



Poverty in Colombia as a Case Study: Structural Factors and Intervention Proposals

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Summary

The objective of this article is to address the issue of poverty in Colombia through the case study method, starting from the structural conditions, social impacts and possible interventions. From secondary documentation, specifically official statistics, academic articles and institutional documents, the central elements that perpetuate it are identified, such as the concentration of wealth and inequality of access to basic services. Likewise, the article analyzes different initiatives and policy measures, such as the Universal Basic Income, to judge their relevance and capacity to reduce the social and economic vulnerability of the Colombian population. The article argues that, although there are some measures to reduce its problem, current interventions are still insufficient, partly due to structural conditions and lack of commitment to address the full regimen, and partly due to limited community participation in strategy design. Rather, a comprehensive approach is needed that addresses the economic, social and political elements of poverty and fosters active collaboration between public and private institutions and the community itself.

Keywords: poverty, inequality, case study, public policies, social exclusión

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Introduction

Poverty in Colombia is a social, economic and political phenomenon that, in recent decades, has been addressed, caused and provoked by problems that are probably rooted in the very structure of society itself, according to Reyes: { 2008}. At different levels and in a specific environment, poverty manifests itself and establishes the quality of life of a large number of people who, for the most part, do not have access to basic services or restitution of the right. Poverty goes beyond the economic perception of total income because

it also has to do with the lack of opportunities for decent employment, food security, poor health and education, homelessness and so many elements that, by accumulation, become a cause of marginalization. { DANE, 2023a}. Within the Colombian context, the topic has been taboo because wealth is in the hands of very few people, which causes enormous resource deficiencies { Ortiz-Benavides & Rúales-Suarez, 2022}. The difference between civil and rural don, in Colombian science, is one of the gaps that cite his policemen in suction { 2007}. Precisely because communities such as peasants and Afro-Colombians have historically been marginalized, even using state services such as business education, they use it again. The scarce aspects between urban and rural are not limited to the distances in infrastructure or manufacturing, but also to the differences that are still within the production of photos of the fortunes { Espinosa Espinosa et al., 2020}.

The argument for the relevance of the study of poverty in Colombia under the methodology of the case study responds to the need to identify in greater detail the internal and particular dynamics composed of the problem. Unlike approaches based on global statistics, the case provides an opportunity to intensively explore the interaction between structural, institutional and cultural factors that converge in the same territory or community. Thus, it is the measure of not only analysing the indicators of monetary and multidimensional poverty, but also the experiences of the people involved, the efforts of autonomous organisations and measures based on improvisation to address the shortcomings. On the other hand, another argument in favor of the choice of the methodology presented is the diversity of positions on how to face the problem. Gutierrez proposes using tools like UBI to take a long-term perspective and address scarcity at its root by promoting social equality. However, other authors, such as Brito Nieto and Huertas Montero, indicate that entering justice in circumstances of economic deprivation is, in fact, a challenge. Therefore, the development of legal and institutional responses is necessary to address the difficulties experienced by the most vulnerable members of society. Given the evidence of the disarticulation between public policies and the communities to which they are addressed, the applicability and relevance of such recommendations in specific cases should be considered.

In this sense, poverty cannot be considered a static or one-dimensional phenomenon, but must be interpreted as a multifaceted concept that encompasses not only the lack of income or employment, but also aspects of human dignity, social cohesion and political participation. As already mentioned, in a country where inequalities have been historical and where there have been conflicts of different kinds, poverty manifests itself not only as a problem in itself, but as a symptom of broader problems in the social structure, such as the poor distribution of opportunities or the poor distribution of power and resources; therefore, the need for an in-depth analysis is justified to understand how the various aspects that make poverty such a deep-rooted phenomenon are related. On the other hand, it is also pertinent to consider the transversal nature of this situation to justify the importance of an interdisciplinary approach. At the family level, for example, it manifests itself with the inability to provide essential needs, generating stressful situations that can lead to informal decisions not to send children to school or to find unregulated ways to generate income. At the community level, support networks are constrained by a lack of the necessary resources, and civil society organizations are often not able to prevent poverty from occurring. Finally, at the national level, poverty is presented as an obstacle to the economic and social development of the country, thus preventing programs aimed at structural improvement from having the desired impact.

