



School of Social Sciences Arts and Humanities – ECSAH

# **RESILIENCE AND INTEGRAL HEALING IN WOMEN VICTIMS OF THE ARMED CONFLICT**



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# BOOK REVIEW

The book presents the results of an intervention process carried out in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, Bolivar, with 25 women heads of household who were victims of Colombia's internal armed conflict. This process sought to heal the wounds caused by the violence through biopsychosocial interventions, so that, at the end of the process, the women participants could extrapolate those lessons learned within their families and with the victims' organizations where they are immersed to continue the struggle for the vindication of their rights and to continue working for the reconstruction of the social fabric.

# RESEARCH TEAM

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# DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the Colombian women who unfortunately had to live the effects of violence, but who despite of it, have moved forward with their life projects and have been an example of improvement for their families and communities. We pay special tribute to the 25 women heads of households who were victims of the armed conflict in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, participants in the research, for their life lessons, their social struggles, their desire to overcome and their resilient actions.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our most sincere thanks to the Universidad Nacional Abierta y a Distancia (UNAD) for having supported and financed this research.

To the directors and teachers of the Institución Educativa Normal Superior Montes de María for their academic and research complicity in this process.

To the 25 women heads of household victims of the armed conflict for having participated and having the courage to tell their stories, and at the same time becoming agents of social transformation and resilience.

To our families for being the engine that drives our dreams and desires in these journeys of the research exercise.

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# PRESENTATION

When a retrospective of the armed conflict in Colombia is made, undoubtedly, one of the geographical contexts that comes to mind is the sub-region of Montes de María, in which all the fifteen municipalities that compose it are located in the departments of Bolívar and Sucre. It is an area that was directly affected by the effects of violence, through overt acts such as forced displacement, massacres, selective assassinations, kidnappings, among other phenomena that weakened the structural bases of the social systems and that today remain latent in the memory of the inhabitants of this subregion. In particular, in the memory of eyewitnesses of the cruelty of war, who saw their loved ones leave in the most merciless ways.

The municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, Bolívar, called the green lung of the Montes de María because it is in the foothills of one of the last tropical dry forests in Latin America and is a producer of oxygen, is recognized as the protected area “Sanctuary of Fauna and Flora Los Colorados”. In its oral richness, myths and legends of a territory framed by magic and fantasy are described, representing the ancestral values of a community that writes its own history. As in other municipalities of the Montes de María sub-region, its inhabitants wrote one of the cruelest chapters and its protagonists still feel the pain of the wounds that refuse to heal.

This research, broadly speaking, shows the painful events experienced by the inhabitants of the Montes de María, but it is also a social exercise that values the memory of women heads of households, victims of the cruelty of violence, especially that experienced by 25 women from the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno. These women, in a very recent past, were protagonists of a history marked by blood and today they are still suffering from the wounds of a past that refuses to leave their memories.

This is where it becomes necessary that the memories of these women, present in such a latent way as if they were happening again and again from the moment they open their eyes to start a new day, be at the same time the fundamental tool to lead to a process of psychological and social reparation; not forgetting the need to coexist and preserve these acts of memory as a way for future generations to identify these facts in a critical way; and without ignoring the resilient attitude of these 25 brave women who, with their acts, represent the conscience and the need for non-repetition.

Therefore, these 25 women, victims of the armed conflict in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, live, in their minds, permanently and repeatedly with those violent events that vilely pulled their loved ones from their arms, without even having the opportunity to know under what conditions or in what places the bodies of their loved ones lie, making the pain and their healing even greater. Not being able to count on a faithful description of the truth surrounding the facts of the loss of the sacred value of the lives of their loved ones, this research refers to the need to develop healing processes based on the recognition of this memory, with which the victims will live forever in their minds, but hopefully will not truncate their vision of the possibilities of a better world.

Based on the above, it is necessary to cite the fifth point of the Peace Agreement, regarding the reparation of victims, where it is based on the need for a comprehensive system of truth, justice, reparation and non-repetition and that includes the creation of bodies with extrajudicial functions, whose objective is the search for truth and reparation. Thus, the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition would promote the search for truth and clarification of what happened, including the lesser-known aspects of the conflict. Through it, those responsible for crimes would collectively or individually acknowledge their participation in violent acts. The Special Unit for the Search of the Disappeared has, for its part, the objective of locating missing persons who are alive and, in cases of death, to identify them, when possible, and to make a dignified delivery of the remains to their relatives.

Having said this, it can be recognized that in the search for the establishment of the truth, it is a priority to consider the actions that have to do with the reparation of the victims, in which the intentionality of this research is framed, where scenarios or spaces are encouraged by applying different tools and techniques to favor a healing process in the 25 women of the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno participating in the research, direct victims of the armed conflict in Colombia. In this process, their memories become in turn the fundamental raw material to establish actions of

acceptance, recognition, but, above all, resilience to a reality that will be present in them forever, but which, also, is the reason to think about the true configuration of a country and the construction of a true culture of reconciliation to move towards the real achievement of a lasting peace.

In this sense, I value this research work because it focuses its actions on an important value of life, the spiritual healing of the victims of the armed conflict to contribute to close those wounds left by the merciless war.

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# ABSTRACT

The Peace Agreement aims to build an inclusive and reconciled society that ensures lasting social peace. In it, attending to the victims and especially to women heads of households is an imperative, since a comprehensive education will allow healing the wounds, individual and collective, ensuring the flow of reconciliation in their children and families.

The word educate comes from the Latin root *educare*, which is to be understood as the knowledge that discovers the learner's true essence and restores his or her peaceful and happy nature. Because that is what man essentially is: inner peace and full happiness (Díaz, 2013, p. 1).

Considering the above, offering a comprehensive education program to women heads of households who are victims of the armed conflict is a challenge for research groups that can contribute their skills, knowledge and will.

The book focuses on the situation of these women victims of the armed conflict in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, Bolívar, and shows how their needs were addressed in three dimensions: (a) first, psychological, individual and collective wounds were considered, which although not as visible as physical wounds, are more permanent and easily inherited to future generations; (b) second, women victims and heads of households recognized their gifts, talents, creativities and capacities that the aftermath of the armed conflict had marginalized and prevented them from developing; (c) third, real alternatives for healing were offered, allowing this group of women to make use of their capacities from the social and family context.





## Chapter

# 1

# THE RESEARCH PROBLEM (PROBLEM, OBJECTIVES, JUSTIFICATION)

## 1.1 PROBLEM

Preparing the country for a lasting peace is an unavoidable task for the actors of the conflict, the institutions and the civil society. Colombian universities and their leaders have, then, the ethical responsibility to conceptualize, reflect and synthesize, through their educational processes, a national history that facilitates the entry of society into a culture of peace (de Zubiría, 2015). To this end, the victims of the internal conflict must be cared for by institutions, NGOs, universities and civil society in such a way that the wounds suffered can be healed, making forgiveness viable as a way of reparation and preparing them for an inclusive life in which they can enjoy their status as true citizens.

Women heads of households, victims of the internal conflict, located in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, in the heart of the Montes de María in the department of Bolívar, were the direct beneficiaries of the project entitled “National Observatory of Reconciliation and Social Inclusion”, focusing on them the efforts of the research groups of UNAD, GIUC Group, the CHOICE research group of the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and the support of the Institución Educativa Escuela Normal Superior Montes de María of the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, Bolívar.

The objective of the research was to generate a greater impact on their children and family members than would be achieved by attending to other actors in the conflict (Yunus, 2003). It is women who are responsible for the care and education of their children, who take care of the elderly and who have been the most defenseless in the process of the armed conflict in Colombia and especially in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, which experienced the various forms of violence perpetrated by different armed groups outside the law and by state forces. Making reparations to these victims meant making reparations to entire families who have felt unprotected and have felt in their bodies, dreams and life projects the rigor of war.

Women have faced a series of vicissitudes in recent decades, facing widowhood in the midst of so many difficulties and without institutional support, generating this situation the fragmentation of the social fabric and negative repercussions in the formation process of family members, who due to the effects of violence have had to assume responsibilities in the absence of the father figure.

In this sense, the authors of the book posed the following research problem; if the Colombian internal conflict has negatively impacted the life project of the inhabitants of the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, department of Bolívar, located in the geographical setting of the Montes de María, then how does the design of bio-psycho-socio-cultural strategies for the generation of spaces for the development of resilience and community well-being for women heads of household victims of the Colombian armed conflict create conditions for the development of resilience in those women heads of household, victims of the armed conflict, in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno?

To further open the spectrum of understanding of this question, other questions were elaborated: how to reconstruct the meaning of the individual and social body as a biopsychosocial support for a meaningful life in women heads of households, victims of the Colombian armed conflict? How to overcome the experiences of fear and resentment of these women heads of household, victims of the armed conflict in Colombia, favoring the expression of their capacities, creativity, the construction of the social fabric, talents and gifts, deepening in them the awareness of being in the world? And finally, once the confidence, self-esteem and spiritual peace necessary for a meaningful life are generated, how to empower these women heads of household in a short time, so that they can associate and create productive, and employment alternatives based on their own capacities, resources, needs and opportunities?

Women have faced a series of vicissitudes in recent decades, facing widowhood in the midst of so many difficulties and without institutional support, generating this situation the fragmentation of the social fabric.

## **1.2 OBJECTIVES**

### **1.2.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVE**

To analyze how to generate spaces for the improvement of living conditions, the development of resilience and community wellbeing through the design of bio-psycho-socio-cultural strategies of integral education for women heads of household who are victims of the Colombian armed conflict, in the case of San Juan Nepomuceno.

### **1.2.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

- To carry out a diagnosis with women heads of household, victims of the armed conflict in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno (Bolívar), about their needs and realities in their personal, family and social environment, to recognize the opportunities for intervention in this community.
- To design bio-psycho-socio-cultural intervention strategies that make possible the recognition of the individual being and the understanding of the social being of women heads of household, victims of the armed conflict, as scenarios of improvement and strengthening of their life projects.
- To implement bio-psycho-socio-cultural intervention strategies in women heads of households, victims of the armed conflict, for the reconstruction

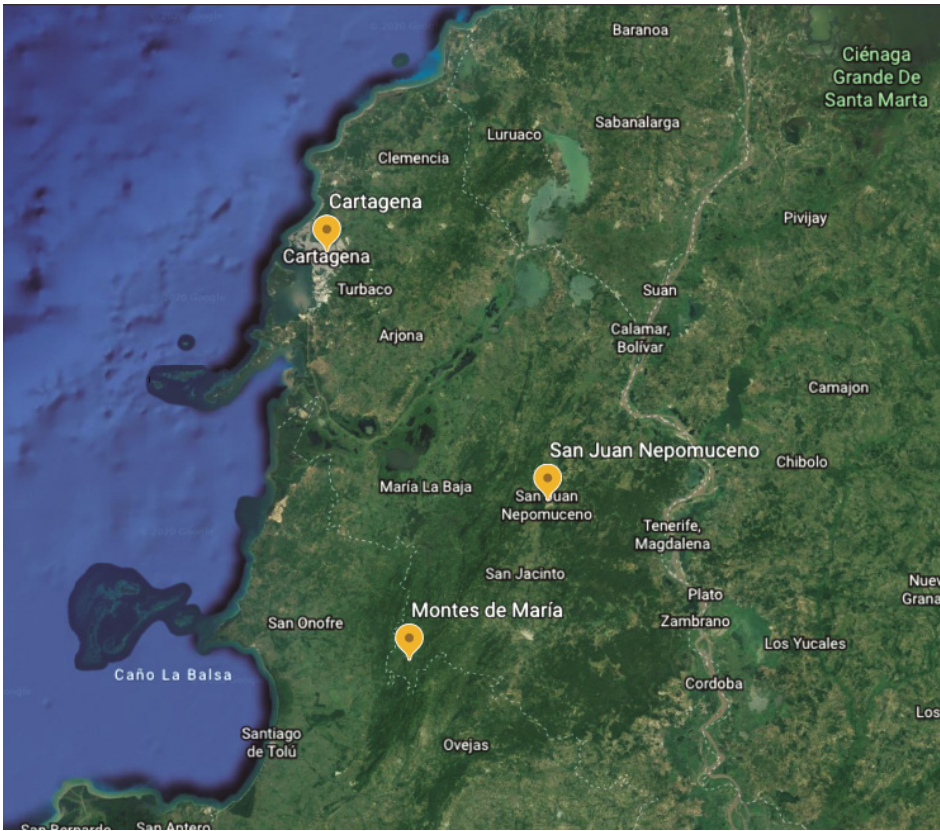
of the social fabric, development of their capacities for the construction of a peaceful society in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno (Bolívar).

### 1.3. JUSTIFICACIÓN

In response to the internal Call 006 of the Universidad Nacional Abierta y a Distancia (UNAD) for the presentation of research projects with the aim of promoting and strengthening the management of knowledge and the research competencies of the researchers of the research groups and centers endorsed by UNAD, the research groups GIUC and Sociocultural Development, Affection and Cognition; in association with the CHOICE research group of the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and the Institución Educativa Escuela Normal Superior Montes de María, the research project was carried out with the construction of an integral education program (therapeutic, creative and formative) that responded to the needs of women heads of household victims of the Colombian internal conflict to rebuild the social fabric and the development of their capacities for the construction of a peaceful society.

The research project was carried out with the construction of an integral education program (therapeutic, creative and formative) that responded to the needs of women heads of household victims of the Colombian internal conflict to rebuild the social fabric and the development of their capacities for the construction of a peaceful society.

**Figure 1.** Geographic location of San Juan de Nepomuceno and Montes de María.



**Fuente:** Google Earth (2020).

As a pilot project, the research focused on the Colombian Caribbean Region, in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, department of Bolívar, located in the geographical setting of the Montes de María (Figure 1). This population has suffered the effects of the internal conflict due to the strong presence of illegal groups that caused forced displacement, kidnapping, selective assassinations, forced disappearances and massacres. Most of the inhabitants of this municipality are mestizos, with a strong Afro-Colombian presence in the La Haya and San Cayetano corregimientos. From the economic point of view, the municipality is dedicated to agriculture, cattle raising and informal commerce; there are also formal jobs in supermarkets or teaching and others provided by the municipalities.

Focusing on the beneficiaries and the scope of action, the research sought to have a deeper impact on the life project of the families who have been victims, to build a

support strategy for the reconstruction of the social fabric and the development of their capacities for the construction of a peaceful society.

In this sense, the research responded to the Development Plan of the Department of Bolívar 2016-2019 in Strategic Line 2, called “Bolívar does move forward free of poverty, through education and equity” and in particular to the sub-strategy “Women motor for development”, whose objective is:

To turn Bolivarian women into protagonists in the reconstruction of the social fabric, economic development and overcoming poverty based on the recognition of the differential effects and impacts of the armed conflict. This implies the design and implementation of actions for the restoration of the human rights of women affected by the conflict and development of their capacities for the transformation of society (Bolívar Governor's Office, 2016, p. 337).

