

Factors Influencing the Quality of Life in Rural Populations in Colombia: A Theoretical Review

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Abstract

The quality of life of rural populations in Colombia is affected by various problems, including poor living conditions related to limited access to basic services, education, health and economic opportunities. Thus, the purpose of this study is to identify the most impacted dimensions in these rural contexts and to formulate guidelines to address the difficulties faced by their inhabitants. Methodologically, the research is framed within the qualitative paradigm, with a descriptive scope and is based on a review of existing academic literature. The findings emerging from the literature review show that the most affected dimensions are access to public services, infrastructure, employment and education, which has a direct impact on the general welfare of rural communities. It is concluded that there is a need to implement public policies that promote the integral development of these areas, improving their infrastructure, strengthening access to basic services and promoting educational and economic strategies that favor a better standard of living in rural areas of Colombia.

Keywords: rural populations, qualitative paradigm.

1. Introduction

The quality of life in rural areas of Colombia has been an issue of growing concern, as these regions have historically been marginalized in terms of access to basic services, adequate infrastructure, and economic development opportunities. According to Restrepo and Giraldo (2021), living conditions in rural areas of the country continue to be alarmingly inferior to those in urban areas, which perpetuates structural inequalities and limits opportunities for wellbeing and social development for their inhabitants. This context raises the urgent need to rethink public policies aimed at improving the quality of life in these territories.

The objective of this study is to identify the dimensions of quality of life that are most affected in rural contexts in Colombia, based on an exhaustive review of recent academic literature. Through this review, we seek not only to understand the main problems faced by rural

inhabitants, but also to formulate guidelines and guidelines to address these difficulties in a comprehensive manner. The identification of critical areas is key to the design of interventions that promote the welfare of these communities, especially in terms of access to public services, employment, education and infrastructure, as highlighted by Villamil (2020).

Methodologically, this research is framed within the qualitative paradigm, with a descriptive approach, which allows for an in-depth analysis of the existing academic literature on the quality of life in rural areas. By reviewing the academic literature, this study aims to contextualize the policies, programs and strategies that have been implemented, and to contrast them with the current needs of these communities. Recent studies, such as Perez and Rojas (2022), highlight that poor infrastructure and limited access to essential services, such as health and education, are factors that negatively impact the quality of life in rural areas.

The analysis of these factors is particularly relevant in a context of socioeconomic transformation, where sustainable rural development is becoming a priority objective of national and international agendas. In line with the recommendations of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (2021), there is a need to implement policies that not only improve the physical infrastructure of rural areas, but also promote human development by strengthening education and decent employment. These dimensions are fundamental for achieving greater territorial equity and a substantial improvement in the well-being of rural inhabitants.

In general terms, this research contributes to the discussion on the quality of life in rural areas of Colombia, offering a theoretical review that highlights the areas of greatest vulnerability. The findings of this study could serve as a basis for the formulation of public policies that promote integral and equitable development in these regions, focusing on improving the living conditions of rural populations through sustainable educational, economic and infrastructure strategies.

2. Literature Review

The literature review constitutes a fundamental element for understanding and interpreting the object of study related to the quality of life in rural populations in Colombia. Therefore, this section systematically integrates the main theoretical and empirical approaches that have addressed this problem from different perspectives, which facilitates a more complete vision of living conditions in these areas. Through the review of recent academic sources, we examine the most affected dimensions, such as access to basic services, education, infrastructure and economic opportunities, providing a solid basis for analysis and critical reflection on the factors that impact the welfare of these communities.

Quality of Life in Rural Contexts

Quality of life in rural areas is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct that encompasses both objective and subjective aspects of individual and collective well-being in non-urban environments. According to Amartya Sen's capability approach, quality of life is understood as the effective freedom people have to lead the kind of life they value (Robeyns and Byskov, 2021). In the rural context, this implies consideration of factors such as access to basic services,

economic opportunities, education, health, and the preservation of the natural and cultural environment. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) expands this notion by incorporating the concept of human development, which emphasizes the expansion of people's capabilities and opportunities in harmony with environmental sustainability (UNDP, 2020).

Measuring quality of life in rural environments presents particular challenges due to the heterogeneity of these spaces and the need to consider specific indicators that capture local realities. Recent studies have proposed assessment frameworks that integrate dimensions such as food security, resilience to climate change, and community social capital (González et al., 2023). These approaches recognize the importance of support networks and social cohesion as fundamental elements of rural quality of life, aspects that are often not adequately reflected in conventional metrics focused on economic indicators.