It is in this sense that the case study proposal seeks to articulate the aforementioned dimensions based on the concrete experience of individuals and population groups in situations of poverty. The results of this approach allow a closer interpretation of the processes and, in this case, more graspable to the understanding of poverty. The case study design does not seek to establish full-fledged generalizations, but rather to envision common mechanisms, or particulars, that can be articulated in the construction of more effective and appropriate public policies. They will also support measurements and reflections on the performance of social policies, the effectiveness of the strategies implemented and the possibilities of allying efforts between public and private sector institutions, as well as with community organizations. As for applied social theory, contributions from sociology, economics and law are recognized. The first establishes critical notions regarding the social construction of poverty and the reproduction of inequalities

in social interaction and relations. For its part, economics offers quantitative elements and models of the phenomenon that explain behaviors and trends in the distribution of wealth, as well as in the country's labor system. Finally, the law provides guidelines and mechanisms for access to justice that, according to Brito Nieto and Huertas Montero, can curb the structural tendency to violate fundamental rights. By integrating these disciplines, a more complete approach to poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon is achieved.

In academic and political discussion, the measurement of poverty has been a main axis to determine to what extent this is a problem in Colombia. From a monetary point of view, DANE established in 2023b the income thresholds to differentiate the population that defines itself as poor or in extreme poverty, which presents a valuable quantitative vision, although insufficient, since it does not always consider intangible dimensions such as the quality of housing, access to health and civic life. among others. In this sense, studies such as that of Sánchez Torres et al. carried out in 2020 and that of Vallejo Zamudio in 2021 frame the relevance of measuring by levels a broader picture of the deprivations and risks to which the poor are exposed. This case may also be useful to identify specific and local variables that can only be accessed through qualitative research. However, addressing poverty in the country necessarily implies reflecting on state entities and the different policies developed. From conditional transfer programs, Family Action to the popular Universal Basic Income proposed by Gutiérrez in 2021, the Colombian State has tried to improve the living conditions of the riskiest sectors. However, effectiveness is not always as desired due to corruption, lack of continuity in long-term policies, and the lack of empowerment of communities in the development of public policies, as indicated by Espinosa Espinosa et al. in 2020. For this reason, the case analysis will facilitate the understanding of the gap between the idea and the reality in poverty in terms of public policies.

In addition, the current literature emphasizes the role of citizen participation and community organizing in social change. In certain scenarios, groups vulnerable to poverty demonstrate resilience resources and support networks at the local level that, combined with the will and duty of the State, could lead to more stable solutions. However, the articulation between local projects and state policies has shortcomings, which leaves questions about how inter-institutional communication and cooperation are developed. In this case, the single-case study approach is favorable, because it can analyze how power dynamics and resource distribution are processed and negotiated in a specific situation. On the other hand, the impact of poverty on mental health and psychological well-being has been addressed by current scholars. The high level of stress, anxiety and depression is a consequence of economic insecurity and uncertainty about the coverage of basic needs. Although these issues are the subject of future research in the Colombian context, the current literature invites us to adopt a holistic strategy based on the discovery of poverty. In other words, when referring to the lack of money as such, the fact of not being able to project a stable future means the lack of individual and collective purpose. Therefore, when dealing with poverty, it is recommended to implement a psychosocial approach that stumbles on self-esteem, interpersonal relationships and social structure.

In addition, on the other hand, a panorama of poverty in Colombia cannot be separated from gender inequality or intersectionality with other variables such as ethnicity and rurality. In fact, women face more barriers to access employment in the formal economy and are more involved in unpaid or informal work, increasing their condition of vulnerability. For their part, ethnic communities such as indigenous and Afro-descendant communities have historically been abandoned by the State and many of them have had to displace, exacerbating their situation of exclusion and limiting opportunities. All of the above reflects the multidimensionality of poverty and indicates the need for a policy that considers the wide range of experiences and conditions of different people. In other words, with this section of a case study from Bolivia I am trying to demonstrate that the discussion on poverty must go beyond indicators and macro perspectives. We need to see how deeper structures, such as the distribution of power, the historical distribution of wealth or discrimination, interact with "micro" processes and the daily and local lives of impoverished people. Only in this way can we better identify the main flaws in current public policy and,

in turn, highlight more clearly the opportunities and resources, which often also come from the communities themselves.