Faced with the challenges of the search for stable and lasting social peace, inclusion and social reconciliation, as State policies, have been expanded and concretized by Law 1448/2011 and regulatory Decrees 4800/2011 and 3011/2012. The Victims and Land Restitution Law seeks to:

to establish a set of judicial, administrative, social and economic, individual and collective measures for the benefit of the victims of the violations referred to in Article 3 of this law, within a framework of transitional justice, to enable the effective enjoyment of their rights to truth, justice and reparation with a guarantee of non-repetition, so that their status as victims is recognized and dignified through the realization of their constitutional rights (Law 1448/2011).

Therefore, it is emphasized in Article 3 of the same Law:

those persons who individually or collectively have suffered harm due to events occurring on or after January 1, 1985, be-

cause of breaches of International Humanitarian Law or serious and gross violations of international human rights law, occurring because of the internal armed conflict, are considered victims.

Also, victims are the spouse, permanent partner, same-sex couples and relatives in the first degree of consanguinity, first civil degree of the direct victim, when the latter has been killed or is missing.

In the absence of these, those who are in the second degree of ascending consanguinity will be considered victims. Likewise, persons who have suffered harm by intervening to assist the victim in danger or to prevent victimization are considered victims (Law 1448/2011).

Similarly, the National Development Plan, Law 1753/2015, in its Article 3 presents the pillars on which it is built:

1. Peace. The Plan reflects the political will of the Government to build a sustainable peace under an approach of effective enjoyment of rights.
2. Equity. The Plan contemplates a vision of integral human development in a society with opportunities for all.
3. Education. The Plan assumes education as the most powerful instrument for social equality and economic growth in the long term, with a vision aimed at closing gaps in access and quality in the educational system, between individuals, population groups and regions, bringing the country closer to high international standards and achieving equal opportunities for all citizens.

In this political and legal context, efforts were pooled, and a National Observatory of Reconciliation and Social Inclusion was created, which made visible a segment of



the victims of the conflict, women heads of household, addressed their fundamental needs (overcoming the emotional, psychological, social and cultural wounds left by the internal conflict) and offered real opportunities to successfully transition to the post-conflict stage. The Observatory also allowed for continuous monitoring through multiple scenarios (psychosocial and cultural laboratories, training, among other spaces), using playfulness, pedagogy and didactics as valid resources to rebuild the social fabric, based on the development of their resilience.

Likewise, this process generated a significant impact in the fields of action of the women beneficiaries of the project, given that their participation in the integral training programs will not only generate in their lives the possibility of making up for the negative effects of the war through resilience, but they will also become emancipators by developing the same intervention process with their families and with the women belonging to their communities.

Focusing on the beneficiaries and the scope of action, the research sought to have a deeper impact on the life project of the families who have been victims, to build a support strategy for the reconstruction of the social fabric and the development of their capacities for the construction of a peaceful society.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research included two general lines of action: bio-psycho-socio-cultural support, development of resilience and play as a psychosocial pedagogical intervention strategy for women heads of household who have been victims of violence in Colombia. This document presents approaches to these three lines and some sub-lines that will help us to understand this scourge that has affected us.

In this sense, the project Bio-psycho-socio-cultural strategies for the generation of spaces in the development of resilience and community welfare for women heads of household victims of the Colombian armed conflict, San Juan Nepomuceno case (Observatory of social inclusion and national reconciliation), an initiative of two interdisciplinary research groups of the UNAD Colombia and the CHOICE group of UCLA in the United States, which has the support of the Institución Educativa Normal Superior Montes de María. With this project, a continuous follow-up was sought to make possible the reconstruction of the social fabric of a community through multiple scenarios (psychosocial and cultural laboratories, training, among other spaces), using playfulness, pedagogy and didactics as valid resources for a new social construct, based on the development of its resilience.

### 2.1 BIO-PSYCHO-SOCIO-CULTURAL SUPPORT

The psychosocial can be seen from different points of view such as risk theory, promotion and prevention processes, conditions that bring about change and protective factors. In this sense, it affects the quality of life of man in a two-way process (the

influence of the environment on the individual and the influence of the latter on his or her environment).

Therefore, the proposed model of psychosocial intervention is one in which a community, working with an interdisciplinary team, assumes the intervention and decisions about a situation that affects their lives in relation to the armed conflict and the pain assumed in the face of these events. This initiates a process of group and individual growth, with professionals from different areas and disciplines as external agents, which gives rise to a movement in which public institutions can be involved, but not as leaders of the action but as providers of services demanded by the community.

Thus, the emphasis is not on the creation and improvement of services in the community by specialized organizations, but on the transformation and strengthening of human groups that become the internal agents of their own change.

In psychosocial work, two types of knowledge and two types of relationship in knowledge are produced: in the first case, a knowledge constructed by the members of the community, together with external agents of change, which translated into the terms of a scientific discipline is the contribution that these agents make to another community, the scientific one. In the second case, a relationship of transmission of technical knowledge from the intervening disciplines to the community, and of contribution of popular knowledge from the community to the professionals involved in the action (Montero, 2006). The above leads to the recognition of community psychology as the group of women victims of the armed conflict. Through the investigative and interdisciplinary exercise, with popular knowledge, their empirical knowledge and their historical moments, their welfare and their community group are promoted, empowering them in an adverse situation. In addition, cultural and social skills are identified in communities that are victims of armed conflict.

Considering the premises of Montero (2006), referring to community psychology, there are elements for the reconstruction of a liberating and resilient process for the victims of the armed conflict, among them:

- **Establishment of liberating pedagogy as a roadmap for forgiveness and reconciliation.**
- **Determining resilience as a protective and self-esteem-building factor in the face of adversity.**

- **Implementation of play therapies to transmit values, norms of conduct, resolve conflicts, educate young members and develop multiple facets of their personality.**
- **Biopsychosocial conception of man:** it understands man as a unique being in his or her totality and determined by psychic, biological and social aspects that are mutually interdependent. This conception emerged as a medical model that, by understanding the human being as a whole, identified that he or she needed to be understood and cared for by an interdisciplinary team or by professionals who addressed all the factors that influence him or her, trying not to fall into medical biologism or psychologism. Subsequently, other sciences took the model to apply it to their understanding of man.

Prior to this model, during the 20th century, there was a proliferation of sciences, whose tendency was towards maximum specialization, which represented a triumph of fragmented conceptions of man, in which different types of phenomena were studied separately in certain compartments, which generated a great accumulation of knowledge and information where the logic of specialization and the increase of disciplines predominated, leading to the abandonment of an integrative perspective. This individual or reductionist vision favored the understanding of the human being in a fragmented way with difficulty to consider the other parts, falling into a sense of omnipotence of knowledge, which corresponded to a purely biomedical position that prevailed for several years.

With the biopsychosocial model, two poles came face to face: a reductionist vision proper to each science that analyzes man from its only perspective and, on the other hand, a holistic and integrative vision that saw man as a biopsychosocial unit. From this integrative perspective, the biological, the psychological and the social are conceived as explained below:

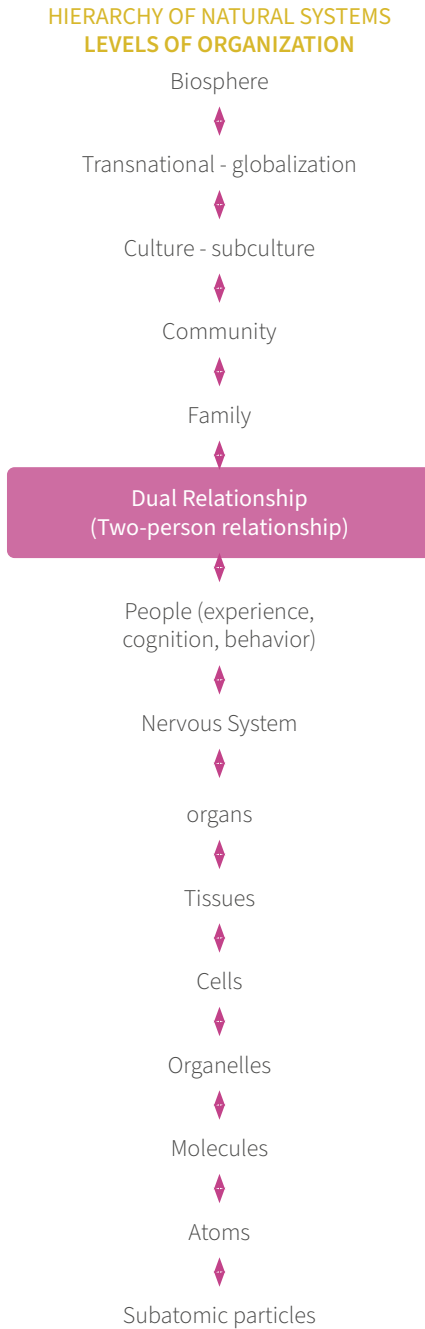
- **Biological:** the human being is conceived as a system, whose parts function as a whole giving rise to the dynamization of mutually interrelated elements. In turn, it has two conceptions:
- **Open system:** a system is permeable to the exchange of information with the environment.
- **Closed system:** a system that is limited by its biology and therefore presents difficulties to achieve exchange with the environment.

- **Psychological:** includes behavior, the expression of cognitive, affective, motivational, spiritual processes, among others. The processes within the subject do not occur in a parceled way, the subject does not think, then gets emotional, etc., but does “everything” at the same time, the processes are interdependent. This implies a way of understanding and comprehending the world in an integral way or perceiving totalities.
- **Social:** the conception of the individual as a social entity is gaining more and more strength. The subject seems to be born predisposed to the encounter with the other. The social institutions which have par excellence are the family, the community where he or she lives and the place where he or she works, have a significant influence on his or her behavior. In this model, the conception of man as a biopsychosocial being includes all the dimensions of his or her life, which are in constant interaction, making it difficult to delimit them. Man is not conceived in separate instances: his or her organism, thought, beliefs, feelings and social environment do not function as parts in themselves, but as a complex interrelated whole. In fact, man as a biopsychosocial being is a dynamic individual who changes throughout his or her life, and in these changes, he is both influenced by and influences his or her environment.

The medical model of the biopsychosocial being is based on the hierarchy of systems proposed by Engel (1977), presented in Figure 2.

The emphasis is not on the creation and improvement of services in the community by specialized organizations, but on the transformation and strengthening of human groups that become the internal agents of their own change.

**Figure 2.** Engel's Hierarchy of Systems



**Source:** Engel (1977).

This hierarchy indicates that the person has constituent biological elements that interrelate with each other, from subatomic particles, atoms, molecules, etc., to form the organism (biological instance) that lays the foundation for the individual to relate to another person, the family, the community and so on to society and the biosphere.

Engel (1977) proposed the biopsychosocial model, derived from systems theory, which attempts to integrate biological, psychological and sociocultural variables in situations of health or disease. The same approach has been applied to the study of human behavior, both adaptive and pathological or non-adaptive behavior, attempting to integrate the influencing factors of the macro and micro social environment, as well as those related to personal weaknesses.

For example, let us look at Figure 2, which graphically represents the systemic hierarchy in which a human being finds himself or herself. The biological dimension and its integration can be seen to occur from the subatomic level down to the level of organs or apparatuses. Above them, the psychological dimension, represented by the personal experiences that every individual has historically lived and processed, plays a fundamental role in the pattern of reaction that he or she will emit in response to any demand that life poses. In its social dimension, in addition, the human being will depend on his or her significant relationships (dyadic level) and his or her family environment (micro social level), from which he will receive influences of transcendental importance in critical periods of his or her life cycle, which will determine the basic features of his or her personality. During his or her personal development, he or she will be involved in his or her social environment, in national policies (statism, liberalism, democratic or authoritarian regimes) and in those governing the international order given the phenomenon of globalization and, finally, in the whole framed in the ecology or natural biospheric habitat.

From this model, man is conceived as a complete system, whose constituent parts interrelate from “within” and then relate to the environment and vice versa: the environment generates ways in which the living organism, at the biological and psychological level, finds unique ways to develop.

Figure 2 also shows the structure of personal activity, proposed by Ortiz (2004), which aims to illustrate how personality arises from the interaction between the affective-emotive, cognitive-productive, conative-volitional systems (the psychological), based on the physical-chemical system (the biological) and then interrelate with the other (interpersonal activities) and from there with the community and society influenced by

culture (cultural and economic activities, i.e., the social). From all this interaction arise the social needs that, by the sensitivity and motility of a human being, give rise to personal production, which in turn nourishes the social aspect, where again result more needs that energize this structure.

The biopsychosocial human being is thus an open system dynamized from the inside out (from the individual to the social) and likewise from the outside in (from the social to the individual).

According to Medina-Montañez et al. (2007) the concept of psychosocial has two linguistic elements that reveal the two key aspects in the understanding of the human phenomenon. On the one hand, the prefix “psycho” mentions a subjective aspect of the person and, on the other, the term “social” relates to that person within a world to which he or she relates, and which gives him or her a sense of belonging and identity. Thus,

psychosocial is linked to traumatic events according to Freud's approaches and, later, it advances explicitly with Erikson's theory of psychosocial development in which the connection between the individual and the collective stands out, where it is relevant to adjust according to each stage of the life cycle. Later Castaño states that the psychosocial has historically evolved from supernatural explanations to biological and psychiatric explanations; in Latin America, concern for the conditions of victimization and terrorism have increased since the mid-twentieth century. The interest in the psychosocial, i.e. to take into account the collective and the individual, increased in World War II, the Vietnam War and other events that humanity has experienced since then; this happens in part because of the conditions of personal and social trauma that each of these events produce in children and adolescents, men, women, entire communities, including the natural environment (Medina-Montañez et al., 2007, p. 4).



## 2.2 DEVELOPMENT OF RESILIENCE

The concept of resilience derives from the Latin *resiliere*. This concept comes from the field of physics to designate materials with a high degree of endurance and resilience to a strong impact. It began to be used later in the Anglo-Saxon context (resilience) by American, European and Australian scientists in the fields of psychiatry and pediatrics. These researchers (Dugan and Coles, 1989; Garmezy, 1991) began to study various cases of children at social risk who managed to resist, adapt and grow despite living in conditions of poverty, neglect and violence.

Thus, while in the Anglo-Saxon field the concept of resilience has been studied for more than half a century and professionals working in the field of social exclusion have used it in the last two decades (Jollien, 2000; Ungar, 2004; Daniel, 2006; 2010; Hart and Heaver, 2013), in Spain it is only now that the concept is beginning to be introduced in the fields of research and socio-educational intervention.

On the other hand, it is interesting to highlight the evolution of resilience studies. At first, the study of human resilience began to develop in the field of psychology. Early research, such as that of Werner and Smith (1992), pointed to individual factors as the only ones responsible for developing resilient processes. Subsequently, in recent decades, work on resilience has been extended to the field of education and, also, to the field of social work. With this, studies such as those by Melillo (2002), Cyrulnik (2002; 2009), Manciaux (2010), Ungar (2004), Suárez-Ojeda (2008), Hart et al. (2013), Forés and Grané (2012), Ungar et al. (2013), Punch (2013), Runswick-Cole and Goodley (2013), Allan and Ungar (2014), Porcelli et al. (2014), Theron et al. (2014), Ungar, Liebenberg and Ikeda (2014) and Ungar, Russel and Connolly (2014) begin to point out the inescapable relationship between environmental, cultural and individual factors for the development of resilient processes.