The evolution of rural development policies has led to a growing recognition of the need for territorial and participatory approaches to improve the quality of life. These approaches seek to leverage local assets and strengthen the capacity of communities to define and pursue their own visions of well-being (Berdegué and Favareto, 2020). Digitalization and connectivity emerge as critical factors in this context, offering new opportunities for access to services, markets and knowledge, but also posing challenges in terms of equity and adaptation (Salemink et al., 2022).

Contemporary studies on quality of life in rural areas underscore the importance of considering the interconnections between different dimensions of well-being and rural-urban dynamics. Mobility, remittances and economic linkages with urban centers play a significant role in shaping rural living conditions (Zhu and Luo, 2021). Likewise, the valuation of ecosystem services and biodiversity is a crucial component of rural quality of life, recognizing the fundamental role played by natural environments in the well-being of communities and global sustainability (Pascual et al., 2022).

Characterization of Rural Areas in Colombia

Rural areas in Colombia are characterized by a marked geographic, demographic and socioeconomic heterogeneity. According to Perfetti et al. (2019), these territories range from extensive plains to mountainous regions, presenting a diversity of ecosystems that directly influence the productive activities and lifestyles of their inhabitants. This geographic variability translates into a multiplicity of agricultural systems, from traditional crops to modern agroindustrial farms, reflecting the complexity of Colombia's rural sector.

In demographic terms, Colombia's rural areas have undergone significant transformations in recent decades. According to Leibovich and Estrada (2020), there has been a trend towards a decrease in the rural population, mainly due to migration to urban centers. This phenomenon has resulted in changes in the age structure of rural communities, with a progressive aging of the population and a reduction in the availability of young labor for agricultural activities.

From a socioeconomic perspective, rural areas in Colombia present persistent challenges. Ocampo (2021) notes that these areas are characterized by higher levels of poverty than urban areas, limited access to basic services and restricted educational opportunities. In addition, the armed conflict has had a significant impact on many rural regions, affecting social and economic

dynamics and generating forced displacements that have altered the social fabric of these communities.

Colombia's rural economy, although traditionally associated with agriculture, is becoming increasingly diversified. Ramírez and Gómez (2022) highlight the emergence of non-agricultural activities as important sources of income, including rural tourism, handicrafts and environmental services. This economic diversification represents both a challenge and an opportunity for the sustainable development of rural areas, requiring public policies that encourage innovation and adaptation to the new dynamics of the global market.

To recapitulate, empirical evidence suggests that living conditions in rural areas of Colombia present significant challenges for the well-being of their inhabitants. Parra-Peña et al. (2023) note that the gap between rural and urban areas persists in terms of access to basic services, economic opportunities and social development. Factors such as limited infrastructure, scarcity of formal jobs and vulnerability to external shocks contribute to perpetuate cycles of poverty and marginalization. This reality underscores the urgent need to implement comprehensive and sustainable public policies that effectively address structural disparities and promote inclusive rural development, with the objective of substantially improving the quality of life of Colombia's rural population.

Impact of the Armed Conflict and Post-Conflict on Colombia's Rural Areas

The armed conflict in Colombia has had significant repercussions in rural areas of the country, affecting various aspects of the lives of its inhabitants. According to Ríos (2020), forced displacement has been one of the most devastating phenomena, forcing thousands of families to abandon their lands and livelihoods. This massive exodus has resulted in the disarticulation of the social and productive fabric of numerous rural communities. Additionally, the presence of armed groups has limited access to basic services such as health and education, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization (Salas et al., 2022).

The rural economy has also suffered the consequences of the conflict. According to Vargas and Hurtado (2021), insecurity and violence have discouraged investment in the agricultural sector, hindering the development of productive chains and the modernization of the countryside. The loss of natural and productive resources, whether due to illegal appropriation or collateral damage from the conflict, has reduced the capacity of communities to generate income and achieve food self-sufficiency. This has contributed to widening the gap between urban and rural areas in terms of opportunities and quality of life.

The post-conflict period presents new challenges for affected rural areas. Rodríguez and Benavides (2023) point out that the reintegration of ex-combatants and community reconciliation are complex processes that require significant time and resources. The implementation of comprehensive rural development programs, such as those contemplated in the Peace Agreement, faces logistical and budgetary obstacles. In addition, the persistence of illegal economies and the presence of new armed actors in some regions threaten to undermine progress in peace and reconstruction of the social fabric (Garzón, 2020).

