveys were conducted at the front door of the CDI inside the 27 Febrero Market.

eMaps: This is an open-source tool for the microscale evaluation of walkability in urban environments (LlactaLAB, 2020). As a first step, an isochron was created (Figure 3). This was determined based on the location of the bus stops closest to the CDI and its immediate surroundings. The street segments and lots were validated using QGIS to generate the maps used for the field study evaluation.

Once all the forms of each of the 19 segments had been answered, rating them as positive and negative, depending on their impact on walkability, began.

Non-participant direct observation: This consisted of collecting data by observing the mobility of care in different spaces and mapping activities to explore the phenomenon through feminist geography. The three main accesses of the CDI and the bus stops were taken as the starting point. For the information processing, the maps made in the field study were analyzed in detail (Figure 4), and analysis variables classified the information.

Semi-structured interview: This technique was applied to seven CDI parents. With this instrument, we sought to understand the dynamics in the mobility of care to and from the CDI. The processing used tables, where the answers were classified according to analysis categories. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the participants.

Interviewees	Date	Gender	Age	Kinship	Transport	Special conditions
Interviewee N°1	April 6th, 2023	Female	41 years old	Mother	On foot	Disability conditions.
Interviewee N°2	April 6th, 2023	Male	40 years old	Father	Private vehicle	Husband of a market worker.
Interviewee N°3	April 6th, 2023	Female	33 years old	Mother	Private vehicle	Market worker
Interviewee N°4	April 11th, 2023	Female	30 years old	Mother	On foot / public transport (bus)	Does not work in the market
Interviewee N°5	April 11th, 2023	Female	24 years old	Mother	Public transport (bus)	Mother of three young children, only one attends the CDI Febrero 27.
Interviewee N°6	April 11th, 2023	Male	38 years old	Father	Private vehicle	Does not work in the market
Interviewee N°7	April 11th, 2023	Female	44 years old	Mother	On foot / public transport (bus)	Market worker

Table 1. Description of the interviewees. Source: Preparation by the authors.

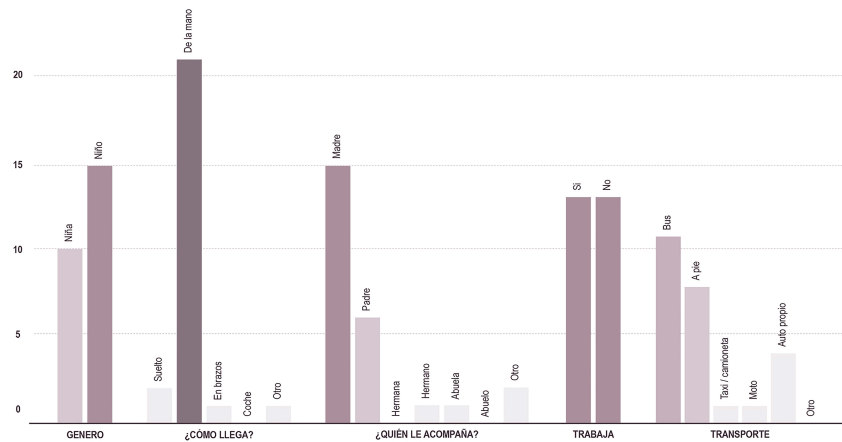


Figure 5. Results of the case-type survey. Source: Preparation by the authors.

