Domestic work and migration in the United States: a characterization of Honduran women

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Given the lack of studies focused on Honduran domestic workers abroad, this article aims to characterize Honduran women living in the U.S. employed in domestic occupations. For this purpose, I employed survey data on women living in five American states, and calculated descriptive and inferential statistics. Furthermore, I employed binary logistic regression modeling to analyze the determinants of domestic work participation. When compared with all other occupations, domestic female workers of Honduran origin present significant differences in age, number of dependents, asset ownership, savings, income, and bank account ownership. Similarly, age (95% CI 0.92–2.63, $p = 0.94$), savings (95% CI 0.01–0.97, $p = 0.047$), account ownership in Honduras (95% CI 0.88–71.05, $p = 0.064$), monthly income (95% CI 0.99–1.00, $p = 0.096$), and social security (95% CI 0.02–1.29, $p = 0.086$) seem to be the key determinants explaining domestic work participation. Engaging and promoting compliance with international legal instruments might provide a means to consolidate the rights of these populations. The article concludes by highlighting future lines of research regarding the migration and rights of Honduras and Central American women living in the U.S.

Keywords: Central America. Employment. Immigration. Labor. Survey data.

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Introduction

Global domestic work facilitates the employment of large contingents of migrants from every corner of the planet. Such occupations connect industrialized and non-industrialized nations (ARIZA, 2016; SALAZAR PARREÑAS, 2015), as the flow of domestic workers involves several countries of origin and destination. Some examples are Indonesian women working in the Middle East (GAMBURD, 2000), Polish women employed in Germany (PALENGA-MÖLLENBECK, 2013), Caribbean and Filipino nationals being the majority of women working in Canada in domestic occupations (HSIUNG; NICHOL, 2010), and Central American/Mexican women in the same sector in the United States (ARIZA, 2016; MURILLO, 2017; SALAZAR PARREÑAS, 2015).

Focusing on the U.S., Ariza (2016) presented a brief timeline regarding the evolution of domestic and caregiving occupations and claimed the provision of these services transitioned from three main populations: The transatlantic immigrant workforce (pre-World War I), black women (around 1910), and Latin American immigrants (after the 1970s). In this regard, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) has reported that Hispanics are the main racial group employed in occupations such as maids/housekeepers, laundry workers, or tailors. Although the U.S. is a common destination for Latin American women, Salazar Parreñas (2015) described the working conditions in the American domestic sector as precarious, with workers typically only enjoying partial citizenship. Targeting domestic migrant workers in the U.S., Salazar Parreñas (2015), Glenn (2012), and Sternberg (2019) have pinpointed the details of such precarious labor conditions, including mandatory live-in employment, absence of minimum wage, impossibility to change employer, or unrecognized overtime pay. Despite these setbacks, the U.S. remains a desirable destination for domestic workers, due to higher salaries and latent possibility of permanent residency (SALAZAR PARREÑAS, 2015).

Honduras has slowly increased its importance in terms of migration to and population in the U.S. According to World Bank estimates, 651,059 Hondurans currently live in the U.S. (WORLD BANK, 2022). Similarly, Hondurans have presented rapid migration growth in specific U.S. locations, such as Harris County, Texas, or Los Angeles county, California (OBINNA, 2019). Honduras is also the home country of many migrants engaged in caravans (MARCHAND, 2021), and one of the main countries involved in the unaccompanied minor migrant crisis in 2020 (CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE, 2020).

Social and environmental indicators represent powerful incentives to migrate from Honduras, as numerous economic challenges persist. Since 2018, 48% of its population was below the poverty line (WORLD BANK, 2020). Similarly, Honduras falls behind in other wellbeing indicators, such as multi-dimensional poverty, access to education, or GINI index (WORLD BANK, 2020). Moreover, Honduras has suffered from extreme environmental events over the last twenty years, including the 1998 Mitch/Fifi hurricanes, the 2001 earthquakes, severe droughts, and the ETA and IOTA hurricanes in 2020 (OBINNA, 2019; ORGANIZACIÓN INTERNACIONAL PARA LAS MIGRACIONES, 2021; WRATHALL, 2012; ZAMBRANO *et al.*, 2021).