This article will examine the connections between poverty, inequality and the state mechanisms used to address these problems. Special attention will be paid to the strategies and programs that have been proposed or carried out, trying to evaluate their adequacy and how challenging their implementation has been in the local reality. Likewise, the contribution of legal, economic and cultural factors in the reproduction of poverty and the contributions of multidisciplinary research to create real changes will be discussed. Ultimately, this analysis aims to provide a critical look that, based on the Colombian experience, can nourish the debate on how to address poverty in a more comprehensive way. In this sense, the need for coordinated action sustained over time and sustained by multiple actors is recognized. In this way, it seeks to stimulate more lasting and broad-spectrum solutions, while pointing out gaps in knowledge that require new lines of research and effective commitment on the part of society.

Methodology

To address poverty in Colombia as a case study, a qualitative research design was used, aimed at the in-depth understanding of the structural factors and social dynamics that affect the persistence of this phenomenon. The main methodological components of this research are described below.

Type of study and scope

The research is part of a **unique case study**, focused on the reality of poverty in Colombia. This approach is relevant to capture the complexity of a social phenomenon that varies according to regional, cultural and institutional factors (Yin, 2009). Although the case study does not intend to generalize its findings statistically, it does offer the possibility of an **in-depth analysis** of the specific conditions that characterize poverty in the country, as well as the actions and strategies undertaken to mitigate it.

Case selection and context

The selection of Colombia as a case responds to the combination of historical and structural factors that have contributed to the formation of high poverty rates, particularly in rural areas and peripheral urban areas (DANE, 2023a). In addition, the geographical and cultural diversity of the territory allows a broad approach to the multiple expressions of poverty, which enriches the analysis.

Data collection sources and techniques

Secondary sources **were mainly used** for information collection, which included:

1. **Official documents:** Reports and statistics from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) and reports from government entities.
2. **Academic literature:** Articles from specialized journals, books and theses that address poverty in Colombia from sociological, economic and legal approaches.
3. **Previous research:** Field studies and surveys conducted by non-governmental organizations and local research centers (e.g., Espinosa Espinosa et al., 2020; Brito Nieto & Huertas Montero, 2022).

The documentary review was complemented with a **content analysis** of legislative and public policy sources (Gutiérrez, 2021), in order to understand the scope of state interventions and legal provisions that address poverty. This strategy made it possible to identify recurring elements and organize the information by thematic categories.

Data analysis

The analysis process consisted of **thematic coding**, following the stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006):

- **Familiarization with the data:** Thorough reading and rereading of the selected literature and reports.

- **Generation of initial codes:** Identification of concepts and patterns related to poverty, inequality, structural barriers and intervention strategies.
- **Topic search and review:** Grouping of related codes into broader topics (e.g., "access to justice" or "transfer programs").
- **Definition and naming of topics:** Refinement of the topics and elaboration of clear definitions for each of them.

The thematic analysis facilitated the **triangulation** of findings from various sources, allowing statistical and legislative data to be contrasted with academic production and field reports.

Criteria of rigor and validity

To ensure the **credibility** of the findings, a data **triangulation** approach was adopted (Stake, 1995), contrasting information from different sources and methodologies. Transferability is sought by providing detailed descriptions of the Colombian context, so that other researchers can evaluate the applicability of the results in realities with similar characteristics. Likewise, **confirmability** was contemplated through the rigorous systematization of the procedures for searching and classifying the information, which reduces bias and makes the researcher's position transparent.