To address this multidimensional problem, it is necessary to adopt a holistic approach that considers the particularities of each territory. The transformation of rural areas affected by the conflict requires not only investment in infrastructure and basic services, but also strategies that strengthen social capital, promote citizen participation and generate sustainable economic opportunities. The success of these initiatives will depend to a large extent on effective coordination between government, civil society organizations and local communities, as well as long-term commitment to peace building and rural development.

Current Challenges for Sustainable Development in the Rural Context

Sustainable development in rural areas faces a number of complex and interconnected challenges that require urgent attention. According to Lopez et al. (2019), climate change represents one of the most significant threats to agriculture and rural livelihoods. Extreme weather events, such as prolonged droughts and floods, directly affect agricultural productivity and food security. In addition, climate variability increases uncertainty in crop cycles, making long-term planning and adaptation of traditional agricultural practices difficult.

Rural-urban migration constitutes another critical challenge for sustainable development in rural areas. According to Castañeda et al. (2021), this demographic phenomenon leads to the loss of human capital in rural communities, especially among the young and the most qualified people. The resulting depopulation negatively affects the economic viability of rural areas, reduces the taxpayer base for essential public services, and weakens traditional social structures. This rural exodus also puts pressure on urban infrastructure and services, exacerbating problems of inequality and marginalization in both contexts.

The digital divide and lack of access to modern technologies represent significant obstacles to sustainable rural development. Ramirez and Stone (2022) note that limited digital connectivity in rural areas impedes access to crucial information, educational opportunities and global markets. This technological disparity hinders the adoption of innovative agricultural practices, such as precision agriculture and environmental monitoring systems, which could improve the efficiency and sustainability of rural production. In addition, the lack of digital infrastructure hinders the development of rural enterprises and the economic diversification needed to reduce dependence on primary activities.

In examining these challenges, the need for a holistic and multidimensional approach to address sustainable development in the rural context is evident. The implementation of integrated policies that consider climate change adaptation, rural population retention and improved technological access is fundamental. Likewise, strengthening community resilience and promoting locally adapted innovations emerge as key strategies to overcome these obstacles and promote sustainable and equitable rural development in the long term.

3. Materials and Methods

The purpose of this study was to identify, analyze and synthesize the existing literature related to quality of life in rural areas of Colombia. To achieve this objective, a qualitative approach has been adopted to explore in depth and comprehensively the dynamics that impact these contexts,

providing a comprehensive view of the relevant factors in rural development. The methodology used is based on the systematic review of documents, which is characterized by its rigor and thoroughness in the collection and analysis of information.

The methodological process of this research was carried out in three phases: search and tracing of information, analysis of bibliographic sources and discussion of the results. This methodological approach guarantees a structured and coherent review that allows a precise approach to the study phenomenon. The specific characteristics of the research design are detailed below, as well as the phases developed to achieve the proposed objectives.

Research Approach, Scope and Design.

The study was developed under a qualitative approach, given that this allows understanding complex phenomena from an interpretive and contextual perspective, focusing on subjectivity and human experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). In this case, a qualitative approach was chosen to examine how social, economic and environmental factors influence the quality of life of rural populations in Colombia. Through this type of study, the interactions between different variables can be explored in depth, offering a detailed understanding of the reality experienced by rural communities in Colombia.

The descriptive scope was chosen because it allows detailing and characterizing the factors that affect the quality of life of rural populations, without pretending to establish causal relationships (Hernández et al., 2014). We sought to systematically describe the findings found in the literature, providing a detailed and structured view of the topics addressed.

The methodological design is documentary review, also called literature review, which focuses on the collection, analysis and interpretation of previous studies in order to synthesize existing knowledge and highlight research gaps (Snyder, 2019). This type of design is considered appropriate for studies that seek to establish the state of the art in a specific area, thus allowing the identification of patterns and emerging themes in the literature (Booth et al., 2016).

Stages of the investigation

- Search and tracking of information

In this first phase, a search of bibliographic sources was carried out in recognized databases such as Scopus, Web of Science and SciELO. In addition, official documents from governmental agencies, reports from international agencies and specialized press articles were included. The search terms used included “quality of life”, “rural populations” and “Colombia”, combining them with Boolean operators (AND, OR) to obtain relevant results. Inclusion criteria were established, such as studies published between 2018 and 2024, research focused on rural populations in Colombia, and articles in Spanish and English addressing health, education, employment, housing, roads and transportation, and access to basic services. On the other hand, studies that did not focus on rural areas, opinion articles, editorials and documents with unclear methodologies were excluded.