Based on census information, Central American nationals – including those of Honduran origin – tend to find employment in service, construction, and production-related occupations (BABICH; BATALOVA, 2021; BRICK; CHANILLOR; ROSENBLUM, 2011; O'CONNOR; BATALOVA; BOLTER, 2019). This tendency is also shared across specific migration schemes, such as the Temporary Protection Status (TPS). Demographic profiles have stressed the prominence of the construction sector for Honduran TPS holders, followed by other occupations such as child day-care and cleaning services (MENJÍVAR, 2017; WARREN; KERWIN, 2017).

Since the beginning of the century, Central American women have made up around one-quarter of the total workforce employed in domestic occupations in the U.S. (ARIZA, 2016), and Honduras is no exception. Residing in the U.S., Honduran women tend to find employment in so-called low-qualified occupations, including food preparation, cleaning and maintenance, domestic work, or caregiving (MURILLO, 2017). Although not usually associated with high wages, these occupations are able to provide individual income and even support the economy of their nation of origin. In this regard, remittances made up 23.2% of the gross domestic product of Honduras in 2020 alone (WORLD BANK, 2022).

The literature on Honduran women employed in domestic occupations in the U.S. is not abundant. Relevant research targeting female domestic workers include studies carried out by international institutions. Estimates by the Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (2018) lay out basic information regarding domestic work: of the total 57,000 Honduran migrants with temporary protected status (TPS), only 3900 were occupied in child care related jobs. Ethnographic studies provide other relevant insights for domestic workers. In this regard, Molina (2015) and Schmalzbauer (2004) have highlighted the importance of migrant networks for newcomers, the vulnerabilities of domestic workers, and pathways to transnational motherhood. More recently, domestic workers of Latin American origin have faced increasing challenges due to the COVID-19 crisis. Despite being officially considered essential workers they are treated as disposable (PANDEY; PARRENAS; SABIO, 2021), facing reduced salaries, enhanced food insecurity, and job loss in 2020 (NATIONAL DOMESTIC WORKERS ALLIANCE – NDWA, 2020). Similarly, these productive groups have not been eligible for emergency measures, with nearly 70% not receiving federal stimulus checks and 58% not qualifying for unemployment benefits (NDWA, 2020).

Despite the relationship between domestic occupation and employment generation for Honduran women in the U.S. (MURILLO, 2017), the literature lags behind in describing and characterizing these populations, using instead only anecdotal, partial, or ethnographic information. Studies often neglect the economic and social aspects relating to human rights, including economic asset ownership or savings. To overcome these shortcomings, relevant theoretical perspectives may be included. The use of frameworks such as a rights-based approach would allow for the inclusion of key economic and social human rights, including social security contributions, asset possession, remittances, or financial inclusion. In time, financial inclusion could lead to diversified investments (GOSH, 2006) and support Honduras's macro-economic performance.

Seeking to contribute to the literature on domestic occupations and Honduran workers, this article aims to characterize Honduran women living in the U.S. through a rights-based approach. This implies the main research question guiding this text is how are characterized domestic workers of Honduran origin employed in the U.S.? To provide an overview of this migrant female population, I employed survey data of Honduran females living in the U.S. The article is structured as follows: Following this introduction, I describe the methodological approach to present the description of the methods used for characterization. Later, I present and discuss the results and finally, I share some closing remarks.

Methodological approach: rights-based approach

This paper is based on the rights-based approach to labor migration. The rights-based approach draws from several international human rights instruments, including the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all migrant Workers and Family Members (ICPRMW), Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (DFPRW), Core Labour Standards (CLS), the Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration (MFLM) (ELIAS, 2010), and the 2011 Domestic Workers Convention. According to Elias (2010), this approach promotes the adoption of a voluntarist and neoliberal perspective to labor rights, which translates into non-binding principles and practices relating to labor migration. Moreover, the rights-based approach has been supported by relevant international organizations, such as the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Labour Organization. Additionally, authors such as Chavez and Piper (2015) and Elias (2010) have stressed the importance of non-governmental organizations, social movements, labor unions, and churches in the development and strengthening of this framework. The rights-based approach has been utilized in relevant migration studies (CHAVEZ; PIPER, 2015; ELIAS, 2010), some related to labor and migration governance (PIPER, 2017; PIPER; ROSEWARNE; WITHERS, 2016).