Results

The results of this research based on the case study are discussed in terms of the thematic analysis of secondary sources, considering primary sources in research, paying special attention to the structural factors of poverty in Colombia and its most important interventions. As a result of the codification, four relevant categories were identified: regional distribution and geographical differences, access to resources and fundamental human rights, programmes and interventions, and structural barriers and inequality. First, there are notable regional differences between urban and rural areas. According to the 2020 National Department of Statistics, monetary poverty was 42.4%, while extreme monetary poverty was 15.1%. However, this general mask hides a picture full of inequalities: rural regions and remote rural settlements show indicators that consistently outperform large cities. They also lack comprehensive infrastructure services, access to an adequate education system, and services provide basic services inconsistently. These findings confirm the hypothesis about historical and structural factors influencing government drilling in areas of low state coverage.

The above findings indicate the vulnerability of the poor in areas that are not limited to income levels. In particular, food insecurity is one of the critical challenges, which is consistent with Florián Buitrago's arguments on the importance of hunger and malnutrition in chronic poverty. In addition, there are obstacles in access to justice, in particular, with regard to the tutela action, designed to reduce procedural barriers for people without resources. However, it does not apply to arbitration, which exposes the population in precarious situations to continuous lack of protection. The policies reviewed above relate to the orientation towards conditional cash transfers, such as Families in Action, as well as towards improved education and health as steps to address poverty. However, effectiveness varies according to the region and leadership changes, as pointed out by Vallejo Zamudio. On the other hand, Universal Basic Income is discussed in contemporary literature as a viable route to address the issue of minimum income and compensate for the structural lack of opportunities. While some data support its effectiveness in reducing vulnerability, factors such as fiscal sustainability and political consensus remain critical.

In this scenario, the concentration of wealth in a small sector of the population continues to emerge as a determining axis of poverty in the country. Added to this are the limitations in the supply of formal jobs, combined with discrimination against ethnic and indigenous groups. Several studies coincide, to highlight two examples, they point out that rural women and Afro-descendant communities live deeper poverty, demonstrating on the one hand the intersection between gender, ethnicity and territory, but also the reproduction of social inequalities, such as the segregation of impoverished populations in certain territories. These structural inequalities directly intervene in the population's ability to escape poverty and

restrict the scope of state initiatives. Taken together, the results described highlight the multidimensional nature of poverty in Colombia, as well as the need for holistic approaches that transcend income and address deprivations in other important aspects of social life. Despite some signs of progress, the urgency of more constant and coordinated interventions to reduce the gaps observed in the national reality remains pressing.

Discussion of the Results

The following findings demonstrate the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon in question, which is based on the intersection of historical, economic, and sociocultural factors. Then, a critical interpretation of the results is offered that contrasts with the statements established in the reviewed literature and the theoretical basis of the study. The first set of findings is linked to the uneven geographical distribution of poverty in the country, being much more acute in rural areas and peripheral areas. These data are consistent with the statements of Espinosa Espinosa et al. The author and her team point out that remote regions of urban centers cannot access infrastructure, education and health. Therefore, the population of these areas is trapped in the vicious circle of poverty, resulting in its transfer to the next generations. In other words, the results indicate that poverty is not based on lack of income, but is due to the historical failure to incorporate the most vulnerable areas into development policies. In addition, state support networks in rural areas are less developed due to several structural factors, such as land concentration, lack of institutional presence, and absence of formal employment opportunities. Therefore, to effectively address the problem, the country should implement a focused strategy that is not limited to the transfer of monetary resources and also addresses citizen participation, investment in infrastructure, and strengthening state institutions.

The discussion developed above on aspects as diverse as food insecurity and access to justice shows how poverty in Colombia cannot be limited to the monetary approach mentioned above. In terms of a legal characterization of poverty, as described by Brito Nieto and Huertas Montero, poverty is even more structural given the lack of amparo in clearly described procedural areas, such as arbitration. In addition, food insecurity as described by Florián Buitrago and later ratified by official evidence indicates the need for public policies that guarantee at least regular access to food and the reduction of malnutrition among the low-income population. It is important to note that surveys such as the one mentioned by DANE suggest that poverty in Colombia is a multidimensional phenomenon in a way that is clearly compatible with the following theories. Lack of income, employment opportunities, housing quality, food insecurity and legal protection are gears that feed on each other, and until they all develop simultaneously, the quality of life will remain radically unchangeable. Therefore, interventions in the field should be characterized by a holistic approach that includes approaches in the economic, social, and cultural fields. The issue of the effectiveness of self-evaluation of existing programs, which at one time or another consist of conditional transfers and subsidies from concentrated programs when it comes to ISS, still remains to be considered. Although there has been progress in the coverage of Familias en Acción and other developments, the actions are still insufficient due to the lack of collaboration of the agencies with each other and the fact that, often, funding comes and goes without seeing all the positive results realized. There is also room for a broader discussion on a subject such as that of the socialist in Colombia. According to Gutiérrez, universal basic income "is a clear instrument of human rights [...] protect life."