- Analysis of the bibliographic sources collected

In the second phase, an analysis of the selected documents was carried out. Two independent reviewers evaluated the content of each study based on a data extraction form, which included information such as: author, year, title of the study, objectives, methodological design and main findings. In cases of discrepancy between the reviewers, a joint discussion was held to resolve the differences, thus ensuring the validity and reliability of the review process. This procedure is aligned with the standards established for systematic reviews (Moher et al., 2009) and guarantees the completeness of the literature analysis.

- Discussion of the results

The third phase consisted of a critical discussion of the emerging results, where patterns, coincidences and divergences were identified in relation to the quality of life in rural populations in Colombia. Links were established between the findings and their implications for public policy and rural development, highlighting areas of opportunity for future research. The results were synthesized into categories that reflect the most relevant factors identified in the literature, providing an integral and comprehensive view of the phenomenon studied.

4. Results

This section presents the findings obtained from the documentary review of the factors that influence the quality of life of rural populations in Colombia. The results are organized according to the proposed objectives and focus on describing the key factors identified in the literature, such as access to basic services, education, health and employment. Based on the analysis of the reviewed documents, a comprehensive and detailed view of how these factors affect the well-being and development of rural communities is provided, highlighting the main barriers and challenges faced by these populations. It also includes reflections that allow us to contextualize the results and understand their impact on the formulation of public policies aimed at improving the quality of life in these environments.

- Results of the information search and tracing stage

During this first phase, a process of searching and tracking of bibliographic sources in academic databases and recognized repositories was developed, complemented with the review of official documents from governmental agencies, reports from international agencies and articles from specialized press. To ensure the relevance of the documents collected, specific search terms such as “quality of life”, “rural populations” and “Colombia” were used, strategically combined to obtain a broad spectrum of results relevant to the objectives of this research.

As a result of this process, 120 documentary sources were initially identified, from which 75 were selected that met the established inclusion criteria: studies published between 2018 and 2024, research focused on rural populations in Colombia, and articles in Spanish and English that addressed aspects of quality of life related to health, education, employment, housing, roads and transportation, and access to basic services. In terms of exclusion criteria, studies that did

not focus on rural areas, opinion articles, editorials and documents with unclear methodologies or insufficient data were left out.

The selected information was organized into a corpus of documents that encompassed different perspectives and theoretical approaches, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the factors that affect the quality of life in rural Colombian communities. This corpus of 75 documents constitutes the basis for the analysis and discussion of the following phases of the research, providing a solid and representative framework for examining the challenges and opportunities faced by these populations.

- Results of the analysis stage of the bibliographic sources collected

Based on the analysis of the 75 bibliographic sources selected in the search and tracing stage, the main factors affecting the quality of life of rural populations in Colombia were identified. These factors are grouped into six key dimensions: health, education, employment, housing, roads and transportation, and access to basic services. Each of these dimensions was approached with an analytical focus, considering the current conditions of rural communities and the specific challenges they face in relation to access to health services, educational coverage, employment opportunities, the quality of housing infrastructure, the state of roads and the availability of transportation, as well as the provision of essential services such as drinking water and electricity. The analysis made it possible to establish that the interrelation of these factors largely determines the general wellbeing of rural communities in Colombia, conditioning their development and opportunities for progress.

• Health dimension

Academic literature highlights that access to health services in rural areas of Colombia presents significant deficiencies. According to a study by Rivillas et al. (2020), there is a marked disparity in the distribution of health resources between urban and rural areas. Researchers have shown that, in some rural regions, the ratio of physicians per inhabitant can be up to five times lower than in urban areas, resulting in insufficient and low-quality health care for rural communities. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of adequate healthcare infrastructure, such as hospitals and equipped health centers, forcing rural inhabitants to travel long distances to receive specialized medical care.

Studies have identified that the quality of health services in rural areas is compromised by multiple factors. Bernal et al. (2022) point out that the shortage of specialized medical personnel, lack of modern equipment, and limited capacity to perform complex procedures are recurrent problems in rural health centers. Scholars agree that this situation has a direct impact on the health of the rural population, manifesting itself in higher rates of infant and maternal mortality, as well as a higher prevalence of inadequately treated chronic diseases. In addition, research by Gómez and Vélez (2021) reveals that telemedicine, although promising, still faces significant obstacles in its implementation due to the lack of connectivity and digital literacy in many rural areas.