The rights-based approach to labor migration is framed within the overarching structure of human rights and its many international instruments. This setting allows to further the scope of migrant rights, potentially enabling the inclusion of social and economic rights. For example, the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers defines principles for decent labor, such as that migrant workers should not be subjected to torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment (article 10). Decent working conditions for migrant domestic workers are explicitly addressed in articles 6-11 of the 2011 Domestic Workers Convention. Standards include provisions on minimum wage, equal treatment, and employee obligations. Moreover, the International Framework of Labor Migration has stressed there should be "opportunities for all men and women of working age, including migrant workers, to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity should be promoted" (INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION, 2006, p. 5). The same instrument also highlights

specific points to foster the more productive use of remittances, the reduction of remittance transfer costs, and a disposition to allow fund transferring when returning to the countries of origin (INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION, 2006, p. 29). The right to transfer earnings and funds to States of origin is also recognized in the International Convention for Migrant Workers (article 47). As indicated by Gibson, McKenzie, and Rohorua (2006), one way to address the reduction of remittance transfer costs would be through the utilization of national banking systems. These authors reported that remittance transfer costs in North America and Oceania can be lowered when using commercial banks, rather than international remittance couriers such as MoneyGram or Western Union (GIBSON; MCKENZIE; ROHORUA, 2006). Similarly, promoting the creation of bank accounts both in the U.S. and Honduras for Honduran migrants might be beneficial for migrants and their families across the two countries. Bank account ownership could potentially lead to access other financial services (ANDERLONI; VANDONE, 2008), thus contributing to the promotion of economic, social, and cultural rights.

Under this framework, migrant workers should have access to proper social protection schemes, particularly social security and health coverage. The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all migrant Workers sets the pathway by advocating for the existence of social protection in destination countries (article 27). Similarly, the convention aims to promote access to adequate housing for migrants (article 43).

Although the rights-based approach (RBA) might provide an alternative to promote decent work and further the scope of rights for labor migrants, there are still doubts regarding its pertinence as a comprehensive framework. For example, Piper, Rosewarne, and Withers (2016) have stressed that economic liberalization – including current labor mobility schemes – is unlikely to benefit all labor migrants. In this regard, Elias (2010) questioned the existence of an array of international instruments relating to the rights-based approach. According to the same author, two issues arise: i) the lack of a coherent international regime and ii) the vulnerability of migrants. Despite these limitations, this framework allows for the inclusion of financial services, return migration, asset ownership, and migrant families in the discussion of migrant women and domestic work. In light of the above, key elements of the rights-based approach are considered for the empirical part of this text, particularly when analyzing the statistical determinants of female domestic work.

Methods

For the purposes of this article, the main information source was data published by the International Organization for Migration (ORGANIZACIÓN INTERNACIONAL PARA LAS MIGRACIONES, 2019). This United Nations agency carried out a large study of Hondurans living in the United States, with the aim of generating information to guide public policies and allow for the elaboration of financial products for the Honduran diaspora. They employed a semi-probabilistic sampling method to gather information from 981 people living in the

States of Texas, New York, Florida, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia. The selection criteria were: Hondurans living in the U.S., sending remittances and granting informed consent. According to OIM (2019), statistical parameters employed when sampling allow for nationwide inference regarding Hondurans living in the U.S. Data were collected between 3 and 15 December, 2018.

One of the first challenges for accurately characterizing female domestic workers in the U.S. was to adequately discriminate occupations related to this type of work. To this end, IOM (2019) collected information on economic occupations classified by the International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (ISCO-08). Based on this guide, all available Honduran women were selected for this article. Table 1 describes the cases by ISCO-08 occupations. This occupation list is compliant with the definition of domestic work under the 2011 Domestic Work Convention (article 1).

TABLE 1
Description of selected cases by occupation

Occupation	ISCO-08 code	Number of observations employed
Domestic housekeepers and domestic cleaners	5152	59
Cooks	5120	18
Child care workers and teachers' aides	5311	27
Personal care workers in health services	5322	17
Cleaners and helpers	9112	4
Manual washing and ironing	9111	4
Sewing, embroidery and related workers	7533	4
Hairdressers, beauticians and related workers	5141	3
Total		**136**

Source: Based on OIM (2018).

A typology to compare female workers engaged in domestic work with all other occupations, whether carried out by females or males was constructed based on the selected occupations. This methodological design was specifically chosen to focus on and highlight female domestic workers in the U.S., as the literature on these occupations and populations is not abundant at present. For their proper characterization, several descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed. First, descriptive statistics were used; namely, the mean, standard deviation, and range values. Depending on the specific variables, a t-test or a Wilcoxon–Mann–Whitney rank test was conducted to measure the mean average differences between the two groups.