From this perspective, pro-UBI positions would argue that this instrument would address the root of the problems of social exclusion by guaranteeing the income of the most vulnerable population, creating the infrastructure for each person to have access to decent work, and reducing the administrative burden involved in managing segmented subsidies. On the other hand, those who oppose the UBI would argue that these would be unfeasible and that they would cause problems such as inflation and the existence of a cycle of dependence on the State by certain sectors of the population. This dichotomy represents, in part, the cycles of economic and political opinions related to the role of the State. That is, one model, on the one hand, is presented as total intervention to correct structural inequalities, while, on the other, the conservative model is presented, which is based on the belief in the responsibility of all and competition in the labor market. It is important to highlight that, although there are relevant strategies and interventions, there are

still significant challenges related to poverty reduction, especially in the focus on the capacity of the rich and discriminatory models. According to Ortiz-Benavides and Rúaless-Suarez, structural inequality stems from "cultural, political, and legal barriers, which limit both the autonomy and participation of Afro-Colombians, indigenous, and rural people."

Based on the above, it is possible to argue that poverty in Colombia must be addressed in a comprehensive manner, reconciling the economic dimension with the social, cultural, ethical and legal dimensions, 2008; Gutiérrez, 2021). In this sense, it could be argued that one of the most important contributions of this case study is to demonstrate that poverty does not refer only to the lack of material resources, but also implies a set of obstacles to the full exercise of human rights and participation in public life. Below, it is suggested that it would be useful to delve deeper into the relationship between poverty and mental health, given that the stress and uncertainty associated with it due to lack of resources can have a negative impact on wellbeing in the United Kingdom* of mental health. Likewise, more research on the effectiveness of transfer programs, and how they could be effectively articulated with the social organization and community initiatives. Finally, there is a collection of longitudinal studies that evaluate the impact of time-isolated interventions, such as UBI, would be useful to determine whether these types of bulls offer structural solutions or simply mitigating relief. In summary, the discussion of the recent results reaffirms the complexity of poverty in Colombia and invites reflection on the limitations and possibilities of ongoing interventions. This phenomenon will not change with the injection of money or isolated programs, but with an institutional and cultural reconfiguration that includes the redistribution of opportunities, effective community participation and the persistent mandate of governments.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this research on poverty in Colombia from a case study approach highlights the need to address the phenomenon in a multidimensional way that goes beyond the notion of a simple income deficit. In this sense, the findings demonstrate the importance of structural factors, such as income distribution and opportunities, that determine the degree of effectiveness of public programs and interventions. Likewise, the gap between urban and rural areas, limitations in access to justice and precarious working conditions are inextricably linked and serve to fuel social exclusion and limit human development. The results therefore highlight the importance of intervention strategies that not only provide monetary capital, but also foster institutional change and the participation of affected communities. However, the lack of continuity of state policies and citizen apathy, as shown in the debate on Universal Basic Income, remain barriers to a sustainable solution to poverty. Overcoming these limitations will require a holistic and interdisciplinary approach that considers both economic factors such as health, education, food security and procedural justice. The findings also suggest the need to address issues such as mental health, gender, and the individual character of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities more thoroughly. Giving voice to these perspectives will allow for an intervention that is more respectful of the local reality, as it shows that poverty is not a homogeneous phenomenon and that each region has its own forms of exclusion. Finally, longer-term studies could investigate the adequacy of these policies and programs over time, as they could determine whether they fulfill their long-term responsibilities in addressing the root causes of poverty or whether they only treat symptoms temporarily. In short, this greater interface between academia, the State, and civil society organizations may pave the way for the well-being of Colombians in the near future.

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