This idea of process emphasizes that resilience is based on a relational dynamic between the subject and the environment to face elements that hinder the development of the person. This way of understanding the creation of resilience is supported by the theories of Bruner (1984), Bronfenbrenner (1987) and Vigotsky (2012), among others, who evidenced the influence that environments and surroundings have on the development of the subject. As Melillo (2002) argues:

if resilience constitutes a process of interweaving between what we are at a given moment, with the affective resources present in the social ecological environment, the lack of these resources can cause the subject to succumb, but if there is, even if it is a point of support, the construction of the resilient process can take place (p. 70).

In this sense, we can say that resilience is a process that is shaped by the subject, the possibilities offered by the environment and contexts, as well as in the educational relationships that are generated between them (Ungar, 2015).

Against this background, resilience from a systemic or processual conception transcends the limits of an individualistic conception and opens a new focus of attention towards culture, the educational community and an educator who accompanies (Costa et al., 2014), as elements to be considered in resilient processes.

According to Werner (1892) resilience is the capacity of an individual or a family to face adverse circumstances and recover by emerging stronger and with more resources. Thus, we can understand resilience as the ability to overcome adverse events and be able to have a successful development despite unfavorable circumstances to which one has been subjected (death of parents, displacement, experiences of fear, terrorism, massacres, homicides, femicides, genocides, gender violence and all these scourges of violence that have plagued Colombia).

In this context, the conceptualization of Garmezy (1991) cited in Becoña (2006), who defines resilience as “the capacity to recover and maintain an adaptive behavior after the initial abandonment or incapacity at the onset of a stressful event” (p. 127), is reiterated. Thus, resilience from Bartelt (1996), cited in Becoña (2006), is defined as “a psychological trait, which is seen as a component of the self that enables success under conditions of adversity, and that can be worn down or, paradoxically, reinforced by adversity” (p. 127). Similarly, Richardson, Neieger, Jensen, and Kumpfer (1990), cited in Becoña (2006), define resilience as “the process of coping with harrowing, stressful, or challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protection and coping skills [different from those he or she had prior to the] disruption that resulted from the event” (p. 127).

But what makes resilience special is that it does not stop there, it does not only talk about the emotional impact and its consequences, but it goes beyond, betting on

that capacity of reconstruction after the blow that even makes it possible to improve and develop some existing capacity in us.

This aspect is what makes this concept so important, not because knowing it gives magical and masterly guidelines in the face of adverse events, but because it focuses on strengths, on hope, and also because it helps to normalize what people who live through these situations feel and experience, by understanding that no matter how much you want to, you will never be the same person as before the event, so this normalization does not have a positive connotation of the event, but a neutral one, where there are different shades of each color, where there is room for both strengths and weaknesses.

All this is especially important because normalizing what is felt, what is experienced, helps to manage the feeling of guilt that may arise as a result of these experiences, such as not feeling strong enough when compared with others who are going through the same situation and act differently, for thinking that something more could have been done, for wanting to be like before and not achieving it, for not knowing or being able to explain what is happening.

Consequently, in the context of this book, resilience is conceived as a protective and self-esteem-building factor for women heads of household and their families in the face of adversity, to face the crisis from a positive and hopeful perspective, as a shared challenge that leads to learning and spiritual growth, allowing their recovery and a reorganization of their life in society.

Therefore, parameterized instruments were applied during the research, considering Ospina-Muñoz (2007), since the measurement of resilience is a complex process that merits interdisciplinary work. An instrument with the capacity to address the resilient phenomenon in its different dimensions could constitute an opportunity for important theoretical development on the subject and move forward in intervention proposals involving the promotion of resilience. This last field deserves intense discussion, since, to promote the necessary contexts for health, resilience is an indispensable component. Within the development of instruments for measuring resilience it is also necessary to raise with greater relevance the question of how to construct instruments that are sensitive to gender differences, age and sociocultural aspects.

But what makes resilience special is that it does not stop there, it does not only talk about the emotional impact and its consequences, but goes beyond, betting on the

ability to rebuild after the blow that even makes it possible to improve and develop some existing capacity in people.

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All this is especially important because normalizing what is felt, what is experienced, helps to manage the feeling of guilt that may arise because of these experiences, such as not feeling strong enough when compared to others who are going through the same situation and act differently, for thinking[sic].

## **2.3 PLAYFULNESS AS A PSYCHOSOCIAL PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTION STRATEGY**

Zúñiga-Benavides (1998) in his paper focuses on a marked difference between today's school and the one that should be had, he wonders how much today's school reinforces children in an integral way, how much it will allow them to move away from the squared world offered by the society full of rules that molds them as much as the communities wish.

Monsalve et al. (2016) consider playfulness as fundamental in the teaching process, in which it fosters participation, collectivity, creativity and other fundamental principles in human beings. Every healthy game enriches, every healthy game or playful activity is instructive, the student through playfulness begins to think and act in the midst of a situation that varies. The value of playfulness for teaching is precisely the fact that it combines different optimal aspects of the organization of teaching: participation, collectivity, entertainment, creativity, competition and obtaining results in difficult situations.

Jiménez et al. (2016) consider:

playfulness not as a means, but as an end, should be incorporated into recreation more as a state naturally linked to the purpose of human development, than as an activity linked only to play; it is rather to advocate for a playful existence of an existential type, which helps us to understand ourselves, to understand the other in all its sociocultural dimension (para. 11).

Thus, they reflect on playfulness considering it as an end and move away from the concept of using only play as its only manifestation.

George Bernard Shaw, cited in Echeverri and Gómez (2012) states that playful environments enhance learning, considering that we learn 20% of what we hear, 50% of what we see and 80% of what we do. Through playful environments, based on experiential methodology, we enhance 80% of the learning capacity. At the same time, he outlines that games have been related to childhood, distancing it from the possibility of applying it in a serious and professional action, tracing that games can be present in all the learning stages of the human being, even in adulthood.

Games have always been related to childhood and certain barriers have been mentally placed stigmatizing games in a serious and professional application, and the truth is that this is far from reality. Games can be present in the different stages of the learning processes of the human being, even in adulthood.

Teaching, or refocusing the concept towards learning, is not limited to children, since human beings are, consciously or not, in a continuous learning process. Games develop skills and competencies in the individuals involved. Games in adults have a double purpose: to contribute to the development of skills and competences of the individuals involved and to achieve a creative atmosphere in a communion of objectives, to become efficient instruments in the development of the mentioned learning processes, which lead to the productivity of the team, in a rewarding environment for the participants.

On the other hand, Bernard Shaw, cited in Echeverri and Gómez (2012), understands playfulness as

a dimension of human development, being a constitutive part of the human being, as a decisive factor to achieve enriching processes. Playfulness refers to the need of human beings to communicate, feel, express themselves and produce emotions oriented towards entertainment, fun and recreation, which can lead us to enjoy, laugh, scream or even cry in a true manifestation of emotions, which must be properly channeled by the facilitator of the process (p. 4).

Thus, establishing that play promotes psychosocial development, the acquisition of knowledge and provides tools to consolidate the personality, all through a wide range of possibilities that interact with joy, pleasure, creativity and knowledge.

Playfulness fosters psychosocial development, the acquisition of knowledge, the shaping of the personality, enclosing a wide range of activities where pleasure, enjoyment, creativity and knowledge interact. It is the atmosphere that surrounds the learning environment that is generated specifically between teachers and students, and vice versa, between facilitators and participants, in this way these spaces present diverse situations spontaneously, generating great satisfaction, contrary to an old proverb “spare the rod and spoil the child” (Echeverri and Gómez, 2012).

Now, another element that underlies the project is the issue of forgiveness, which is understood as an intimate and very personal act in which two people decide to try to overcome the faults, mistakes and pains of the past. In this sense, authors such as Derrida (2003), Pérez (2015), Duque (2015), Martínez and Neira (2010) and Schumacher (2007) have allowed structuring the category of forgiveness from some conceptions, dimensions and purposes. The nature of forgiveness has been questioned from its voluntary, free and gratuitous character; that is why there is a debate between conditional and unconditional forgiveness.

Conditional forgiveness. In the case of conditional forgiveness, i.e., that which is subject to the necessary limits to grant it, there are voices that consider such a scenario necessary to achieve a total change between the parties involved, such is the case of Martínez and Neira (2010), who consider that, although forgiveness implies gratitude, it also requires the commitment to return, translated into a positive change of the victimizer “a forgiveness that does not generate commitment is a meaningless forgiveness” (p. 93).

For his part, Schumacher (2007) recalls that conditional forgiveness has been heavily influenced from religious cults in expressions such as “we forgive, just as we will be forgiven” (p. 62), thus expecting, somehow, a kind of reward through forgiveness itself. From this perspective, Duque (2015) reaffirms the power of conditional forgiveness in its purpose of transforming the behavior of those who have committed a fault, since he states that one must “seek a mechanism so that the victimizer does not reoffend; for forgiveness to act adequately for this purpose, it must be conditioned to a change in the victimizer, to a conversion driven by his or her genuine repentance” (p. 10).

Unconditional forgiveness. Unlike the previous approaches, Derrida (2003) makes some important observations that limit the purity or dignity of forgiveness itself, stating that whenever forgiveness is subject to certain purposes, then it loses its pure character. In this regard, he warns about the existence of the unforgivable and curiously wonders if this is not the only thing that calls for forgiveness, since it seems that there would be no greater value in forgiving what is apparently forgivable, in which case the concept of forgiveness would vanish. This is how the author states decisively that:

if there is anything to forgive it would be what in religious language is called mortal sin, the worst, the unforgivable crime or error. Hence the aporia that one can describe in its dry and implacable formality, without consideration: forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable. One cannot, or should not, forgive, there is no forgiveness, if the unforgivable does not exist. That is as much as to say that forgiveness must be announced as the impossible itself. It cannot be possible except by doing the impossible (p. 64).

Integral education, from the perspective of León, (2007), is:

a complex human and cultural process. To establish its purpose and definition, it is necessary to consider the condition and nature of man and culture as a whole, in its totality, for which each particularity has meaning because of its linkage and interdependence with the others and with the whole. Education is an individual and supra-individual, supra-organic whole. It is dynamic and tends to perpetuate itself through a strange inertial force. But it is also exposed to drastic changes, sometimes

traumatic and to moments of crisis and confusion, when very few know what to do, coming from contradictions, inadequacies, casuistic and ill-advised decisions, catastrophes, drastic changes. It is good to know that education changes because time so disposes, because it evolves. It itself alters, changes and moves continuously and sometimes discontinuously; it grows and decreases, it can become and cease to be (p. 2).

Hence, education, by its very essence, must keep a certain relationship with its addressees, it must be directed to the living conditions and situations that the subjects go through; its contents must be updated in such a way that they keep a symmetry with the social reality. Man is not conceived as a simple tabula rasa in which the concepts and procedures necessary for him or her to be useful to himself or herself and to society must be inscribed. Man is conceived as an original being, who possesses his or her own abilities to live and share with others, who can externalize his or her gifts and talents, and explore his or her capabilities in a changing and adverse environment. Therefore, the model of education that guided this research is not that of manufacturing but that of agriculture.

So, I think we must change metaphors. We must move from an essentially industrial, manufacturing model of education, which is based on linearity, on conformity and clustering of people, to a model that is based more on principles of agriculture. We must recognize that human flourishing is not a mechanical process, it is an organic process. And you cannot predict the outcome of human development, all you can do, as a farmer, is create the conditions in which they will begin to flourish (Robinson, 2011, 14:36-15:06).

A comprehensive education for women heads of households, victims of the internal armed conflict in Colombia, will be focused, then, on making the capacities, creativity, talents and gifts that these women have brought to light in the midst of the conflict, or have buried because they did not find the conditions for them to flourish, blossom. It will include a reconstruction of their inner self, of their consciousness as a being in the world, to heal wounds and overcome lingering fear, resentment and revenge. It will facilitate the growth of these women's confidence in the other, in the value of the self and the social body; and will integrate training in topics, contents, procedures and attitudes for associative entrepreneurship.



The research process allowed integrating the inner, spiritual, biological and psychic dimension with the outer, social and cultural dimension of women heads of households in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno located in the Montes de María, so that they have an appropriate emotional and existential support to build social fabric through skills and capacities for resilience. It is about educating active citizens for a peaceful coexistence in the post-conflict.

In this sense, for example, the Bogotá Capital District Education Secretariat (SED) prepared the “Framework Document: Education for Citizenship and Coexistence” in which “coexistence is understood as a process of interaction within the framework of power relations exercised without oppression or domination, where consensus is established on values, norms and agreements that will guide living together” (Fernández-Lefort, 2014, p. 17). To move forward this definition, the document previously makes a conceptual approach to the term highlighting three approaches in which an education for coexistence can be articulated: (a) a first approach (structural functionalism) states that the socialization process is central in the appropriation of values, norms and rules that define the social structures to which the individual must “accommodate”; (b) a second approach (interactionism and constructionism) considers that social structures are built from the daily interaction of subjects in which dialogue, consensus and dissent mediate the coexistence that defines the way of living together; c) finally, a third approach (structural-constructionism) comes from Pierre Bourdieu who sees in social interaction not only a process conditioned by the relations of production and accumulation of economic capital but also of cultural, social and symbolic capital (Fernandez-Lefort, 2014, pp. 15-16).

An education for coexistence focused from Bourdieu's perspective allows us to think about the increase of the cultural capital that individuals possess, simultaneously ensuring access to symbolic, economic and social capital that empowers them and facilitates the development of their capabilities in all these dimensions. From this perspective, the educational environment becomes a democratic space built from the recognition of otherness, from the different ways of being, feeling, thinking or acting.

This conception of coexistence in difference and of educational space as a terrain for overcoming discrimination and exclusion, of recognition and respect for otherness (being, feeling, thinking and acting) makes it possible to imagine a place in which individuals live their corporeality, their life history and their surrounding world as empowered citizens, who seek to overcome the different forms of violence and build a new society.

The existence of difference reveals the importance of conflict as a manifestation of dissent and the need for dialogue, argumentation and aesthetic expressions as paths to consensus. An education that recognizes dissent and does not sanction error is a democratic education in the broadest sense of the term, that is, an inclusive education (Fernández-Lefort, 2014, pp. 17-18).

It is because an inclusive education recognizes that all citizens are subjects of rights capable of transforming the conditions of exclusion, resentment and revenge left by an internal conflict such as the one experienced in Colombia. For this it is necessary to build an idea of an inclusive society that tolerates diverse conceptions of good but recognizes only one conception of justice. In other words, educating for inclusion requires citizens to recognize that there are different ways of being happy and enjoying life, but that we must agree on a single way of accessing justice and building a sense of the public: “to see oneself as a legal subject and adhere to a general legal framework is precisely what allows coexistence in the midst of a society with moral and cultural diversity” (Administrative Department of Social Welfare, 2003, p. 33).