Additionally, this article aimed to portray Honduran women employed in the domestic sector by focusing on its determinants. To do so, a binary logistic model was constructed, with the intention of determining whether specific respondent characteristics were linked to female domestic work. This methodological approach has been employed before in similar studies considering migration and the determinants of domestic work in the U.S. (ARIZA, 2016).

Independent variables related to demographics, economic, and cultural traces of labor migrants have been used in several migration studies, including those relying on the rights-based approach (BLOFIELD; JOKELA, 2018; ELIAS, 2010; INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION, 1990; STERNBERG, 2019). Similarly, variables such as social security contributions and family dependents are explicitly covered in relevant international instruments, such as the convention on domestic workers (article 14 and Annex B 14.4, respectively).

TABLE 2
Variables selected for determinant analysis

Variable	Scale	Description
Age	Continuous	Age of respondent in years
Squared age	Continuous	Squared age
Number of dependents in U.S.	1-18	Number of dependents living in the U.S.
Number of dependents in Honduras	1-21	Number of dependents living in Honduras
Migration in years	0-46	Years living in the U.S.
Legal status	0-1	Possession of legal status. Value 0 correspond to no legal status and 1 to any legal status (tps, greencard, etc.)
Return intentions	0-1	Return intention. Value 0 correspond to no return intention and 1 to expressing return intention
Movable asset in the U.S.	0-1	Possession of moveable asset in the U.S. Value 0 correspond to no asset and 1 to declaring assets
Movable asset in Honduras	0-1	Possession of moveable asset in Honduras. Value 0 correspond to no asset and 1 to declaring assets
Non movable asset in Honduras	0-1	Possession of non-moveable asset in Honduras. Value 0 correspond to no asset and 1 to declaring assets
Savings	0-1	Possession of savings. Value 0 corresponds to no saving and 1 to declaring savings.
Bank account in Honduras	0-1	Possession of bank account in Honduras. Value 0 corresponds to no account and 1 to declaring having an account.
Bank account in the U.S.	0-1	Possession of bank account in the U.S. Value 0 corresponds to no account and 1 to declaring having an account.
Income	Continuous	Monthly average income in dollars.
Social security coverage	0-1	Paying for social security. Value 0 corresponds to no social security while 1 paying for social security.

Source: Based on OIM (2018).

Based on the relevant theory and previous studies, the above-mentioned variables were employed. With few exceptions, they were dichotomous variables. Considering the limited data availability, this selection corresponded to a better model fit. To assess the model fit, three tests were employed: The Hosmer-Lesmeshow goodness-of-fit test (p-value = 0.999), area under the curve (0.9209), and percentage of correctly classified cases (93.38%). All three tests suggested an optimal model fit. Results were computed using the STATA 14 software.

Results

Table 3 summarizes the descriptive statistics. Of the total surveyed population, 136 participants were classified as women employed in domestic occupations, accounting for more than 17% of all occupations. This figure is substantially higher than Honduran persons employed in caregiving occupations under the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in the United States, as reported by the IOM (ORGANIZACIÓN INTERNACIONAL PARA LAS MIGRACIONES, 2018). Females engaged in domestic work had a mean age of 42.23 years, more than 5 years older than the comparison group. A *t*-test confirmed this to be a statistically significant difference (*t*-test *p*-value = 0.000). Women having a dependent in the U.S. and in Honduras accounted for similar figures, when compared to non-domestic workers. Moreover, both groups presented a similar number of years living in the U.S., with the mean value ranging between 10.99 and 11.70 years; in fact, this was a non-significant difference (*t*-test *p*-value = 0.48; Wilcoxon−Mann−Whitney *p*-value = 0.38).

In terms of legal status, both groups reported similar results, with approximately 37% possessing regular status in the U.S. (no significant difference when using *t*-test or Wilcoxon test). Moreover, most members of both groups intended to return to their home country Honduras (70.4%−74.5%), with no significant difference between the groups (*t*-test *p*-value = 0.34; Wilcoxon−Mann−Whitney *p*-value = 0.33). This tendency accounted for a large proportion of respondents with return migration intentions. Conversely, other migration studies have registered considerably lower return migration intentions, ranging from 6% to 50.4% in their samples (CARLING; PETTERSEN, 2014; WALDORF, 1995). If this intention is materialized, and a large proportion of Hondurans do return to their home country, local authorities might face social, economic, and educational challenges (DÍAZ QUINTERO; SABILLÓN ZELAYA, 2021; MORRIS; PALAZUELOS, 2017); however, return migration also represents an opportunity for the country of origin to benefit from the skills, capital, and experiences of returnees (DUSTMANN; WEISS, 2007; WAHBA, 2021).