Some studies highlight that economic barriers represent another significant obstacle to health access in rural Colombia. According to Arrieta et al. (2019), the costs associated with

transportation and lodging to access specialized medical services in urban centers can represent an unsustainable financial burden for many rural families. Researchers have shown that this situation leads to delays in seeking medical care and, in many cases, the abandonment of necessary treatments. Additionally, the study by Perez et al. (2023) notes that the lack of adequate health insurance coverage in rural areas exacerbates these difficulties, leaving many rural residents without access to essential health services.

The researchers agree that public health conditions in rural Colombia present unique challenges that require urgent attention. Research by Osorio and Lucumí (2018) reveals that the lack of access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation in many rural communities contributes significantly to the prevalence of gastrointestinal and parasitic diseases. Studies have identified that exposure to pesticides and other agricultural contaminants represents an additional health risk for rural workers and their families. Martínez et al. (2021) point out that the lack of occupational health and occupational safety programs adapted to the rural context aggravates this situation, resulting in a higher incidence of occupational diseases and occupational accidents in the agricultural sector.

- Education dimension

Academic literature highlights that education in rural areas of Colombia faces significant challenges that affect quality and access to training. According to a study by Arias et al. (2018), there is a marked gap in academic performance between rural and urban students, evidenced in the results of national standardized tests. Researchers have shown that factors such as lack of adequate infrastructure, scarcity of teaching materials, and limited digital connectivity contribute to this disparity. In addition, Parra et al. (2021) note that school dropout in rural areas is significantly higher than in urban areas, largely attributed to the need for young people to contribute economically to their households, which compromises their educational continuity.

Studies have identified that the quality of education in rural schools is affected by multiple factors. Bonilla and Galvis (2020) reveal that there is a critical shortage of qualified teachers willing to work in remote areas, resulting in high staff turnover and discontinuity in educational processes. The researchers agree that this situation is aggravated by the lack of continuous training and pedagogical updating programs adapted to the rural context. The research by Rodríguez et al., (2019) highlights that many rural teachers lack the necessary tools and training to implement innovative teaching methodologies relevant to the local environment, which limits the effectiveness of the learning process.

Also, based on the analysis of the research tradition, it was possible to identify that the educational infrastructure in rural areas of Colombia presents critical deficiencies that hinder the learning process. According to Acosta et al. (2022), a significant percentage of rural schools lack basic services such as potable water, adequate sanitation and reliable electricity. Researchers have shown that these precarious conditions not only affect the health and well-being of students, but also limit the implementation of modern educational technologies. Additionally, the study by Barrera et al. (2020) reveals that the lack of adequate spaces for extracurricular and sports activities in rural schools restricts the integral development of students, depriving them of opportunities for personal and social growth that complement their academic training.

Scholars agree that access to higher education and technical training in rural areas of Colombia is extremely limited, perpetuating cycles of poverty and underdevelopment. Research by Gómez and Celis (2023) points out that the scarcity of higher education institutions in rural areas forces young people to migrate to urban centers to continue their studies, which is economically unviable for many families. Studies have identified that this situation contributes to the brain drain from rural areas, as those who manage to access higher education rarely return to their communities of origin. In addition, Vásquez and Gabalán (2018) highlight that the educational offer available in rural areas is often not aligned with the needs and opportunities of the local context, which hinders the practical application of the knowledge acquired and limits the economic development prospects of these regions.

- Employment dimension

The analysis of academic literature has elucidated that employment in rural areas of Colombia faces significant challenges that affect the quality of life of its inhabitants. Based on the study conducted by Leibovich et al. (2019), there is a marked gap in job opportunities between rural and urban areas, with a rural unemployment rate that considerably exceeds the national average. Researchers have shown that factors such as lack of economic diversification, low agricultural productivity, and limited infrastructure contribute to this disparity. In addition, Gómez et al. (2021) note that labor informality in the rural sector reaches alarming levels, exceeding 80% in some regions, which translates into economic instability and lack of social protection for rural workers.

Studies have identified that the quality of employment in rural areas is affected by multiple structural factors. Flórez et al. (2018) reveal that there is a persistent wage gap between rural and urban workers, even when controlling for variables such as education and experience. Researchers agree that this situation is exacerbated by the lack of training and professional development opportunities in rural areas. Research by Otero and Sánchez (2020) highlights that many rural workers lack the technical skills and competencies needed to adapt to the changing demands of the labor market, which limits their employability and occupational mobility.