For this reason, the research had education as a fundamental axis of training and integration of women heads of household victims of the armed conflict, since it developed skills, values and reconstruction of their sense of self in terms of being, knowing, feeling and doing. Likewise, it allowed psychosocial intervention as a space for critical dissemination, resilience, empowerment and assertive training for problem solving and decision making that enable personal and collective commitment to the situations of their immediate context (López-Vélez et al., 2015).

The idea of comprehensive education proposed here, which takes resilience as a principle, gave options for reconstructing the meaning of life to women heads of household who were victims of the internal conflict in Colombia. It should be noted that this would have been incomplete if it had not been considered that overcoming fears, violence, resentment and access to forgiveness is complemented by putting into practice the gifts, talents and creativity explored through various training processes. To this end, entrepreneurship is a tool that offers great possibilities to individuals and groups of scarce resources whose greatest asset is their creative capacities.



## Chapter 3

# CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SAN JUAN NEPOMUCENO: A SCENARIO OF PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

## 3.1 THE MONTES DE MARÍA SUB-REGION: CONFLICT AND HOPE

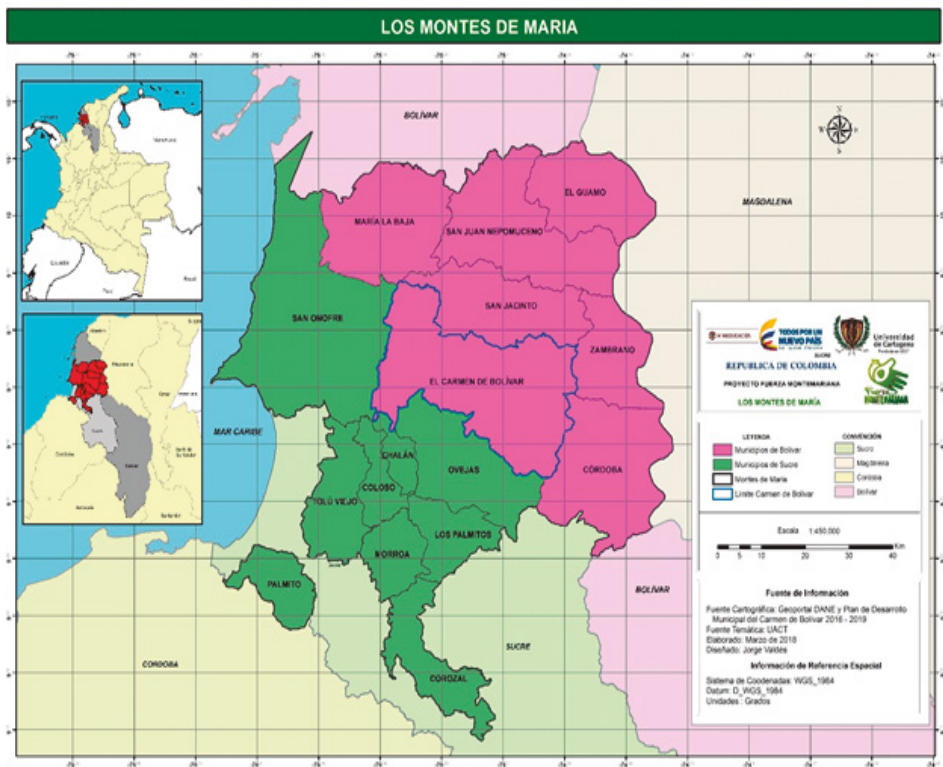
The Montes de María are a mountain range located in the Colombian Caribbean, of a particular beauty due to the contrasts existing in its territory, between mountains, valleys, streams, and a varied fauna and flora, it has fertile lands where the peasant population cultivates a variety of products for food and for the commercialization on a low scale in the different supply centers of capital cities of the Caribbean region.

However, this wealth has been permeated by environmental problems related to poor land use and intensification in some sectors of extensive crops that according to Sayas-Contreras (2015) “have been replacing traditional crops in the area, such as corn, cassava, yams, sesame, tobacco, avocado and different types of fruits, replacing them with crops such as teak, oil palm, and others intended for biofuel production” (p. 145).

Also, the traditional peasant practice of slash and burn to clear the land and apparently improve productivity has generated difficulties because burning leads to the loss of its fertility and, as is well known, the peasantry, most of which has little land, and the land does not recover easily because they cannot rotate the plot for its recovery.

The Montes de María sub-region (Figure 3) covers an area of approximately 6,466 km<sup>2</sup> and is in the Departments of Sucre and Bolívar. There are 15 municipalities in these territorial entities that are included in this subregion: San Onofre, Chalan, Morroa, Los Palmitos, Colosó, Ovejas, Tolú Viejo, San Antonio de Palmito, María La Baja, Carmen de Bolívar, San Jacinto, Córdoba, Zambrano, El Guamo and San Juan Nepomuceno. According to Aguilera-Díaz (2013), two fifths of the population live in rural areas, poverty is latent, public services are provided in terrible conditions or in some cases they do not have access to services such as water, electricity, sewage, education and health services, and those who have them in regular conditions are the people who live in the municipal capitals.

**Figure 3.** Map of Montes de María



**Source:** Universidad de Cartagena (2018).

On the other hand, it is important to highlight the richness and cultural appropriation surrounding these municipalities. In general, there are different ethnic groups: Afro-Colombians, mestizos, Zenú Indians, the latter, who due to the effects of violence have cabildos in the region, and migrants from the interior of the country; called indistinctly by Montemarians as cachacos, who drive the economy with businesses such as stores, supermarkets, appliance sales, clothing stores, grocery stores, among others.

As a result, the Montes de María region has artistic and artisanal potential, allowing it to host national and international events to showcase its cultural and gastronomic wealth; for example, the gaitas festivals held in August and October, in San Jacinto, Bolívar, and in the municipality of Ovejas, Sucre, respectively.

However, in the last four decades, the Montes de María region has been scourged and violated by illegal armed groups and, as a result of the phenomenon of violence, a series of vicissitudes have originated for the region, causing uncertainty, a culture of silence, fear, forced displacement and, somehow, the normalization of violent deaths as part of daily life among its inhabitants, as evidenced in expressions such as “ it is a miracle that no one has been killed this week”; which, in general terms, sows despair in each and every one of its municipalities.

Since the decade of the 1970s, the Montes de María region has been a direct witness to the Colombian armed conflict, with the armed presence of illegal groups and institutional actors altering the established social order and fragmenting the social fabric. This was due to different forms of violence, namely forced displacement, selective assassinations, massacres, forced disappearances, kidnappings, torture, sexual and psychological violence, forced and voluntary recruitment, among other infamous manifestations of the logic of war.

In the 1970s, the guerrillas increased kidnappings, message intimidation, extortion payments, and terrorism. In the first half of the 1980s, the illegal groups (guerrillas and paramilitaries or self-defense groups) carried out political work among the population, taking advantage of the weakening of the peasant movements in the 1970s. Hence, since the late 1990s, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), fought with the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) for control of the MM zone and turned it into a refuge and stra-

tegic corridor for the introduction of weapons, drug trafficking and the mobilization of these organizations on the Caribbean Coast (Aguilera-Díaz, 2013, p. 6).

Nevertheless, some armed organizations and the community wanted to “lay the foundations for a culture of peace” ( Peace, Development and Reconciliation Area [Asdi], 2010, p. 9) by promoting dialogue with the national government in order to find other ways of social vindication and new alternative solutions for the region, without using arms, and by promoting actions for the social development of the working class of the Montes de María.

In this context, in the 1990s, as a result of negotiations with the governments in power, subversive groups such as the PRT, EPL and CRS demobilized and, in the framework of the peace agreements, the Colombian State created social programs such as housing in order to alleviate social inequalities for people who had suffered the devastation of the war and also “to boost economic, social, political and cultural production processes” (Villarraga-Sarmiento, 2016, p. 128).

During the 1990s, there were several demobilizations of subversive groups in Los Montes de María. The Workers' Revolutionary Party (PRT) signed the peace agreement in January 1991 in Don Gabriel, municipality of Ovejas. A month later, as part of the national demobilization process of the EPL, a good number of its combatants were concentrated in the municipality of Juan José, Córdoba, near Los Montes de María. Then, on April 9, 1994, the Socialist Renewal Current (CRS) signed its agreement in Flor del Monte, Ovejas (Asdi, 2010, p. 9).

This panorama of apparent social tranquility for the region consolidated the emergence of new leftist political alternatives that managed to occupy important elected positions such as mayors and councils, in addition to the glow of the political successes obtained at the national level by the political wing of the FARC: the Unión Patriótica (Patriotic Union).

The most ironic aspect of this situation is the emergence of paramilitary groups, a criminal organization supported by state agencies and with the economic support of businessmen and cattle ranchers who financed the support of the armed group to

safeguard their economic interests and their physical integrity, given that they were being extorted and kidnapped by the guerrillas in the region (Andrade et al., 2009).

The paramilitary groups killed the vast majority of PRT reinserted members, but the greatest impact was on civil society, because political leaders and union leaders, with different ideas and contrary to the prevailing traditional politics of the time, became the focus of assassinations, as well as leaders of peasant unions; they justified their murders for supposedly having an ideology close to those promulgated by the guerrilla movements (Verdad Abierta, 2010).

The intention of the paramilitary groups was to eliminate any social actor related to leftist ideas, a constant in Colombia's recent history, as those who promulgate ideas different from the traditional parties are labeled as communists and supporters of the ideologies of the guerrilla movements.

Between 1995 and 2005, paramilitarism imposed its territorial control through the “Héroes de los Montes de María” and “Canal del Dique” blocks, which affected mobility, perpetrated 42 massacres, destroyed property and caused displacement. The “Héroes de los Montes de María” bloc demobilized with a total of 594 members in 2005 in the corregimiento of San Pablo, municipality of María la Baja. They took advantage of Law 975/2005, which provided elements for the demobilization of illegal armed groups. On the other hand, with the increase in law enforcement operations between 2003 and 2007, the 37 and 35 fronts of the FARC and the José Solano Sepúlveda of the ELN were dismantled (Sierra, et al., 2011, cited by Aguilera-Díaz, 2013, p. 7).

One of the bloodiest and most abominable acts committed in the Montes de María, among others, by the paramilitaries, was the massacre of El Salado, in the corregimiento of Carmen de Bolívar, through an armed incursion that took place between February 16 and 21, 2002, ( National Commission for Reparation and Reconciliation [CNRR] and Historical Memory Group, 2009) where 60 inhabitants were killed in different ways, in the town's sports field, in the presence of the entire population, without the competent authorities taking immediate action, despite the fact that it was no secret to anyone what was happening. Perhaps, the media were the



ones who exerted pressure for the public forces to enter the territory, but unfortunately, they did it too late, since the worst had already happened.

The objective of the torture was not to extract information, because they did not need it. They had already declared the whole town guerrilla, and the town, in the infernal logic of the victimizer, was to blame for the torture, the executions and all the grievances that followed. The sense of torture and terror was associated rather, in this case, with an exhibition of omnipotence of the paramilitaries, to scold the population about any possible collaboration with the insurgency and to provoke its commotion and massive evacuation (CNRR and Historical Memory Group, 2009, p. 14).

Currently, there is no institutional evidence of the presence of illegal groups that disrupt the social order in the Montes de María subregion, due to the presence of the security forces and the demobilization processes in the framework of the peace negotiations. Meanwhile, paramilitary groups were also demobilized after negotiations during the administration of former President Álvaro Uribe Vélez.

At present, the insinuated presence of criminal groups apparently made up of ex-militants of the AUC persists, maintaining an almost invisible but evident presence through extortion mechanisms against ordinary citizens recognized for having economic conditions and facilities, among which merchants and cattle ranchers stand out. Likewise, there were rumors among the inhabitants of Montes de María about the presence of dissident groups of the guerrillas, causing concerns among the inhabitants about an eventual return of the war in the region due to the circulation of pamphlets about an alleged return of the FARC (Quiroz, 2019), however, these rumors were denied by the competent authorities.

However, the aftermath left by the armed actors is unprecedented in the history of the Montes de María, because its inhabitants were subjected to guerrilla harassment, assassinations, disappearances, massacres and forced displacement perpetuated by both armed sides. The information corresponding to the number of massacres perpetrated in the Montes de María subregion is disputed, some sources relate 42 massacres (Sierra et al., 2011) other research reports that between 1996 and 2001 (Daniels and Munera, 2010) the AUC committed 17 massacres, while other sources support that 104 massacres were committed (Ortiz-Franco, 2015).

In addition to this conjunctural issue of violent events, there is also ungovernability. Asdi (2010) states: “a second structural cause of the conflict in Los Montes de María is that it has not been possible to have an equitable and inclusive development model” (p. 11), many rulers in office, in the last four decades, have assumed their positions according to clientelism and electoral fraud, negligence related to administrative diligence, embezzlement of funds, seizures of public money and misuse of information and complaints made by the victims of violence are the daily bread and butter, even when there is inappropriate talk of post-conflict.

The Historical Memory Group in its text ¡Basta Ya! (2013) argues that it has not been easy to quantify the true reality left by the war, since it has not been easy to make a reliable diagnosis due to the effects of political wills that prevent a real tracking and verification of the implications of the war in Colombia, due to the cruelty and dimension of the war itself, a situation that has been an impediment to take concrete actions in favor of the victims of the armed conflict. However, in the report entitled “Montes de María under fire”, carried out by the Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (Codhes, 2020) and kept by the Truth Commission, it states that the armed conflict in the Montes de María left more than 158,000 victims.

However, it is worth recognizing the actions and dynamics of the different associations formed by the victims of the conflict with the aim of overcoming their negative life situations and seeking mechanisms to build a social fabric to tell their stories and, in addition, to make public opinion aware of the truths of the war in their lives. To tell the untold, to show Colombian society and the world those stories and experiences that state institutions have not been able or have not wanted to show, probably to silence or make invisible their own responsibilities within the framework of the Colombian internal conflict.

In the Montes de María, the war not only left a sea of cruelties, the adverse life situations that many had to live, originated a series of mutations in their life projects with the formation of victims' associations that build life in the region from peaceful actions to unravel the aftermath of the war through different dynamics to tell what happened and, thus, prevent situations like those experienced from happening again in the Montes de María and in any corner of Colombia. The victims' associations of the Montes de María are a model of national reconciliation worthy of emulation, among them, we can highlight the following: *Mujeres tejedoras de Mampujan, María la Baja (ASVIDA), Asociación Municipal de Mujeres de Zambrano (Asomusa), Ruta Pacífica por la Mujeres de Tolú Viejo, Pichilin y Libertad, Fundación Narrar para Vivir del Carmen de Bolívar and San Juan Nepomuceno, Líderes de la Alta Montaña del Carmen de Bolívar, Líderes de Libertad de San Onofre, Colectivo de Comunicaciones Montes de María in*

*Carmen de Bolívar*, among other social initiatives that fight for the culture of peace (Centro de investigación y Educación Popular/Programa por la Paz, 2018).