Additionally, only 21.48% of female domestic workers possessed movable assets in the U.S., compared to 47.02% in the general comparison group. This accounted for a statistically significant difference between groups (*t*-test *p*-value = 0.00; Wilcoxon−Mann−Whitney *p*-value = 0.00). Meanwhile, the percentage of people owning movable and non-movable assets in Honduras was similar for both groups.

In economic terms, 127 of the domestic workers received monthly income for their jobs (σ = 2100.78, µ = 1725.84), indicating that around 6.61% (nine cases) were non-paid workers. In contrast, the comparison group had a much higher monthly income (σ = 2951.84.78, µ = 1999.81), accounting for a statistically significant difference (*t*-test *p*-value = 0.00; Wilcoxon−Mann−Whitney *p*-value = 0.00). Similarly, there was a statistically significant difference in savings between the groups, as only 38% of domestic workers were able to save (*t*-test *p*-value = 0.00; Wilcoxon−Mann−Whitney *p*-value = 0.00). Of the two samples, only 45% of female domestic workers possessed an U.S. bank account,

while 57.38% of the other workers did (t-test p-value = 0.00; Wilcoxon–Mann–Whitney p-value = 0.00). The groups also varied in terms of bank account ownership in Honduras; however, no statistically significant effect was found (t-test p-value = 0.34; Wilcoxon–Mann–Whitney p-value = 0.344). Interestingly, 40.60% of the female domestic workers paid for social security, while 44.30% of participants in the rest of activities did the same; however, no significant difference was observed for this characteristic (t-test p-value = 0.4346; Wilcoxon–Mann–Whitney p-value = 0.4342).

TABLE 3
Descriptive statistics of surveyed people (all occupations) and domestic workers

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
Age *€	657	37.56954	11.26529	18	82
	136	42.23529	11.41554	22	71
Squared age *€	657	1538.184	938.58	324	6724
	136	1913.176	1028.669	484	5041
Number of dependents in U.S. €	205	1.609756	1.900439	1	18
	19	1.631579	0.7608859	1	3
Number of dependents in Honduras	560	2.989286	2.371543	1	21
	115	2.843478	2.250112	1	13
Migration in years	655	10.99695	9.007132	0	46
	135	11.7037	9.234163	0	46
Legal status	654	0.3761468	0.4847883	0	1
	135	0.3777778	0.4866374	0	1
Return intentions	620	0.7451613	0.4361224	0	1
	125	0.704	0.458328	0	1
Movable asset in the U.S. *€	655	0.470229	0.4994943	0	1
	135	0.2148148	0.4122234	0	1
Movable asset in Honduras	654	0.559633	0.4968111	0	1
	134	0.5895522	0.4937609	0	1
Movable asset in Honduras	654	0.1681957	0.3743263	0	1
	134	0.141791	0.3501447	0	1
Saving *€	642	0.5809969	0.4937806	0	1
	134	0.3880597	0.4891368	0	1
Bank account in Honduras	657	0.43379	0.4959744	0	1
	136	0.3897059	0.4894864	0	1
Bank account in the U.S. *€	650	0.5738462	0.4948975	0	1
	135	0.4518519	0.4995299	0	1
Income *€	613	2951.843	1999.817	400	12800
	127	2100.787	1725.845	400	12000
Social security coverage	632	0.443038	0.4971382	0	1
	133	0.406015	0.4929441	0	1

Source: Calculations based on OIM (2018).
Note: For every variable, the first row represents general surveyed people while second one represents women employed in domestic occupations. * Indicates statistically significant t-test for mean difference at α = 0.05. € represents statistically significant Wilcoxon–Mann–Whitney rank test for mean difference at α = 0.05.

The results of the binary logistic regression on domestic work are presented in Table 4. According to the results, out of all of the variables, age, savings, Honduran bank account

ownership, monthly income, and social security coverage presented statistically significant values. Of these variables, owning a bank account in Honduras had the most prominent effect (95% CI 0.88-71.05, p-value = 0.064) in explaining female domestic work. In light of these results, those possessing a Honduran bank account were 7.94 times more likely to be female domestic workers.