V. RESULTS

Results of the case-type survey

The research shows that the female gender predominates in the question of who accompanies the child on their journeys to the CDI. As for whether the subjects worked in the 27 Febrero Market, 13 interviewees did not work in this space, and 12 did. On the other hand, it is most usual for children to arrive holding an adult's hand. However, it was interesting that no child came in a stroller. Finally, regarding the mode of transport they use to get to the

CDI, the most frequent is public transport, in this case, the bus. 11 of the 25 people consulted use this means, with walking in second place in third and last place taxi and motorcycle options (Figure 5).

eMaps Results

The levels of walkability in the previously established area of influence were evaluated. It is interesting to see how the rating can vary significantly from one section to another. For example, the market's surroundings obtained low ratings, reflected in yellow, orange, and red (Figure 6), indicating that walkability in this area is not in the optimal



Figure 6. Result of eMAPS walkability evaluation. Source: Preparation by the authors.

conditions to guarantee accessibility. However, Avenida Fray Vicente Solano and the corridor towards the Virgen de Bronce were evaluated as the most suitable areas for good walkability, obtaining the highest scores.

Results of non-participant direct observation

It was evident that women usually accompany their children to and from the CDI. They are also the ones who mostly attend the market to make their daily purchases or attend to their stalls (Figure 7). In addition, it was possible to detect that parents usually take their infants holding their hand, information coinciding with the results obtained in the survey. On the other hand, the presence of people under the influence of alcohol was observed in the surroundings of the market, mainly on the corner of Belisario Andrade and Adolfo Torres Streets.

The observation at the selected entrance showed the citizen guard⁵ hovering around the market, creating a sense of security (Figure 8). As for the observation at the selected bus stops, it was found that many people do not cross the zebra crossings or those set up to cross safely. It was also observed that women generally have difficulties getting on and off the bus when

⁵ Guardia Ciudadana is "a Municipal-run public institution that controls the public space, reinforces security together with the police and citizen security in the Cuenca district" (Guardia Ciudadana, n.d., s.p.).

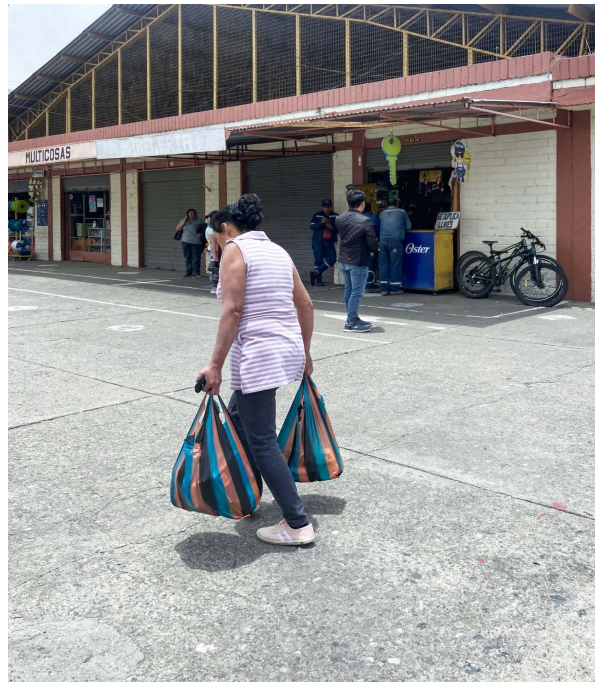


Figure 7. Women do the shopping. Source: Preparation by the authors.



Figure 8. Presence of the citizen guard. Source: Preparation by the authors.

accompanied by children and even more so when carrying shopping bags. Finally, one of the four bus stops analyzed does not have the necessary infrastructure because there is only one vertical "Bus Stop" sign (Figure 9).

Results of the interview

The interviewees stated that the CDI's location within the market facilitates the daily lives of those who care for children since it has several activities in the same place, such as work, education, and shopping. It is important to emphasize that, for five of the seven people interviewed, one of the main reasons they chose to enroll their children in the CDI analyzed is their daily work in the stalls within the market or its vicinity. However, three interviewees mentioned the lack of green areas near the 27 Febrero CDI. An example is interviewee N°2, who stated, "There are no parks for market children who need to be distracted."