## **SYNOPSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF THE ARMED CONFLICT IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF SAN JUAN NEPOMUCENO**

San Juan Nepomuceno is one of the 15 municipalities that are part of the Montes de María region, located in the heart of this mountain range, one of the most important roads in the country crosses this municipality, the western highway that connects this town with capital cities such as Cartagena and Sincelejo, with several municipalities of the Montes de María such as San Jacinto, Carmen de Bolívar, Ovejas, among others, and with the city of Barranquilla through the intersection with the eastern highway at the site known as Carreto.

Los Colorados Flora and Fauna Sanctuary is in San Juan Nepomuceno, named after the large population of howler monkeys, that live in this tropical dry forest. “It contains one of the best-preserved relicts of dry forest in the region, an important refuge for the organisms of this habitat, as well as for some populations of primates and mammals” (Natural Parks of Colombia, n.d., para. 1). In addition, this natural park is also attractive for ecotourism and research because of the variety of endemic animal species and because it is a food reservoir for migratory birds.

San Juan de Nepomuceno is administratively divided into the following areas: the municipal capital or urban sector and six corregimientos, which make up the rural sector, namely: San Cayetano, San Pedro Consolado, San Agustín, San José del Peñón, Corralito and La Haya, which have a series of villages. As the municipality is in the center of the Department of Bolívar, it is a point of road interconnection of the Western Highway, being this the main access road to the municipality, which in turn communicates it with cities such as Cartagena, Barranquilla, Sincelejo and the interior of the country (Assembly of the Department of Bolívar, Ordinance No. 04, 1970).

The municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, according to the National Administrative Department for Statistics (DANE, 2020), is projected to have a population of 40,306 inhabitants in 2024, where 29,379 will reside in the municipal seat and the remaining total, equivalent to 10,928, will be in populated and dispersed rural centers. Likewise, considering the information obtained in the Municipal Development Plan 2016 - 2019, the municipality reports 20,121 people declaring themselves as victims of the armed conflict, that is, half of the population projected for 2024 (Municipal Mayor's Office of San Juan Nepomuceno in Bolivar, 2016), without counting the number of people directly and indirectly affected by the armed conflict, and those who did not want to declare themselves as victims of the conflict because of the possible problems that this situation could cause in the future as their names were included in the State's databases, which in the past were rumored to be used by extreme right-wing groups outside the law to identify possible victims, perpetuate persecutions, threats and even end their lives.

From the economic point of view, San Juan Nepomuceno, is an emporium for the development of agriculture because the mountainous terrain has the conditions for it. One of the most important products in the municipality's plots is the yam, in its different versions: creole or slimy, thorn, diamond, seed. In addition, other products are cultivated such as avocado, cassava, plantain, corn, among others (Aguilera-Díaz, 2013).

Its economy revolves mainly around agriculture and livestock on a smaller scale, and from the jobs generated by state entities such as the mayor's office or the set of commercial establishments and chain supermarkets, with presence in the municipality, which have nurtured the economic dynamics of the population with the creation of new job offers for its inhabitants. This is not to mention the informal economy and itinerant sales of farm products within the town and in the businesses located on the main western highway, which are used by locals and foreigners for temporary parking. Undoubtedly, another of the recent phenomena that has boosted the informal economy is motorcycle taxis, one of the economic activities of daily life, of the economy of the "rebusque" (odd jobs).

Now, let us recount the beginnings of paramilitarism in the municipality told from the own story of one of the authors of the book, because he was a direct witness in his adolescence and because he lived in his own flesh the beginnings of the movements of the paramilitary forces in the population and the military actions derived from the other insurgent force under the representation of the 37th Front of the FARC.

Neighboring municipalities such as San Jacinto and Carmen de Bolívar in the 90's were towns that frequently suffered harassment and guerrilla takeovers within the population, to the point of hearing rumors that when the army arrived to reestablish order, the insurgent militias disappeared in the same houses of the two towns. San

Juan Nepomuceno was a haven of peace, the deaths in the community were due to natural causes and an occasional death was the result of people who took their own lives and scandalized the community. Guerrilla incursions were not part of daily life, and for this reason, according to the expressions expressed by the community itself, San Juan was “the pretty girl” for not reporting guerrilla attacks in the Montes de María region. But it is true that frequently at night the sky was illuminated by flares launched by the phantom planes of the Air Force to clear the western main highway between the towns of San Juan Nepomuceno and San Jacinto, where the so-called “*pescas milagrosas*” (kidnappings) and the burning of vehicles by the 37th Front of the FARC operating in the region took place on repeated occasions.

From 1994 to 1996, rumors spread in the town of San Juan about the nighttime presence of polarized pickup trucks, whose occupants, hooded men, roamed the streets of the town warning people who wandered around to avoid being outside their homes after 8:00 p.m., because the situation was going to change significantly. This is how a generalized fear was triggered and the night life of the inhabitants changed for fear of encountering the hooded men, as they were called, and that they would do something to them. The inhabitants closed the doors of their houses at 8:00 p.m., fear, the culture of silence prevailed and normalized the daily life of the population, also with the circulation of pamphlets, describing people who apparently helped the guerrilla or the demobilized and warning that, if they did not leave the town, they would become a military target: then the anxiety and fear began to reign.

It was not until 1997 that the first criminal acts were perpetrated by the recently formed paramilitary bloc “Héroes Montes de María” commanded by Edwar Cobo Téllez, alias Diego Vecino, against former militants of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT), a guerrilla movement that had laid down its arms on January 26, 1991, through a peace agreement signed in Don Gabriel, in the municipality of Ovejas, Sucre. The murdered were Humberto Castillo Castellar and Antonio Ferradanes García, according to information contained in the files of the Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris (2014), the former was a promoter of the housing programs LA PAZ, in the municipalities of San Juan Nepomuceno and Carmen de Bolívar and the latter was the president of ANUC and advisor of the SENA's Integral Center of the Agricultural Sector (CAISA), in that municipality.

From then on, the paramilitaries began criminal actions in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno through a wave of assassinations, forced disappearances, forced displacement and the circulation of pamphlets with warnings to those who had political affinity with leftist ideas, to alleged guerrilla helpers, to cattle ranchers and merchants resistant to the financing of the armed group and to anyone who could cause suspicion against the interests of the paramilitaries.

At the same time, the 37th Front of the FARC under the command of Gustavo Rueda Díaz, alias “Martin Caballero”, responsible for the kidnapping of Fernando Araujo Perdono in 2000, frequently harassed the outskirts of the municipality and the rural area, which kept the population on edge until 2007, when in a joint operation between the Colombian Air Force, the Army and the National Navy killed Martin Caballero in the mountains of Maria and with him, dismantled the 37th Front of the FARC in the framework of the democratic security policy of the then president of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe Velez.

Since the late 1990s and mid-2000s, due to the actions of the guerrilla forces of the 37th Front of the FARC, the municipal capital lived in a state of anxiety due to rumors of an eventual, although in several attempts, failed, guerrilla takeover, turning the center of the town, where the police station is still located, into a trench zone as a protection mechanism for the police authorities against an eventual attack by the insurgent group that did not occur.

In the following lines, and based on the reports of the Development Plan of the Municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno 2016 - 2019, we present a synopsis of some important and preposterous facts of the armed conflict in the population, without counting the individualized murders, the forced disappearances (to date the whereabouts of the victims are still unknown) and the wave of people who fled due to threats because their names were mentioned in the pamphlets or because of the rumors that circulated among the common people of individuals declared as military targets and those who were identified as undesirable in the infamous social cleansing.

That same year, 1997, the Corralito community suffered its first massive displacement to the town of San José del Peñón, due to the death of several people, including Mr. Gregorio Barreto Radiel and the owner of a pool hall. Subsequently, the community returns to the corregimiento. On July 24, 1997, the

candidate Ascanio was assassinated. On September 14, 1999, the corregimiento of Corralito suffered its second massive displacement towards the municipal capital of San Juan Nepomuceno, because two men were killed, one called “el cibi” and the other called “jochon”. On September 17, 1999, the paramilitaries assassinated the government spokesman Carlos Pareja in the middle of a radio program on the air. The corregimiento of San Agustín had three historic moments in its displacement. First, on May 22, 1999, Lizandro Guzmán, who administered the San Agustín aqueduct, was killed. The second occurred in June 1999, when Francisco Blanco was killed, and the third occurred in September 1999 with the murder of Mr. Julio Caro. On March 11, 2000, 12 peasants were massacred in Vereda de las Brisas. In June 2000, the guerrillas of the 37th Front of the FARC EP assassinated the mayoral candidate Emiro Osorio Borre. In 2002 there is a massive displacement of the corregimiento of San José del Peñón due to the systematic deaths of several of its inhabitants. In August 2002 there was a massacre of 12 people in the Guáimaras farm, located between the corregimiento of Corralito and the corregimiento of San Agustín, even today the justice system has not been able to establish which group perpetrated this unfortunate event. In 2005, there was a massive displacement of the town of La Haya and its villages ( Municipal Mayor's Office of San Juan Nepomuceno in Bolívar, 2016, p. 187).

All these events were the cause of the fragmentation of the social fabric of the municipality and remain latent in the social conscience of the people of San Juan. The forced displacement of San José del Peñón was one of these humanitarian crises, its inhabitants left everything behind and faced with the forced departure, the competent authorities organized an assistance plan locating those affected in a geographic space that eventually led to the founding of the Ciudadela 2000 neighborhood, made up mostly of inhabitants originally from the aforementioned corregimiento.

The assassination of the municipal ombudsman Carlos Pareja is another fact difficult to forget, at that precise moment he was in the community radio station addressing live and direct to the community of San Juan and a paramilitary group attacked his life and that of a companion, the shots marked the criminal note during

the live transmission. Also, the assassinations of the mayoral candidates of San Juan Nepomuceno, Ascanio de Jesús Romero Pérez, from the Liberal party and Emiro Osorio Borré, from the Civic Movement. The former had previously received threats and was the victim of an assassination attempt, but the crime was not committed because he was not at home when the assassins came looking for him. However, on July 25, 1997, he was assassinated by five individuals inside a Brasilia bus while he was on his way from San Juan Nepomuceno to the city of Barranquilla (Assassinated mayoral candidate of San Juan, July 25, 1997).

In 2000, during a guerrilla raid by the 37th Front of the FARC, the insurgents tried to kidnap the cattle rancher and mayoral candidate for the Civic Movement, Emiro Osorio Borré, who resisted and in the midst of a confrontation between state forces and the insurgents, Osorio Borré and a neighbor were killed.

For its part, the massacre of the Guáimaras, perpetrated in 2002, is an event that has yet to be clarified, despite all the processes carried out, in different instances, by the relatives of the victims to ensure that the crimes do not go unpunished and to know the perpetrators and motives of the massacre. The Prosecutor Office has carried out investigations without reliable results, to date, there is no clarification of the truth, there is no knowledge of who were the perpetrators, there is no certainty which of the armed groups present in the region committed the massacre, Paramilitaries or the 37th Front of the FARC? For this reason, the relatives of the victims remain united and as a result of these collective motivations to clarify the facts, together with some researchers wrote the book entitled *Los Guáimaras y el Tapón: la masacre invisible* (Gutiérrez-Torres, et al., 2018), the text collects aspects of the lives of the peasants and the people killed, and at the same time, it is a writing of reflections on possible solutions for justice to clarify the facts.

Another of the massacres committed by the paramilitaries of the “Héroes Montes de María” Bloc was in the village of Las Brisas on March 11, 2000, as part of a route of death undertaken by the paramilitary group since February with the massacre of El Salado and the forced displacement and kidnapping of seven people from Manpuján in the municipality of María La Baja. The kidnapped people were taken as guides to go to the Vereda de Las Brisas where they finally murdered twelve peasants accused of collaborating with the guerrilla, as Nicolás Sánchez states in a report in the newspaper *El Espectador*:



the community claims that the troop included members of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) and the Public Security Forces. With machetes and firearms, they killed, list in hand, 12 peasants from the region whom they accused of being guerrilla collaborators. The massacre was committed near a tamarind tree that was very important for the life of the village. There they summoned the men they had sentenced to death (Sánchez, 2018, para. 2).

Today, Rafael Posso, a relative of three of the victims, has made drawings of the tragic event to remember, to make catharsis, to clarify the truth and to deny the accusations of the paramilitaries who labeled the 12 people as guerrilla collaborators. In addition, he fought with the group of relatives of those killed to pay homage to the memory of the 12 peasants with the monument that today rests in the Olaya Herrera Square in San Juan Nepomuceno, donated by Uber Banquez “Alias Juancho Dique”, as a symbol of reconciliation and as a manifestation of symbolic reparation in the framework of Law 975/2005, Law of Justice and Peace, as stated in its article 8:

symbolic reparation is understood as any benefit made in favor of the victims or the community in general that tends to ensure the preservation of the historical memory, the non-repetition of the victimizing facts, the public acceptance of the facts, the public forgiveness and the reestablishment of the dignity of the victims.

The sculpture is the portrait of a peasant on a mule (figure 4), a characteristic animal of the region for the transport and loading of the products of the land, on his sides he carries two sacks of products of the land, the peasant wears his characteristic work clothes, on his feet the traditional abarcas tres puntá (sandals) and on his head the veltiao hat.

Juan Nepomuceno was a haven of peace, the deaths in the community were due to natural causes and an occasional death was the result of people who took their own lives and scandalized the community. Guerrilla incursions were not part of daily life...

**Figure 4.** *Monument in Olaya Herrera Square in San Juan Nepomuceno*



**Source:** Amaya (2018).

## 3.2. VIOLENCE IN THE TEACHING COMMUNITY AND PEDAGOGICAL ACTIONS

The effects of the phenomenon of violence also impacted the teaching community of San Juan Nepomuceno, in this regard, Professor Rosma Morales Fontalvo, former principal of the Institución Educativa Normal Superior Montes de María (hereinafter Escuela Normal), argues that one of the causes of violent actions towards teachers was due to the “critical, autonomous and community role of the teacher in the face of different violence, [that] was the pretext of armed groups to control pedagogical and educational action” (Morales-Fontalvo et al., 2012, p. 22).

To gather stories, sources from local newspapers and blogs were sought, since there are few articles that address the subject directly. In this sense, two significant events have saddened the Montemariana community, the kidnapping and forced disappearance of two principals of the Escuela Normal at the hands of paramilitary groups. The first was Professor Atilio Vásquez Suarez, principal from 1993 to July 27, 1997, when he was kidnapped in broad daylight in front of the helpless eyes of residents and passers-by on the central street of San Juan Nepomuceno, after having participated, as he did every weekend, in a softball game. He was intercepted and taken off the motorcycle on which he was riding to his residence, forcibly put into a pickup truck and then, according to press reports (“Conviction for disappearance and homicide”, July 1, 2020), was taken by his kidnappers to a farm in a neighboring municipality, where he was tortured and then apparently thrown into the waters of the Magdalena River. His body was never recovered.

With the disappearance of Professor Atilio, fear reigned in the teachers' community; several were forced to leave the town due to alleged threats and rumors that were being spread with the appearance of teachers' names in pamphlets declared as military targets. The truth is that this persecution against teachers was a constant in Montes de María, given that the illegal groups wanted to use them as bridges of seduction to induce students to join the armed forces. The “resistance and refusal to use the role of teachers for these purposes was one of the causes of displacement and death of these social actors in Montes de María” (Morales-Fontalvo et al., 2012, p. 29).