TABLE 4
Logistic regression results – Outcome variable women employed in domestic occupations

Variable	Odds ratio	Std. err.	Z	P›z	[95% Conf. interval]
Age	1.563407	0.417679	1.67	0.094	0.926117 − 2.639237
Squared age	0.996071	0.002919	-1.34	0.179	0.990367 − 1.001809
Number of dependents in U.S.	1.470966	0.362125	1.57	0.117	0.90793 − 2.383157
Number of dependents in Honduras	1.045038	0.173431	0.27	0.791	0.754865 − 1.446755
Migration in years	0.893079	0.068198	-1.48	0.139	0.768936 − 1.037265
Legal status	5.932488	6.544248	1.61	0.107	0.682746 − 51.54833
Return intentions	5.346777	7.128027	1.26	0.209	0.392028 − 72.9234
Movable asset in the U.S.	0.366622	0.372485	-0.99	0.323	0.05005 − 2.685541
Movable asset in Honduras	1.046678	0.951402	0.05	0.96	0.176235 − 6.21631
Non movable asset in Honduras	0.369506	0.548426	-0.67	0.502	0.020149 − 6.776204
Savings	0.133825	0.135627	-1.98	0.047	0.01836 − 0.97544
Bank account in Honduras	7.940333	8.878399	1.85	0.064	0.887313 − 71.05599
Bank account in the U.S.	0.440104	0.406898	-0.89	0.375	0.071875 − 2.694837
Income	0.999361	0.000383	-1.67	0.096	0.99861 − 1.000113
Social security coverage	0.166955	0.174183	-1.72	0.086	0.021605 − 1.290179
_cons	4.55E-06	2.78E-05	-2.02	0.044	2.92E-11 − 0.710934

Source: Calculations based on OIM (2018).
Note: Number of observations 151. Log likelihood = -26.067037. Pseudo R2 = 0.3779

Discussion

Preliminary models allowed to determine the pertinence of using dichotomous or continuous variables (e.g., asset number, age, dependents, income). Most variables are dichotomous, yielding a better model fit. Meanwhile, only a limited number of variables were continuous, including number of dependents in both countries, years since original migration, and age. This last variable was first recorded as categorical (youth, adults, and elders); however, the model proved substantially worse and, hence, the continuous variable was retained.

Although the golden rule for statistical significance is typically 5% or less (i.e., α ‹ 0.05), a growing number of scholars have supported the use of alternative thresholds (MILLER; ULRICH, 2019; SCHUMM *et al.*, 2013). Authors such as Schumm *et al.* (2013) have argued that less conservative values should not be used to argue against the credibility or scientific soundness of research. Considering this, the following section discusses the findings when considering significance values at the 10% level (i.e., α ‹ 0.1); however, the results should be analyzed with caution. Both confidence intervals and p-values are presented for appraisal.

Among the demographic variables, age proved to be important (CI 0.92–2.63, *p*-value = 0.094), indicating the tendency of Honduran domestic workers being older. A similar result was observed in relation to certain statistical models for Latin American domestic workers in the U.S. (ARIZA, 2016). Notably, the mean age of female domestic workers of Honduran origin was more than five years higher than that in the comparison group (see Table 3). This provides evidence of a positive relationship between age and domestic occupation for Honduran women in the U.S. However, the observed mean age of 42.23 years is substantially lower than those in other reports focused on domestic employment in the U.S. For example, Sternberg (2019) reported a mean age of 64 years in her study. Similarly, López Estrada (2020) reported large proportions of Mexican trans-border domestic workers to be over 30 years of age. Squared age does not seem to be a determinant in predicting domestic work participation.

Moreover, female domestic workers of Honduran origin tended to receive lower wages (σ = 2100.78, μ = 1725.84), when compared to all other occupations. Even though the literature seems to reaffirm this tendency, domestic workers may perceive such disparity as the "lesser of two evils" (TAYAH, 2016). This seems to be supported by the fact that domestic workers roughly receive around 50% of the average national wages in their countries of origin (INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION, 2015). According to Sternberg (2019), it is legal to pay domestic workers less than minimum wage in 42 American states. Moreover, Molina (2015) has documented that Honduran immigrants – including those employed in domestic sectors – often face hardship as newcomers and frequently have their wages delayed. Although payment in domestic occupations was lower than in the comparison group, these wages are still higher than in the nation of origin, making the U.S. a desirable location for female domestic workers (SALAZAR PARREÑAS, 2015)[1]. Income appeared to have a negligible effect on domestic occupation participation (CI 0.99–1.00, *p*-value = 0.096).