On the other hand, academic literature highlights that the agricultural sector, the main source of employment in rural Colombia, faces challenges that negatively impact the generation of decent work. According to Perfetti et al. (2019), the fragmentation of rural property and limited access to modern agricultural technologies result in low productivity that directly affects the income of small producers. Researchers have shown that these precarious conditions not only reduce the profitability of agricultural activities, but also encourage migration to urban centers in search of better opportunities. In addition, the study by Gutiérrez-Rodríguez et al. (2020) reveals that exposure to occupational hazards and the lack of social security in agricultural work compromise the health and well-being of rural workers, demonstrating the urgent need for policies that promote decent working conditions in the countryside.

The studies analyzed suggest that the lack of economic diversification in Colombia's rural areas severely limits employment opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and underdevelopment. Research by Cárdenas and Vallejo (2023) points out that excessive dependence on primary activities, mainly agriculture and mining, makes rural economies highly

vulnerable to external shocks such as price fluctuations in international markets or adverse climatic events. Studies have identified that this situation contributes to labor instability and seasonality of employment in rural areas. In addition, Arias et al. (2020) point out that the absence of productive linkages and value added in rural production limits the creation of quality and well-paid jobs, restricting the prospects for sustainable economic development in these regions.

- **Housing Dimension**

The studies analyzed highlight that the housing situation in rural areas of Colombia presents significant deficiencies that affect the quality of life of its inhabitants. According to the study conducted by Torres et al., (2020), there is a marked housing deficit both quantitatively and qualitatively in rural areas, which considerably exceeds the national average. Researchers have shown that factors such as the lack of access to basic public services, the precariousness of construction materials and the absence of property titles contribute to this problem. In addition, Sánchez and Moreno (2018) point out that the geographic dispersion of rural housing makes it difficult to implement effective public policies for housing improvement, which perpetuates the conditions of vulnerability of these communities.

Studies have identified that the quality of rural housing is affected by multiple structural factors. Villegas et al. (2019) reveal that a high percentage of rural housing lacks access to potable water and basic sanitation, which has direct implications on the health of its inhabitants. The researchers agree that this situation is aggravated by the lack of investment in infrastructure and the difficulty in implementing technological solutions adapted to the rural context. Perez's (2021) research highlights that many rural houses are built with inadequate or low-quality materials, which makes them vulnerable to natural disasters and adverse weather conditions, compromising the safety and well-being of rural families.

Most research points to the fact that access to property and the formalization of land tenure represent significant challenges for rural housing in Colombia. According to Parada and Marín (2021), a high percentage of rural families live in dwellings without legalized land titles, which limits their access to credit and housing improvement programs. Researchers have shown that this informality in land tenure not only affects the housing security of families, but also hinders investment in improvements and expansions of existing housing. Additionally, Ocampo's study (2022) reveals that land restitution and property formalization processes in rural areas affected by the armed conflict have been slow and complex, which prolongs housing uncertainty for many rural communities.

Several scholars argue that the lack of adequate rural housing programs adapted to the specific context of these areas perpetuates precarious housing conditions. The research by Osorio-Campuzano et al. (2023) points out that housing policies have tended to apply urban models in rural contexts, without considering the cultural, productive and environmental particularities of these areas. Studies have identified that this inadequate approach results in housing solutions that do not respond to the real needs of rural families, such as the integration of spaces for productive activities or the use of sustainable technologies. In addition, Zambrano-Botero (2019) highlights that the scarcity of rural housing improvement programs and limited technical assistance for self-

construction restrict the possibilities of rural families to improve their housing conditions, thus perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginality in these regions.

- Roads and transportation dimension

Theoretical analyses suggest that road infrastructure and transportation in rural areas of Colombia present significant deficiencies that affect the quality of life and economic development of these regions. According to a study by Vilorio-de-la-Hoz (2018), a significant difference is observed in the quality and coverage of the road network between rural and urban areas, with a high percentage of tertiary roads in poor condition or unpaved. Researchers have shown that this situation severely limits the mobility of rural communities and increases the cost of transporting agricultural products. In addition, Toro et al. (2020) point out that the lack of adequate maintenance of rural roads makes them highly vulnerable to climatic phenomena, resulting in frequent traffic interruptions and isolation of entire communities for prolonged periods of time.