The Escuela Normal tried to recover its stability and pedagogical identity when the teacher Pura Álvarez de Bustillo, following the instructions of the Secretary of Education of Bolívar, became the principal of the Institution, but once again the classrooms of the school were in mourning. On April 7, 2001, the teacher Álvarez, accompanied

by her husband and a brother-in-law, was intercepted by a paramilitary group on the road from San Juan Nepomuceno to the city of Barranquilla, and later disappeared along with her companions.

These events, among others, in the second half of the 1990s and early 2000s generated tensions in the educational sector of the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno and in general in the Montes de María region. In view of so many negative experiences against the humanity of teachers, these, to safeguard their lives, assumed positions in their pedagogical practices contrary to their duty; to “avoid conflict, confrontation with members of the community, pedagogical relations became flexible, permissive, evasive, where letting go prevailed, letting things pass, for fear of threats and harassment from the actors of the conflict” (Morales-Fontalvo et al., 2012, p. 23).

In the midst of this situation, despite the existing fears, the group of teachers of the Escuela Normal tried to make their educational practices and their classrooms become a “neutral space, sometimes as a space to contain the conflict and also as a scenario of micro encounter of what was socially experienced” (Morales-Fontalvo et al., 2012, p. 29). This originated the prevalence of the culture of silence in the educational community, at the same time, this situation was the trigger to rethink pedagogical practices, since the school is responsible for ensuring the development of a critical conscience, to educate for life in the face of reality, to give positive answers reaffirming the value of life, dialogue and the word, as opposed to weapons to counteract the adverse realities latent in the territory.

In this sense, the weapons were not enough for the teachers of the Escuela Normal to decline in their training processes, on the contrary, the realities of the conflict that they had to live internally were the driving force to continue in the training of children, youth and teachers under the bases of education for peace and the pedagogy of memory. It has been established as a social responsibility of the Escuela Normal to contribute to compensate the painful situations inherited by the educational community in the context of the armed conflict in the Montes de María region.

As a sign of the social commitment and dynamics of the Escuela Normal and the basis of pedagogical projects facing the contextual realities, it has become for the teaching staff a tool and life option to build peace and cohesion of the social fabric. To date, three of its teachers have been recognized for their work, by developing innovative pedagogical projects focused on peace building, through their participation in the *Compartir al Maestro* Award. The purpose of this award is to “pay tribute to the most outstanding teachers and principals in the country, with the aim of

promoting the social appreciation of their work, making their pedagogical practices visible and supporting their professionalization” ( Compartir Award, n.d., para. 1).

In this sense, Professor Elmer Guardo Serrano, a Social Sciences teacher, was awarded in 2003 as Illustrious Teacher for his pedagogical project called “Escuela Normal School Conflict Resolution Committee, CRECEN”.

It emerged as a component of the Education for Democracy project, seeking to answer the question “How to promote peace in and from the school? Its purpose was to promote peace among the members of its educational community, to extend it to the environment of the Montes de María. The methodology facilitated the construction of agreements between the parties and the resolution of conflicts, and provided tools to school mediators, in charge of improving school coexistence and the relationship between students (Compartir la Palabra Maestra, 2017, para. 4).

A project relevant to the realities of the municipality to seek alternative solutions based on the word and agreements as mechanisms to solve the problems present inside and outside the classroom. It is a proposal that reaffirms the need for peaceful coexistence, in a scenario where problems were solved violently, attacking people's humanity.

In 2005, Professor Edgardo Ulises Romero Rodriguez, who also has a degree in Social Sciences, followed in the footsteps of his colleague Guardo and participated in the Compartir al Maestro Award, being also awarded as Distinguished Teacher with a pedagogical project that addressed three important aspects to work with his students: historical memory, orality and writing, and research. These three aspects were concentrated in his work entitled “Oral history as a methodological resource for the teaching of Social Sciences” whose objective was focused on the development of research processes with students, through oral history, investigating the collective memory of its inhabitants, to solve situations of the context and build stories of lives, events and facts that survive in the historical memory of the population and are transmitted orally from one generation to another.

Romero-Rodríguez (2005) stresses the importance of historical memory because “it is a social activity that constructs and reconstructs the past, allows the integration and recovery of a people's identity, lays the foundations for reconciliation and prevents making the same mistakes” (p. 89). In this sense, the project was based on the construction of events, to capture them through articles and stories, with various pedagogical intentions: to strengthen research skills in their students and cultural identity, to recover the historical memory of the community and to form citizens committed to the survival of the cultural patterns of their society.

In 2014, Professor Dilia Elena Mejía Rodríguez, teacher of Social Sciences at the Escuela Normal, winner of the Teacher of Distinction Award by the *Compartir el Maestro* Award with a work entitled “The teaching of Social Sciences through living didactics and education for a culture of peace” (2015), asserts that its pedagogical proposal is a meeting space, where students reflect, enhance communicative and scientific skills and seek the necessary mechanisms for the understanding of the realities of societies in conflictive situations, such as those in the environment of the Escuela Normal. From the teaching of social sciences, problematizing questions are raised and then, through pedagogical strategies such as living didactics and pedagogy of dialogue, possible solutions arise and generate in students “significant learning in the field of social sciences [to] break the culture of silence, imaginaries and [the] violent actions among young people” (Mejía-Rodríguez, 2015, p. 4).

The previous pedagogical projects, the set of pedagogical practices of the teachers and the curriculum itself of the Escuela Normal, are the living example of reconciliation and social resistance processes based on education to face the countless violent actions perpetuated in the Municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno by the different armed actors and to avoid their repetition.

As a sign of the social commitment and dynamics of the Escuela Normal and the basis of pedagogical projects facing the contextual realities, it has become for the teaching staff a tool and life option to build peace and cohesion of the social fabric.

# Chapter 4

## METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 APPROACH

The study at the methodological level was addressed from a qualitative approach, supported by some quantitative instruments. Qualitative research involves procedures to know reality, to make approximations and interpretations of that complex reality (Villa-Gómez and Insuasty-Rodríguez, 2016); it also has a naturalistic perspective and interpretative understanding of human experience in which senses and meanings that guide and reconstruct life projects are situated (Rodríguez-González and Mora, 2006). The qualitative approach allows the construction of knowledge, shared meaning and systematization through consensus born from the sustained exercise of observation, reflection and dialogue processes with the communities under investigation (Sandoval, 2002).

It is considered important to point out the three conditions that, according to Sandoval (2002), are the most important in the production of knowledge from the qualitative alternative. The recovery of subjectivity as a space for the construction of human life, to the extent that the subject's lived experience and the understanding he or she gives to his or her personal experience are considered. The vindication of daily life as a basic scenario for understanding sociocultural reality, insofar as the subject is understood in its context. Intersubjectivity and consensus as vehicles for accessing valid knowledge of human reality (Sandoval, 2002).

Considering the theoretical foundations of qualitative research, the type of study was developed from the social critical paradigm. Martin Heidegger's interpretative



phenomenology was used, with Van Manen's existential themes. In phenomenology, the links between data and theoretical knowledge are achieved through reflection, using four basic existential themes: the lived space (spatiality), the lived body (corporeality), the lived time (temporality) and the lived human relationships (relationality or communality) as guides for reflection (Van Manen, 1990, cited by Espitia and Rincón, 2011).

## **4.2. TYPE OF RESEARCH**

Action research (AR) was used, since it facilitates the exploration of the relationship between action and reflection of the selected sample. According to Kemmis and MacTaggart (1988), AR is defined as a form of self-reflective inquiry carried out by those who participated in the research. In this case, mothers who are victims of the armed conflict, to improve the rationality and fairness of: a) their own social or educational practices; b) their understanding of these practices; and c) the institutional situations in which these practices are developed. AR allows participants to understand reality in its usual context, generating new knowledge that unveils how to build an equitable and inclusive society that ensures lasting social peace, and, therefore, to glimpse the situation of victims and, especially, that of women heads of households as a priority. Focusing efforts on women heads of household as a challenge, this action research process allowed to ensure that it is possible to heal individual, social and collective wounds, ensuring the flow of reconciliation in their family and community group.

## **4.3. PARTICIPANTS**

The research participants were 25 female heads of household who were victims of the internal armed conflict in Colombia, residents of the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, department of Bolívar.

## 4.4. INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

The following were considered among the inclusion criteria:

- Women mothers who are victims of the internal armed conflict in Colombia, in any of its expressions.
- Women mothers who are victims of the internal armed conflict in Colombia with a previous confirmed diagnosis of any psychopathology.

Selection of informants for the sampling used in qualitative research requires the researcher to place himself or herself in the situation that best allows him or her to collect the information relevant to the concept or theory sought. Sampling is oriented to the selection of those units and dimensions that best guarantee: a) quantity (saturation) and b) quality (richness) of the information.

**Intentional typological sampling:** the type of sampling in the qualitative content analysis designs is usually intentional, that in which the subjects of the sample are not chosen following the laws of chance, but on the contrary they are chosen intentionally, in this case the dialogue with the directors and teachers of the Institución Educativa Normal Superior Montes de María, knowledgeable about the context, helped to identify the population under study.

Normally in this sampling modality there is no way of estimating the probability of the elements to be included in the sample. The analyst selects the sampling units, not randomly, nor following calculations or laws of probability, but by other methods. Two methods are used for this purpose: opinionated and theoretical.

**In opinion sampling, the researcher selects the informants according to personal strategic criteria:** knowledge of the situation, ease, voluntariness, etc. On the other hand, theoretical sampling is used to generate theories in which the analyst collects, codes and analyzes the data and decides what data to collect from then on and where to find them to develop a better theory as the analyst perfects it.

**Probabilistic quantitative sampling:** it primarily samples units (objects, texts and individuals), on the understanding that, if the sample of these is representative, the way to arrive at knowledge of the universe is available. On the contrary, purposive

sampling (opinion or theoretical) does not obey fixed rules, nor does it specify in advance the number of units to be selected.

In the case of the project, the purposive sampling took 25 women victims of the armed conflict in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno. The basis was the idea that this number could be altered throughout the research, so that it would be possible, on the one hand, to select sampling units not initially planned to improve the quality and richness of the information, and on the other hand, to interrupt the selection of more units when it is understood that a saturation point has been reached due to the amount of information collected; however, the population under study remained the same until the end of the process. According to Ardila-Suárez and Rueda-Arenas (2013), this theoretical saturation is reached when the researcher (who collects while analyzing the information) understands that the new data begins to be repetitive and ceases to provide novel information.

## 4.5 TECHNIQUES AND INSTRUMENTS

During the execution of the project, several information gathering techniques were used, including semi-structured interviews, which Lázaro and Asensi (1987) define as “an interpersonal communication through a structured conversation that configures a dynamic and comprehensive relationship developed in a climate of trust and acceptance, with the purpose of informing and guiding” (p. 287).

One of the data collection techniques was non-participant observation, which made it possible to prepare a record of the observable aspects. In this sense, the instruments were observations with photographs, protocols and fieldwork notes (Goetz and Lecompte, 1988).

In summary, this methodological scenario is the frame of reference used by the researchers to solve the central question of the problem and develop the proposed objectives.

Another instrument that was applied was a sociodemographic data sheet, made up of questions that collect elements of the surveyed group: age, sex, level of schooling, with whom they live and stratum. The focus group technique was also used, defined as a technique for data collection through a semi-structured group interview, which re-

volves around a topic proposed by the researcher. Different definitions of focus group have been given; however, many authors agree that this is a discussion group, guided by a set of carefully designed questions with a particular objective (Aigner, 2009; Beck et al., 2004). Parameterized psychometric instruments were also applied to measure the degree of resilience, such as the Personal Resilience Factors Inventory.

The personal factors of resilience were evaluated: self-esteem, empathy, autonomy, humor and creativity, together with another instrument called the Wagnild and Young Resilience Scale (1993), which made it possible to identify the degree of individual resilience, considered as a positive personality characteristic that allows the individual to adapt.

## **4.6 PROCEDURE. PHASES OF THE RESEARCH**

### **4.6.1. PHASE 0. PREPARATION**

In this phase of the process, everything related to the administrative part of the project for its initiation and subsequent execution was considered. Among them, review of the hours assigned to the teachers, type of inclusion in their hiring, filling out the initiation certificate and other legal terms of the project.

### **4.6.2. PHASE I. IDENTIFICATION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH - PSYCHOSOCIAL DIAGNOSIS**

Sensitization and motivation processes were carried out with the population with which the project worked, achieving the linkage and integration to the intervention process of women community leaders who were victims of the armed conflict in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno in the department of Bolivar, located in the Caribbean zone, generating conditions of improvement and resilience. Before starting the process, an informed consent was applied. At this stage, a diagnosis was made of the interests aroused by the deployment of the intervention strategies in the population under study.

### **4.6.3. PHASE II. DESIGN OF STRATEGIES**

At this stage, the bio-psycho-socio-cultural intervention strategies developed with the population under study were determined, establishing pedagogical routes to approach the interventions from the recognition of the individual being and the understanding of the social being for the resignification of the value of life and strengthening of the life project in women heads of household who experienced the armed conflict firsthand.

### **4.6.4. PHASE III. IMPLEMENTATION OF BIO-PSYCHO-SOCIO-CULTURAL INTERVENTION STRATEGIES**

Based on the findings, bio-psycho-socio-cultural strategies were designed for the population under study.

### **4.6.5. PHASE IV. COLLECTION OF INFORMATION FROM THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

Once the intervention process was initiated in the population under study, information was collected to corroborate whether the community intervention process contributed significantly to the generation of favorable conditions of improvement and resilience for their life projects.

### **4.6.7. PHASE V. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS AND IMPACT EVALUATION**

The analysis of the information was carried out from a qualitative approach that resulted in the writing of this book to show the academic community the results obtained from the research. It is hoped that it will serve as a model to be replicated in other scenarios where armed conflict has left social effects.

# Chapter 5

## RESULTS

### 5.1. UNDERSTANDING PARTICIPATION: CONTRIBUTIONS FROM A QUANTITATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Usually, before carrying out an action, we think: Why? and why are we going to carry it out, otherwise these actions would be a praxis lacking in sense and orientation. This is how we reflect on the methodology developed with the group of women of San Juan de Nepomuceno, that is, before proposing the answers to the things we want to achieve, it is a priority to deepen in these two big questions: why? and what for? Therefore, the intention is to rescue the philosophical, socio-cultural and socio-economic orientations that guide the professional action from the recognition of that being.

#### ANALYTICAL-REFLEXIVE SCOPE OF THE APPROACH

The study at methodological level was addressed from a qualitative approach, with the support of some quantitative instruments, which were the fundamental basis for the development of the research, looking from the quantitative fundamental for the development of this research.