Moreover, female domestic workers were, on average, unable to save (CI 0.01–0.97, *p*-value = 0.047). The existence of dependents in both countries and the absence of social safety nets might partially explain this trend. Moreover, the inability to save is also related to low salaries; in fact, salaries also presented statistically significant effects, as previously discussed. An earlier study in México by Nava Bolaños, Brown Grossman, and Domínguez Villalobos (2014) pointed out a negative tendency between female-led household savings and the number of hours used for domestic work. According to the authors, this is due to the unequal distribution of domestic work within households (NAVA BOLAÑOS; BROWN GROSSMAN; DOMÍNGUEZ VILLALOBOS, 2014).

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[1] Note that data used in this study was collected in 2018. However, domestic workers faced increasingly fragile conditions throughout 2020: six months after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, working hours increased, income reduced, food security raised, and numerous workers were laid off (NDWA, 2020).

Social Security coverage was also a significant determinant of domestic work. In the results, people covered by and paying social security were less likely to be female domestic workers in the U.S. (CI 0.02–1.29, p-value = 0.086). This implies that female domestic workers may have less social coverage while working in the U.S., even when such a benefit is explicitly included in the Domestic Work Convention (article 14). Coverage level might relate to the employer's willingness to enroll the employee (SALAZAR PARREÑAS, 2015). Social contribution participation is shared across the American Hemisphere; for example, the proportion of domestic workers actively contributing to social security accounted for only 28% in Latin America (LEXARTZA; CHAVES; CARCEDO, 2016). Conversely, 47% of other occupations were found to enjoy the same benefit in the sub-region (LEXARTZA; CHAVES; CARCEDO, 2016).

Moreover, possessing a bank account in Honduras proved important for domestic work participation (CI 0.88–71.05, p-value = 0.064). This was the most prominent variable explaining female domestic work in the U.S., and the results imply that respondents having a bank account in Honduras were 7.94 times more likely to be female domestic workers in the U.S. The possession of bank accounts in host and origin countries might yield additional positive effects, including financial inclusion, remittance productive use, credit access, and lowered transfer costs. Notably, the productive use of remittances, reduction of transfer costs, and the transfer of earnings are covered in relevant international law instruments such as the International Framework of Labor Migration or the International Convention for Migrant Workers. Moreover, Gosh (2006) has stated that some migrants may send remittances to their own bank accounts in their country of origin due to future return migration intention, higher interest rates, or to diversify their investments. Similarly, new financial products targeting migrants in the U.S. have been developed by commercial banks such as Wells Fargo, BANAMEX, and BBVA (GOSH, 2006). Although mainly targeted at Mexican migrants, this could be a potential way to create new financial services for Central American immigrants, including Honduran nationals. Basic financial services, or specifically tailored ones, might provide a means to reduce remittance transfer costs. As Gibson, McKenzie, and Rohorua (2006) have stated, using a commercial banking system generally allows for lower fees when sending money to the country of origin.

Two variables – possession of legal status and intention to return – did not present statistically significant effects. From a rights-based approach, irregular migratory status can lead to additional vulnerabilities, limitations to family reunification, and human rights violations (MULLALLY; MURPHY, 2014, p. 407). Moreover, the intention to return to Honduras might pose opportunities for the country, leveraging the work experience, skills, knowledge, and capital gained while residing in the host country. As previously stated in the literature, migration intentions can serve as predictors of migration behavior (AYALA DURÁN, 2022; CARLING; PETTERSEN, 2014; TJADEN; AUER; LACZKO, 2019), although such intentions are not linear and are subject to change over time. In light of the above, these two variables should be the subject of future research regarding Honduras and other Central American countries.

Despite the findings obtained and the above-mentioned characterization, this study had some limitations, one of the most prominent being the absence of key demographic variables such as education level, civil status, migrant generation, race, overtime payment, or poverty status. Income, as all other variables, was self-declared, and it was not possible to cross-check this information with other relevant sources. Additionally, the dataset only included Honduran nationals. Although domestic workers of Latino origin share challenges while living in the U.S. (ILO, 2015: NDWA, 2020; TAYAH, 2016), the results of this study can only be applied to Honduran workers in domestic occupations. This limitation would also exclude Americans employed in such occupations. Similarly, no longitudinal information was available. Future research should include such characteristics, as they might also prove crucial to a deeper understanding of the determinants of domestic employment.