Studies have identified that the quality of public transportation in rural areas is affected by multiple structural factors. Gomez (2019) reveals that there is a significant shortage of formal transportation services in many rural areas, forcing inhabitants to rely on informal or unsafe options for mobility. Researchers agree that this situation is exacerbated by the lack of adequate regulation and oversight of rural transport services. The research by Cantillo et al. (2021) emphasizes that the low population density and geographic dispersion of rural communities make it difficult to implement efficient and economically viable public transportation systems, which perpetuates the isolation and marginalization of these populations.

Academic sources indicate that deficiencies in road and transportation infrastructure have a direct impact on access to basic services and economic opportunities for rural communities. According to Perdomo-Calvo (2021), the poor condition of rural roads significantly increases travel times and transportation costs, making it difficult to access health centers, educational institutions, and markets for the commercialization of agricultural products. Researchers have shown that this situation not only affects the quality of life of rural inhabitants, but also represents an obstacle to the sustainable economic development of these regions. Additionally, the study by Martínez-Restrepo et al. (2018) reveals that limitations in rural transportation infrastructure constitute a significant barrier to the effective implementation of social and rural development programs, compromising the effectiveness of public policies aimed at these areas.

The researchers agree in pointing out that the lack of sustained investment and the absence of comprehensive planning for the development of rural road infrastructure perpetuate the conditions of backwardness in these areas. The research by Pérez-Valbuena et al. (2020) points out that, despite government initiatives to improve the tertiary road network, a significant gap persists in the allocation of resources between primary, secondary and tertiary roads, with the latter being the most neglected. Studies have identified that this chronic neglect of rural road infrastructure not only limits physical connectivity, but also hinders the economic and social integration of rural communities with the rest of the country. Furthermore, Cardona-Sosa et al. (2022) highlight that the absence of a differential approach in the planning and execution of rural road projects, which considers the geographic, cultural and productive particularities of each

region, results in inadequate solutions that do not effectively respond to the mobility and development needs of Colombia's rural communities.

- Access to basic services dimension

Academic literature highlights that access to basic services in rural areas of Colombia presents significant deficiencies that affect the quality of life of its inhabitants. According to a study by Pérez et al. (2020), there is a marked gap in the coverage and quality of essential services such as drinking water, basic sanitation and electricity between rural and urban areas. Researchers have shown that this disparity is accentuated in remote and difficult to access regions, where the lack of adequate infrastructure and population dispersion hinder the provision of these services. Furthermore, Zambrano-Jurado et al. (2018) note that the absence of reliable basic services in rural areas has a direct impact on public health, economic development, and educational opportunities in these communities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization.

Studies have identified that access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation is particularly critical in rural areas of Colombia. Ocampo-Giraldo et al. (2022) reveal that a high percentage of rural households lack connection to aqueduct and sewerage systems, forcing many families to rely on untreated water sources and inadequate excreta disposal systems. Researchers agree that this situation significantly increases the risk of gastrointestinal diseases and other conditions related to poor hygiene. The research by Arias-Valencia et al. (2020) underscores that community water management in rural areas, although valuable, faces considerable challenges in terms of financial and technical sustainability, which compromises the continuity and quality of service in the long term.

Academic literature highlights that access to reliable electricity remains a major challenge for many rural communities in Colombia. According to Ramírez-Delgado et al. (2021), despite advances in national electricity coverage, significant gaps persist in isolated rural areas, where connection to the national electricity grid is technically or economically unfeasible. Researchers have shown that this lack of access to electricity severely limits opportunities for economic development, access to information and communication technologies, and the overall quality of life of rural populations. Additionally, the study by Castillo-Ramírez et al. (2019) reveals that, even in rural areas with electricity connection, the quality and reliability of the service are often deficient, with frequent interruptions that affect productive activities and the daily lives of the inhabitants.

The researchers agree that the digital divide represents another critical dimension of access to basic services for rural communities in Colombia. Research by Gómez-Navarro et al. (2023) points out that the lack of adequate telecommunications infrastructure in rural areas results in limited and low quality access to internet and mobile telephone services. Studies have identified that this situation not only affects the educational and employment opportunities of the rural population, but also limits their access to government services, information and markets. Furthermore, Benavides et al. (2021) highlight that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the consequences of this digital divide, highlighting the difficulties rural communities face in accessing remote education, telemedicine and other essential services based on digital technologies. This reality underscores the urgent need for comprehensive policies that address

not only the physical infrastructure of connectivity, but also digital literacy and affordability of services in rural areas of Colombia.