Qualitative research involves procedures to learn about reality, to make approximations and interpretations of that complex reality (Villa-Gómez and Insuasty-Rodríguez, 2016); in addition, methodologically it is naturalistic, i.e. it studies people and groups in their natural environment and in everyday life. Researchers interact with them in a natural way (Quecedo and Castaño, 2002). The qualitative approach allows the construction of knowledge, shared meaning and systematization through consensus born from the sustained exercise of observation, reflection and dialogue processes with the communities under investigation (Sandoval, 2002).

Thus, from this approach, the human being is made visible, that woman in her vital space with each and every one of her actions, emotions, memories, ideas of own actions, in that territory and in the time lived and shared with the community that glimpsed what happened in this historical time.

It is considered important to point out the three conditions that, according to Sandoval (2002), are the most important in the production of knowledge from the qualitative alternative: the recovery of subjectivity as a space for the construction of human life, to the extent that the lived experience of the subject and the understanding he or she gives to his or her personal experience are considered. The vindication of daily life as a basic scenario for understanding sociocultural reality, insofar as the subject is understood in its context. Intersubjectivity and consensus as vehicles to access valid knowledge of human reality (Sandoval, 2002). In which each lived situation is recovered and seeks to transform these realities in favor of the human being who addresses each scenario, each story in the subjectivity and intersubjectivity of each woman in her territory.

Considering the theoretical foundations of qualitative research, the study is developed from phenomenological guidelines. In such a way that it seeks to describe the experience. The approach is based on the four basic existential themes: the lived space (spatiality), the lived body (corporeality), the lived time (temporality) and the lived human relationships (relationality or communality) (Van Manen, 1990, cited in Sandoval, 2002).

This research emphasized the situation experienced by the women of San Juan de Nepomuceno in the face of the violence experienced in their territory. Its social relevance makes it possible to create processes and spaces for dialogue between women, family members, community agents, researchers, professionals and politicians, considering research as a tool to impact social creation and transformation. From this quantitative perspective, support instruments were applied to validate and sup-

port the creation of workshops and their execution. Likewise, the research exercise was intended to be a means to find pertinent answers with statistical support.

## **AREAS OF INFLUENCE FROM THE TYPE OF RESEARCH**

Action research (AR) facilitates the exploration of the relationship between action and reflection of the selected sample. According to Kemmis (1989), AR is defined as a form of self-reflective inquiry carried out by those who participate (mothers who are heads of households and the community in general), to improve the rationality and justice of: a) their own social or educational practices; b) their understanding of these practices; and c) the institutional situations in which these practices are carried out.

The AR allows participants to understand the reality in its usual context, generating new knowledge that reveals how to build an equitable and inclusive society that ensures lasting social peace, by making the situation of victims and, especially, of women heads of households, a priority. Focusing efforts on women heads of households as a challenge, this action research process allowed to ensure that it is possible to heal individual, social and collective wounds, ensuring the flow of reconciliation in their children and family members.

This type of research shows a process that is solved in parameterized instruments, which supports the creation of this social technology and makes it relevant in the study.

## **WHO CONTRIBUTED WITH THEIR EXPERIENCES**

The participants were 25 women heads of household who were victims of the internal armed conflict in Colombia, residents of the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, department of Bolivar.

The inclusion criteria were women heads of household who had been victims of the internal armed conflict in Colombia, in any of its expressions, and as exclusion criteria, participants with a previous confirmed diagnosis of any psychopathology.



In the selection of informants, the researchers placed themselves in the situation that best allowed them to collect the information relevant to the concept or theory sought. Sampling is oriented to the selection of those units and dimensions that best guarantee: a) quantity (saturation) and b) quality (richness) of the information.

For this purpose, we used the intentional typological sampling, used in the qualitative content analysis designs, which is understood as the one in which the subjects of the sample are not chosen following the laws of chance, but on the contrary, they are chosen intentionally, in this case in dialogue with directors and teachers of the

Institución Educativa Normal Superior Montes de María. For the case of the Observatory project, the intentional sampling took 25 people from the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno.

The starting point was then the idea that this number could be altered throughout the research, so that, on the one hand, sampling units not initially planned could be selected to improve the quality and richness of the information, and on the other hand, the selection of more units could be interrupted when it is understood that a saturation point has been reached due to the amount of information collected. According to Ardila-Suárez and Rueda-Arenas (2013), this theoretical saturation is reached when the researcher (who collects while analyzing the information) understands that the new data begin to be repetitive and ceases to provide novel information. Nevertheless, the sample did not undergo variations.

## **STARTING POINT WITH TECHNIQUES AND INSTRUMENTS**

The process begins with the application of parameterized instruments that support the research from the quantitative point of view. A series of qualitative social technology instruments were then consolidated, which address the problems that affect the participants and, above all, give greater protagonism to women in their territory, bearing in mind their biological, psychological, social and cultural development. Thus, it is intended to achieve a development in a context of peace and democracy that accounts for the deep contextualized understandings and criticisms about the conditions and processes in which the identities and subjectivities of the women of San Juan de Nepomuceno are built.

From the quantitative point of view, the sociodemographic data sheet was used to characterize the group of women: age, sex, level of schooling, type of housing, social

security, people with whom they live, stratum and some questions related to the type of affectation generated by the armed conflict and its impact on the family and social context.

On the other hand, parameterized psychometric instruments were applied to explore the resilience capacity of the victims. For this purpose, the Personal Resilience Factors Inventory was used to evaluate self-esteem, empathy, autonomy, humor and creativity; and the Wagnild and Young Resilience Scale, which allowed identifying the degree of individual resilience, self-confidence, independence, decision, ingenuity, perseverance, adaptability, balance and flexibility, through Factor I: personal competence and Factor II: acceptance of oneself and life.

The other technique used was the focus group, defined as a data collection technique that is carried out through a semi-structured group interview, which revolves around a theme proposed by the researcher. There have been different definitions of focus group; however, many authors agree that this is a discussion group, guided by a set of carefully designed questions with a particular objective (Aigner, 2009; Beck et al., 2004).

Continuing with qualitative instruments, during the execution of the project several information gathering techniques were used, among them semi-structured interviews, which Lázaro and Asensi (1987) define as “an interpersonal communication through a structured conversation that configures a dynamic and comprehensive relationship developed in a climate of trust and acceptance, with the purpose of informing and orienting” (p. 287).

Therefore, an interview script was elaborated with some guiding lines of discussion, which were applied to women and community leaders victims of the armed conflict who have played a preponderant role in integration and reconciliation processes, in order to know their perceptions and visions of life, in order to carry out an objective systematization process; hence, the sample may vary significantly according to the approach of the information.

One of the data collection techniques was non-participant observation, which makes it possible to record observable aspects. In this sense, the instruments used to carry out the observations are photographs, protocols and fieldwork notes (Goetz and Lecompte, 1988).

In summary, this methodological scenario is the frame of reference used by the researchers to solve the central question of the problem and develop the proposed objectives.

## TIMELINE IN THE EXECUTION OF THE PROJECT

Action research has a different character from what has been regularly understood as research. This study option necessarily contemplates co-management, self-management and the work of all in search of the transformation of the territory and of the people with whom it is developed. Therefore, the research moments are linked, and the researcher is an agent of change who is always part of the process.

**In Phase I.** Identification and community approach - Psychosocial diagnosis, sensitization and motivation processes were carried out with the population with whom the project worked, with the aim of bringing together women community leaders who were victims of the armed conflict in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno so that they would join the intervention process and generate conditions for improvement and resilience. Informed consent was applied. In the same way, this stage is the precise moment to elaborate a diagnosis on the interests aroused by the deployment of the intervention strategies in the population under study.

**In Phase II.** Design of strategies, the bio-psycho-socio-cultural intervention strategies developed with the population under study were determined, establishing pedagogical routes to approach the interventions from the recognition of the individual being and the understanding of the social being for the resignification of the value of life and the strengthening of the life project in women heads of household who lived the proximate experience of the armed conflict.

**During Phase III.** Implementation of bio-psycho-socio-cultural intervention strategies, considering the findings, strategies were designed for the population under study from the biological, psychological, social and cultural points of view.

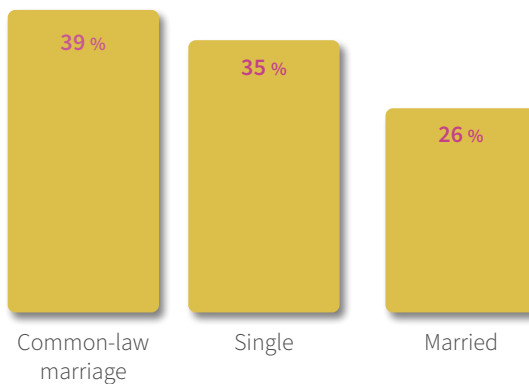
**From Phase IV.** Collection of information of the research process, the process of intervention in the communities began, and information was collected to corroborate whether the process of community intervention contributed significantly to the generation of favorable conditions of improvement and resilience for the populations where the research proposal was implemented.

**Finally, Phase V.** Analysis of results and impact evaluation, was carried out from a qualitative approach. Subsequently, a book is prepared and published showing the results obtained during the research process, which serves as a memory of the process carried out and serves as a model to be replicated in other scenarios where the armed conflict has left social effects.

## TREATMENT OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

To obtain a complete vision of the group of women participants from a quantitative point of view, the research was carried out using parameterized instruments. This involves reducing, categorizing, clarifying, synthesizing and comparing the information obtained to construct the social technology instruments (workshops that are applied to the community under study) and thus clearly mentalize results, possible conclusions and courses of action.

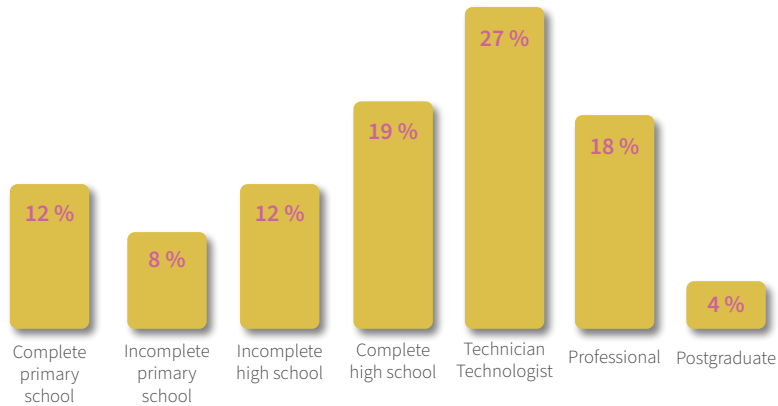
**Figure 5.** *Marital status*



**Source:** own elaboration.

With respect to marital status, 39% of the population is married and 26% are in a common-law marriage; 35% are single, indicating that a high number of women in the project live with a partner.

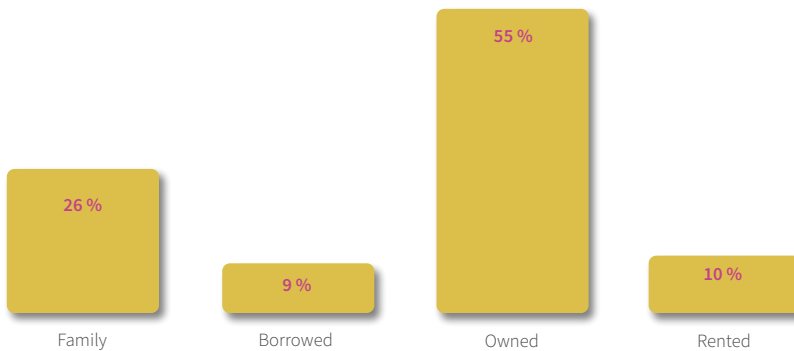
**Figure 6.** *Studies completed*



**Source:** own elaboration.

According to Figure 6, 27% of the women have completed technical and technological studies and the same percentage has incomplete or finished high school, including professional and postgraduate studies, relevant data for the study from their level of resilience and self-improvement.

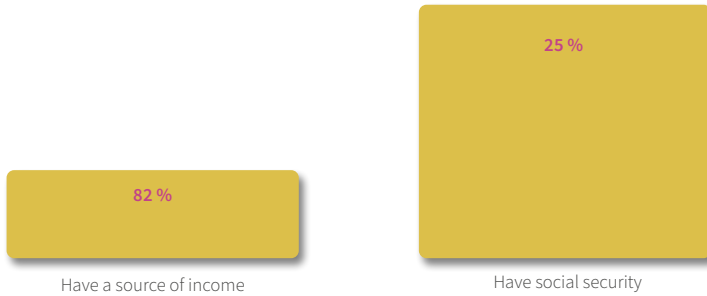
**Figure 7.** *Home Ownership*



**Source:** own elaboration.

According to Figure 7, 55% of the women live in their own home and 26% in a family home, giving a high percentage of satisfaction of their basic needs by owning housing.

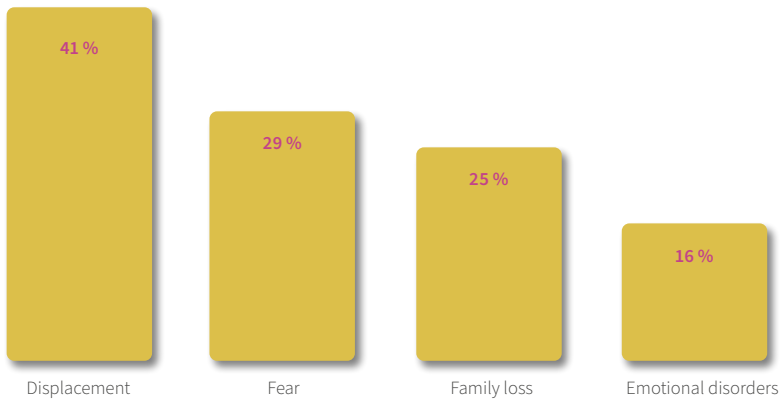
**Figure 8.** Results of sociodemographic data sheet, sources of income and social security



**Source:** own elaboration.

According to Figure 8, 82% of the women participating in the study work and have an income and 95% have social security, which shows their ability to manage family support.

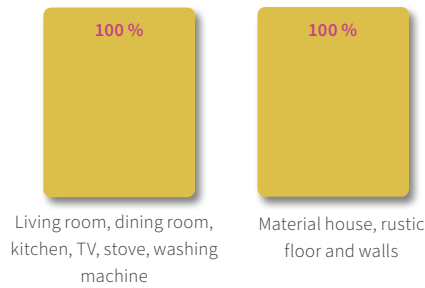
**Figure 9.** Results of the sociodemographic data sheet, situations



**Source:** own elaboration.

According to Figure 9, 41% are victims of displacement, 29% suffer from fear, 25% have had a family loss in the armed conflict and 16% suffer from emotional disorders due to the armed conflict.