Another interesting topic related to the mobility of care was waiting for the bus with the infants. Interviewee N°7 mentioned certain difficulties, such as, "We have to be careful as parents because sometimes, because they are little, they run, and since the bus stop is very close, it is of concern to us." Of the three interviewees who use the bus, two women mentioned that the bus stops do not have the necessary infrastructure, there are no roofs to cover themselves from the rain, and, in some cases, they only have a vertical sign.

In the interviews, three women who travel on foot commented that their daily environment has some obstacles. Interviewee N°1 is a person with a disability who has to take her daughter, mentioning that the market sidewalks are very high, hindering her mobility. Sometimes, the child's grandmother takes her to the CDI, and on two occasions, she has suffered falls due to obstacles while walking through the area. On the other hand, regarding personal safety when walking, interviewee N°7 says, "Sometimes the pedestrian sidewalk to go out to the Bronze Madonna, that one is a little dark, nothing has happened to me, but they have commented that young people appear who want to steal things." Most of the women who walk, 3 of the 5 interviewees, to come to or from the CDI, in the streets around the market, use pedestrian crossings, but in some cases, they consider them unsafe, as evidenced by interviewee N°1 "cars come from everywhere," interviewee N°7 mentions that there is no respect for the pedestrian by drivers at crossings without traffic lights.

Regarding the interviews conducted, certain factors that generate insecurity around the market are identified. The most worrying cause is the presence of people who are intoxicated, especially on weekends, as well as the existence of street vendors outside the market and debt collectors inside it. Interviewee N°1 reported, "Sometimes, I don't open for fear of them, that they will take my things..." She feels



Figure 9. Bus stop on Av. Fray Vicente Solano. Source: Preparation by the authors.

insecure about the collectors' presence. They offer a very high interest rate; if the payment due is not paid, the borrowers are threatened with taking, sometimes forcefully, supplies from the kiosks inside the market. Five interviewees mentioned the presence of the citizen guard and the social cohesion between neighbors as factors that improve security.

Regarding the sample obtained, the difference in the conditions of mobility of care is marked by the intersectionality approach; that is, inequalities are further accentuated by race, socioeconomic status, or origin issues. An example is the inequalities produced between urban and rural inhabitants, which is evident in the interviews conducted. Interviewee N°4 is a resident of the urban area, and she mentions that it takes about 10 minutes to get to the CDI, an assertion opposed to the opinion delivered by interviewee N°5, who mentions, "Quingeo is an hour away from here, I leave at 6:10 and arrive

at 7:10. I get up at 5:30 in the morning.” Both interviewees travel by public transport and do not have another means of transport to get to the CDI, but they have different travel conditions due to their place of residence. This differentiation causes other consequences, including children arriving late for classes, the bus being late, and the bus being full, which has the consequence of not stopping at the bus stop.

VI. DISCUSSION

This research sought to identify the factors that affect the mobility of care conditions around the 27 Febrero Child Development Center. The main issue is identifying and categorizing crucial concepts based on feminist geography or urbanism with a gender perspective. The study also emphasizes the critical role of women in the configuration of urban spaces and how this affects mobility dynamics. The study focuses primarily on transferring children to and from the CID nursery.

The mobility of care involves multiple factors. There is evidence, reflected in the literature, that demonstrates the dependence of women as the main ones responsible for performing the tasks of care and the inequality of conditions in their daily mobility (Motoya Robledo et al., 2020; Sánchez de Madariaga & Zucchini, 2019). Authors such as Heather et al. (2019) and González-Alvo and Czytajlo (2022) emphasize that inadequate public transport, low-quality infrastructures, and the perception of constant insecurity condition the mobility of care. This research explored this phenomenon in a particular case: the CDI within the 27 Febrero Market in Cuenca-Ecuador. The analyzed case study corroborates that although some men are responsible for taking and picking up children, women are mainly responsible; in our case study, 72% were women, according to case-type surveys applied at work.