- Results Discussion of findings

The analysis of quality of life in rural populations in Colombia reveals a complex and multidimensional picture. According to Arias et al. (2020), the most important determinants of rural quality of life include access to health services, quality education, decent employment opportunities, housing, road infrastructure, and availability of basic services. However, Ramírez (2021) argues that the relative importance of these factors varies significantly across regions, highlighting the need for differentiated territorial approaches in rural development policies.

A recurrent pattern in the literature analyzed is the persistent gap between urban and rural areas in terms of access to services and opportunities. Méndez et al. (2023) point out that, despite advances in the coverage of basic services, Colombia's rural areas continue to lag behind in terms of quality and continuity, especially in peripheral regions. On the other hand, Ocampo-Marín (2022) highlights successful experiences of integrated rural development in certain communities, where the active participation of the local population in the planning and execution of projects has been key to improving the quality of life.

The relationship between rural quality of life and public policies is a topic of academic debate. While Gutiérrez (2019) argues that rural development policies in Colombia have been insufficient and disjointed, Herrera (2024) argues that recent government initiatives, such as the Development Programs with a Territorial Approach (PDET), represent a significant advance towards a more holistic and participatory approach. Both authors agree, however, on the need to strengthen inter-institutional coordination and long-term policy continuity.

One area of divergence in the literature focuses on the impact of technology and digital connectivity on rural quality of life. On the one hand, Moreno et al. (2022) argue that the expansion of digital connectivity has opened up new educational and economic opportunities for rural communities. In contrast, Valencia (2021) warns of the risk that the digital divide will exacerbate existing inequalities, stressing the importance of accompanying technological infrastructure with digital literacy programs and support for local entrepreneurship.

Finally, this review of the academic literature identifies promising areas for future research. López (2023) suggests the need for longitudinal studies that examine how perceptions of quality of life evolve in response to specific interventions. Additionally, Cárdenas (2020) proposes to further explore the interrelationship between rural quality of life and factors such as environmental governance, food security, and resilience to climate change, aspects that are becoming increasingly relevant in the context of sustainable rural development in Colombia.

5. Conclusions

The theoretical review of the quality of life in Colombia's rural populations reveals a complex and multifaceted panorama. It is evident that, despite progress in some areas, significant challenges persist that require urgent attention and concrete actions. The gap between urban and

rural areas remains a palpable reality in terms of access to basic services, economic opportunities and infrastructure development. This disparity not only affects the immediate well-being of rural communities, but also has long-term implications for the balanced and sustainable development of the country as a whole.

A crucial finding of this review is the interconnectedness of various factors that influence rural quality of life. Aspects such as health, education, employment, housing, road infrastructure and access to basic services do not operate in isolation, but are interwoven in a complex web of mutual influences. This interdependence underscores the need for holistic and integrated approaches to rural development policies and programs, moving away from fragmented interventions that address problems in isolation.

The literature reviewed highlights the importance of community participation and local empowerment as key elements in improving rural quality of life. Documented success stories suggest that when rural communities have a say in the planning and implementation of development projects, the results are more sustainable and in line with local needs and aspirations. This participatory approach not only improves the effectiveness of interventions, but also strengthens the social fabric and resilience of communities in the face of challenges.

To significantly improve the quality of life of rural communities in Colombia, it is imperative to implement a set of strategic and coordinated actions. First, investment in basic infrastructure and public services must be prioritized, ensuring that rural areas have access to potable water, sanitation, electricity and quality digital connectivity. At the same time, it is crucial to strengthen rural education and health systems, adapting them to the specific realities and needs of these communities. Diversification of rural economies, support for sustainable agriculture and the promotion of local entrepreneurship are essential to create decent employment opportunities and reduce forced migration to the cities.

Finally, improving the quality of rural life requires a long-term commitment on the part of all stakeholders: government at different levels, the private sector, academia and civil society. It is essential to develop coherent and sustained public policies that transcend political cycles, are evidence-based and adapted to regional diversities. Investment in ongoing research on rural dynamics, the promotion of technological innovation adapted to the rural context and the strengthening of local governance mechanisms are crucial steps towards inclusive and sustainable rural development. Only through coordinated and persistent efforts will it be possible to close the gap between urban and rural areas, ensuring that Colombia's rural communities can enjoy a dignified and prosperous quality of life.

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