Final remarks

The present study aimed to characterize Honduran women living in the U.S. and employed in domestic occupations. Differences in terms of economic dependents, age, income, savings, and ownership of assets were identified between female Honduran domestic workers and the rest of the Honduran diaspora employed in the U.S. Moreover, determinants of female domestic work participation in the U.S. include savings, age, monthly income, bank account ownership, and social security contributions. Some of these factors, such as income or contribution to social security, potentially contribute to the construction of decent working conditions for international female migrant workers. Similarly, the potential possession of financial instruments, such as bank accounts, in both the host country and country of origin could hypothetically lead to greater financial inclusion and more productive use of remittances. The improvement of relevant transfer mechanisms to the country of origin is explicitly covered in international law instruments, as discussed throughout this paper.

The international community, including international organizations, could potentially spearhead the improvement of foreign worker rights by promoting and overseeing existing international law instruments; however, the ability of global organizations to exert pressure and contribute to the improvement of labor conditions for workers greatly depends on the willingness of sovereign states, as the rights-based approach and other relevant international law instruments rely on voluntarist and non-binding principles.

Finally, the characterization drafted in this paper provides a basis for future research on migrant domestic workers in the U.S., either focusing on Honduran or other Central American nationals. In this regard, researchers may focus on the relationships between domestic work, migration status, and return migration, as these provide clear opportunities to improve the rights of migrants while residing abroad.

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Resumo

Trabalho doméstico e migração nos Estados Unidos: uma caracterização de mulheres hondurenhas

Em função da escassa literatura sobre o tema, o presente artigo visa caracterizar as mulheres hondurenhas empregadas em ocupações domésticas nos Estados Unidos. Com esse objetivo, empregam-se questionários preenchidos por mulheres morando em cinco estados desse país norte-americano. Para realizar tal caracterização, é utilizada estatística descritiva e inferencial. Adicionalmente, emprega-se regressão logística para analisar os determinantes da participação em empregos domésticos. Quando comparadas com todas as outras ocupações, as mulheres hondurenhas fazendo trabalhos domésticos possuem diferenças em termos de idade, número de dependentes, posse de bens, poupanças e existência de conta bancária. Similarmente, a análise dos determinantes estatísticos mostra que variáveis significativas incluem idade (95% IC 0,92-2,63 *p* = 0.94), poupanças (95% IC 0,01-0,97, *p* = 0.047), existência de conta bancária (95% IC 0,88-71,05, *p* = 0.064), renda mensal (95% IC 0,99-1.00, *p* = 0.096) e contribuição à

previdência social (95% IC 0,02-1,29 p = 0.086). Promover a adoção de instrumentos de direito internacional pode representar uma alternativa para fomentar os direitos humanos desse grupo de pessoas. O artigo finaliza ressaltando possíveis linhas de pesquisa relacionadas à migração de mulheres hondurenhas e da América Central morando nos Estados Unidos.

Palavras-chave: América Central. Emprego. Imigração. Trabalho. Enquete.

Resumen

Trabajo doméstico y migración en los Estados Unidos: una caracterización de mujeres hondureñas

En vista de la escasa literatura centrada en trabajadoras domésticas hondureñas en el extranjero, el presente artículo busca caracterizar a mujeres hondureñas empleadas en ocupaciones domésticas en Estados Unidos. Para ello, se utilizan encuestas aplicadas a mujeres hondureñas que viven en cinco estados del país norteamericano y se emplea estadística descriptiva e inferencial. Adicionalmente, se usa una regresión logística para analizar los determinantes de la participación en empleos domésticos.

Cuando se compara con todas las otras ocupaciones, las mujeres hondureñas que trabajan en este rubro presentan diferencias en edad, número de dependientes, posesión de bienes, ahorros y posesión de cuenta bancaria. Similarmente, el análisis de determinantes muestra las variables significativas que incluyen edad (95 % IC 0,92-2,63 p = 0,94), ahorros (95 % IC 0,01-0,97, p = 0,047), cuenta bancaria (95 % IC 0,88-71,05, p = 0,064), ingreso mensual (95 % IC 0,99-1,00, p = 0,096) y seguro social (95 % IC 0,02-1,29 p = 0,086).

Promover la adopción de instrumentos de derecho internacional puede ser una alternativa para fomentar los derechos humanos de esta población. El artículo termina mostrando líneas de investigación sobre migración para mujeres hondureñas y centroamericanas viviendo en Estados Unidos.

Palabras clave: Centroamérica. Empleo. Inmigración. Trabajo. Datos de encuesta.