The main findings highlight that the mode of transport and the perception of safety influence the mobility of care quality. The case-type surveys of 25 people in the studied sector found that 16% of respondents use a private vehicle for comfort and independence versus 84% of individuals who move on foot or by bus. However, the conditions of these modes of transport for the inhabitants in Latin America are not always the best (Figueroa & Waintrub, 2015; García, 2022). Public authorities must provide suitable conditions for all modes of travel. The pyramid of mobility, where pedestrians and cyclists are prioritized, followed by public transport users, should be the action guide of municipalities worldwide. Similarly, it is crucial to consider the different experiences, daily lives, and needs of vulnerable population groups when designing and planning mobility infrastructures.

The analysis of the results of the eMAPS indicate low walkability in the surroundings of the CDI, which primarily affects those who are in charge of moving children and people with disabilities (Ilárraz, 2006) since cities do not usually meet the needs of women, children, people with disabilities, and older adults, among others. Another shortcoming identified regarding the urban environment is the existence, quality, and/or location of zebra crossings. This leads parents to jaywalk (through the middle of the street) with their children, risking their safety.

The bus is the most used means of transport by the people surveyed and interviewed from the case study. The non-participant observation and interviews showed the poor condition of specific stops; 1 of the 4 stops analyzed only had a vertical sign and no protection from the weather or benches. Sometimes, vehicles are parked at the stops, hindering the route and making it difficult for passengers to board and disembark. These data coincide with those provided by Ilárraz (2006), who talks about physical accessibility, which is the ease or difficulty of accessing stations or stops, as well as getting on or off the transport itself, and that, due to all the conditions of mobility of care, it is women who have the least possibilities of accessibility to means of transport, which leads to an exclusion in terms of travel.

In all the interviews, personal safety was mentioned. A noteworthy fact was that the two men interviewed talked about insecurity in the city, while the five women detailed the causes of their feeling of insecurity. The main reason was the presence of people under the influence of alcohol hanging around the market and the existence of street vendors and debt collectors for the market workers. These groups, defined as “unwanted,” mostly comprised adult men (Gargiulo et al., 2020; Mugan, 2018). The presence of these groups sometimes forces women to take other routes, even if they are longer and less efficient (Figueroa & Waintrub, 2015). The concept of personal safety and lack of lighting was relevant even though the schedules for arrival and departure from the CDI are in the day.

The quantity and quality of lighting affected the eMAPS scores. It was identified that the lighting and urban design are crucial for crime prevention and citizen security. Well-designed spaces with good visibility, lighting, accessibility, and signage can improve women’s perception of safety (Jirón & Gómez, 2018; Ilárraz, 2006; Park & García, 2020).

It was recorded that the mobility of care conditions is crossed by intersectionality, where women have disadvantages in using and appropriating public space, even more so if they have few resources (Reyes-Muñoz, 2023; Alcántar & Velentim, 2023). It was found that those who

take their children by public transport have disadvantages compared to those who travel by private transport. They have to move to and from rural areas, investing a lot of time in their journeys (Gutiérrez & Reyes, 2017), hindering the possibility of dedicating their time to study, recreation, or socialization.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

In this case study, it is corroborated that women are primarily responsible for accompanying their children on their journeys to and from the 27 Febrero Child Development Center and that, in addition, the mode of transportation and the perception of safety are determinants in the mobility of care conditions. Likewise, it is verified that these are crossed by intersectionality, both by socio-economic level and place of residence (urban or rural).

These data demonstrate the importance of adopting a gender perspective in urban planning and in implementing concrete actions to promote equity, safety, and efficiency in women's movements or those who perform care work, thus contributing to constructing more inclusive and just cities.

The research allows for comparing results with CDIs in vulnerable and rural neighborhoods or identifying the differences between private kindergartens attended by children of a higher socioeconomic level in the future.

Finally, the study contributes to the knowledge and discussion of how mobility, associated with caregiving tasks, impacts the daily lives of people, especially women, who devote a significant amount of time to this often unpaid work.

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