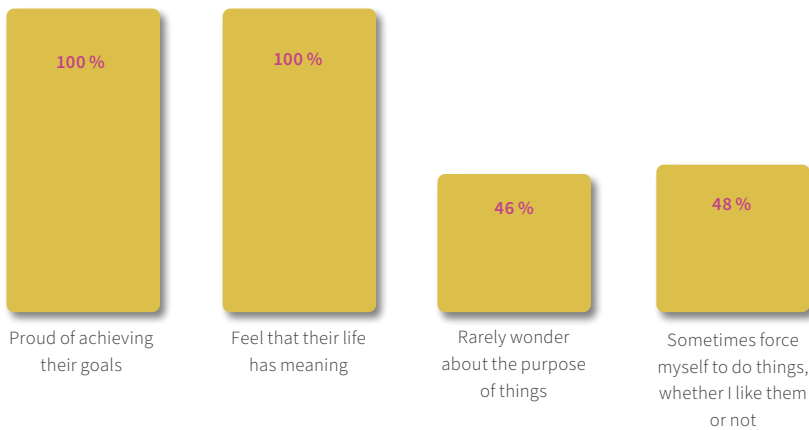
**Figure 10.** *Materials in the type of housing*



**Source:** own elaboration.

According to Figure 10, 100% of the households have a living room, dining room, kitchen, stove, washing machine and 100% have a rustic floor and walls.

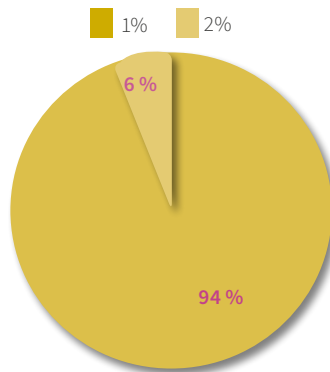
**Figure 11.** *Resilience scale results*



**Source:** own elaboration.

Considering the parameterized instruments and according to Wagnild and Young's Resilience Scale (Figure 11) we obtain that 100% of the participants are proud of achieving their goals and feel that their life has meaning, as well as we see that 48% often force themselves to do things whether they like it or not and 46% rarely ask themselves about the purpose of things.

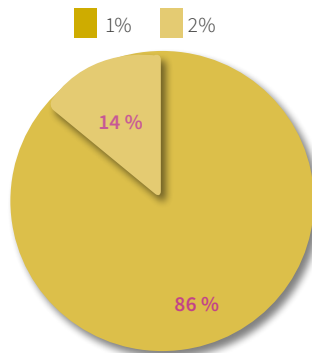
**Figure 12.** *Wagnild and Young Resilience Scale, Factor I*



**Source:** own elaboration.

Figure 12 shows that 94% of the women victims of the armed conflict in San Juan de Nepomuceno are self-accepting, self-confident, independent, decisive, powerful, resourceful and persevering.

**Figure 13.** *Wagnild and Young Resilience Scale, Factor II*



**Source:** own elaboration.

Figure 13 shows that 86% of the women victims of the armed conflict in San Juan de Nepomuceno have acceptance of themselves and of life; they represent adaptability, balance, flexibility and a stable outlook on life.



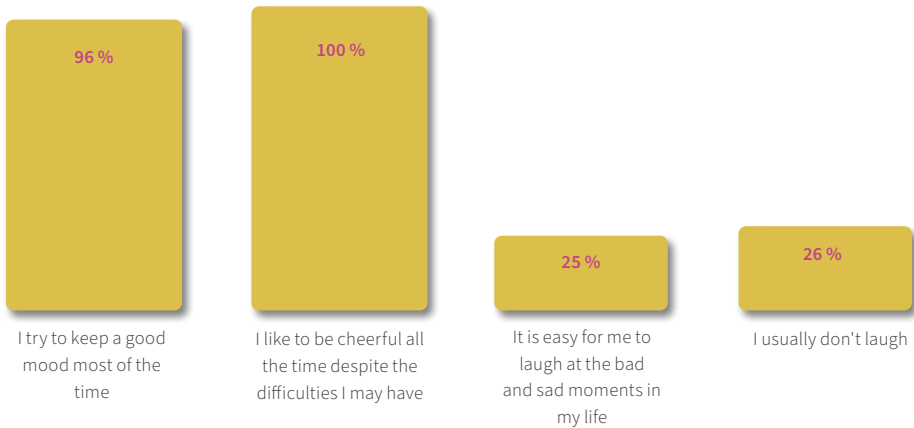
**Figure 14.** *Autonomy*



**Source:** own elaboration.

In Figure 14, it is inferred regarding autonomy 17% can make decisions easily, 13% can avoid doing something dangerous, 17% can make decisions easily and 100% can look for ways to solve problems.

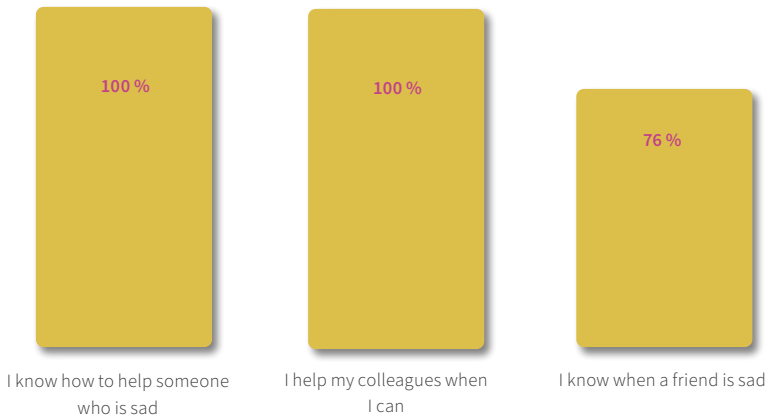
**Figure 15.** *Mood*



**Source:** own elaboration.

It is observed that in terms of mood 96% of the participants try to maintain a good mood most of the time, 100% like to be always cheerful despite the difficulties they may have, 25% find it easy to laugh at the sad moments of their life and 26% generally do not laugh.

**Figure 16.** *Empathy*



**Source:** own elaboration.

In empathy it is observed that 100 % know how to help someone who is sad, 100 % help a colleague when they can and 76 % perceive when a friend is sad.

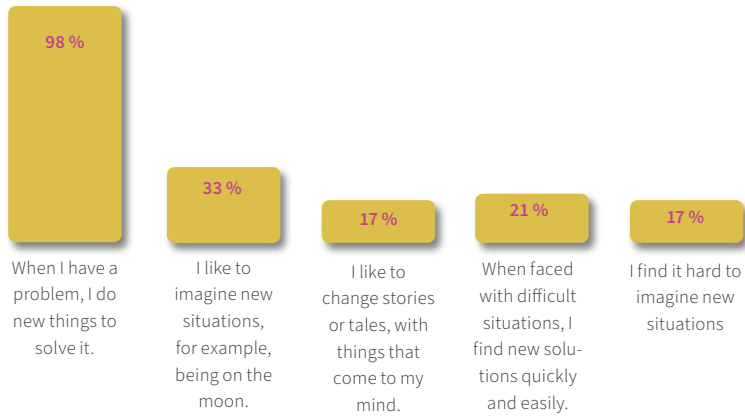
**Figure 17.** *Self-esteem*



**Source:** own elaboration.

It is observed in self-esteem that 21% feel that it is difficult for them to do well because they are not good or intelligent, 25% are easily overcome by adversity, 100% feel loved and appreciated, 100% consider that, although they feel sad and annoyed, others still care about them, and 100% perceive that they are happy.

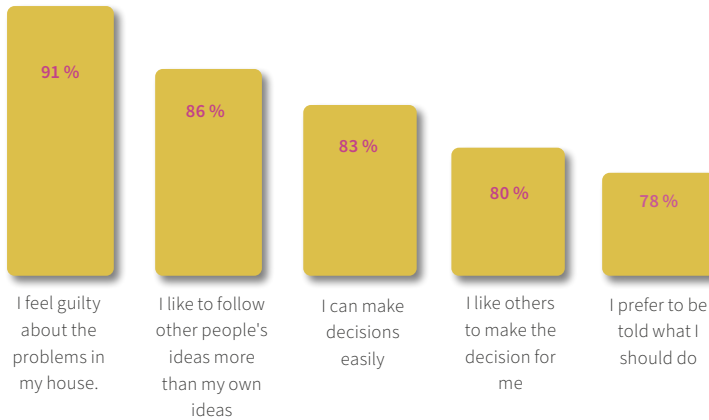
**Figure 18.** Creativity



**Source:** own elaboration.

In the creativity part, it is observed that when they have problems, 98% do new things to solve them, 33% like to imagine new things, 17% like to change stories with things that come to mind, 21% in difficult situations find new solutions quickly and easily, and 17% find it difficult to imagine new situations.

**Figure 19.** Resilience scale questions a)



**Source:** own elaboration.

**Figure 20.** Resilience scale questions b)



**Source:** own elaboration.

It is relevant to observe how, in the resilience factor (Figures 19 and 20), variables such as I am willing to take responsibility for my actions, I can look for ways to solve my problems, I realize when there is danger and try to prevent it, I can solve problems typical of my age, score low, 78%, I prefer to be told what I should do.

The quantitative data invite us to build the exercise in situ from these conclusions. We value all the people who have made this research and these contributions possible from the quantitative approach, with their experiences, their participation, their feelings, especially those women victims of the armed conflict who were so violated in previous years and who are re-victimized with the passage of time; as well as the directors of the Institución Educativa Normal Superior Montes de María, who selflessly shared a path of personal and collective construction, for the work of creating and composing together true viable utopias, dreams and fulfilled desires.

The innovative practice and popular wisdom are also evident in this community; they are women who, despite all the pain, preserve friendship, laughter, similarities, longings, differences and magic.

Finally, the quantitative findings invite us to recreate a scenario of support from the qualitative research closer to these women, by seeking their accompaniment, healing, hugs, listening, therapy, laughter and affection, typical of an action research exercise.

The innovative practice and popular wisdom are also evident in this community; they are women who, despite all the pain, preserve friendship, laughter, similarities, longings, differences and magic.

## 5.2 UNDERSTANDING PARTICIPATION: CONTRIBUTIONS FROM A QUALITATIVE PERSPECTIVE

### REBUILDING OURSELVES FROM THE HEALING OF OUR WOUNDS

**Figure 21.** *Participants' texts during the activities*



**Source:** own elaboration.

From a qualitative point of view, the workshops were developed based on the four basic existential themes: the lived space (spatiality), the lived body (corporeality), the lived time (temporality), the lived human relationships (relationality or communality).

**Table 1.** *Relationship between basic existential themes and*

<b>Van Manen's basic existential themes</b>	<b>Workshops</b>
<p><b>Spatiality</b>            The lived space is the dimension of human life. The significance that space acquires for human beings and the behavior that develops in it, is elaborated and reelaborated day by day, by virtue of an individual and social experience. "The space in which behavior is developed is conditioned by factors such as culture, class or social group, acquired knowledge, place of origin, life histories, etc." (Espitia and Rincón, 2011, p. 310).</p>	<p>Recognizing and transforming my character</p>
<p><b>Corporeality</b>            Lived body: Husserl, according to Zaner, considers the body as the bearer of the zero point of orientation, the organ of perception, sensitive organ and organ of will. "It is the body, as existence, the individualizing factor that turns each of us into a particular presence of the world" (Espitia and Rincón, 2011, p. 310).</p>	<p>The five fingers of my life</p>
<p><b>Temporality</b>            Lived time. Heidegger conceived of the person as being in time. That which is and is in time and is thus determined by time is called the temporal. The temporal means the transient, that which passes or perishes in the course of time. Time itself passes; however, while it passes it remains as time; to remain means not to disappear and therefore to be present. Time is constitutive of being or existence (Espitia and Rincón, 2011).</p>	<p>Conflict as a tool for social transformation</p>

Van Manen's basic existential themes	Workshops
<p><b>Relationality or communality</b> Lived human relationships. When human beings express and act in what they are engaged or interested in, they take a position on what they are. Human beings are and are constituted by the knowledge and understanding of the world and by the relationships with it (Espitia and Rincón, 2011).</p>	<p>Network of actors in co-management for psychosocial wellbeing</p> <p>Illuminating and projecting our history</p>

**Source:** own elaboration.

In this section we will describe the intervention process of the project's researchers with women heads of household who are victims of the armed conflict in the town of San Juan Nepomuceno, a municipality in the department of Bolivar. As already mentioned, this process responded to the question: How to overcome the experiences of fear and resentment of women heads of household victims of the armed conflict, promoting the expression of their capacities, their creativity, the construction of the social fabric, talents, gifts and deepening in them the awareness of being in the world?

In this sense, the process was carried out in two stages. In the first, workshops were designed with the intention of contributing to the healing of wounds and the projection of the life project of the participants. In the second, psychosocial intervention strategies were implemented based on the development of these workshops that motivated the strengthening of the participants' life projects.

The construction of the workshops arose from the diagnosis carried out with the women based on the application of a sociodemographic data sheet, a focus group and the completion of parameterized psychometric instruments: Personal Resilience Factors Inventory and the Wagnild and Young Resilience Scale.

The sociodemographic data sheet made it possible to characterize the group of women: age, sex, level of schooling, type of housing, social security, people with whom they live, stratum and some questions related to the type of affectation generated by the armed conflict and its impact on the family and social context.

Similarly, two focus groups were conducted guided by a set of relevant questions related to the meaning of life, spiritual healing, personal, family, social resilience, among others that were validated by experts. They refer to the following:

How do you feel about the situation you have experienced, what situations or circumstances do you think you could heal in your life, what actions or changes have you made regarding your personal reality in the last year, what do you do to cope with some of the difficulties in relation to family and personal matters, what do you do to cope with some of the difficulties in relation to social matters, what would you like to do to face some of the difficulties you expressed in relation to personal, family and social matters (see annex 1).

Among the responses, feelings and emotions of resentment, fear, hatred, nostalgia, sadness, uncertainty, frustration, impotence prevailed, but the need for forgiveness, the struggle for dreams and the feeling of being subjects of rights also emerged.

On the other hand, parameterized psychometric instruments were applied to explore the resilience capacity of the victims. For this purpose, the Personal Resilience Factors Inventory was used to evaluate self-esteem, empathy, autonomy, humor and creativity; and the Wagnild and Young Resilience Scale, which allowed identifying the degree of individual resilience, self-confidence, independence, decision, ingenuity, perseverance, adaptability, balance, flexibility, through Factor I: personal competence and Factor II: acceptance of oneself and life.

Subsequently, the information was analyzed and systematized in a document that was presented and validated by the women leaders themselves. The information obtained, analyzed and validated was contrasted with theoretical positions that gave way to the design of the workshops, establishing pedagogical routes to approach the interventions from the recognition of the individual being and the understanding of the social being, for the resignification of the value of life and the strengthening of the life project in women heads of household who experienced the armed conflict firsthand. The workshops that emerged as a proposal in this process were the following:

- Transformative awareness processes
- Recognizing and transforming my character
- The five fingers of my life
- Conflict as a tool for social transformation
- Network of actors in co-management for psychosocial welfare
- Illuminating our history



## RESILIENCE, A PROTECTIVE FACTOR AND A BUILDER OF SELF-ESTEEM

Thinking about the daily transformations that open the way to the construction of an inclusive social fabric, where the pain of people who have been excluded and violated is validated, requires asking oneself how to generate a turning point that affects the community and commits it affectively and effectively to the construction of communities characterized by dignity, respect, justice and solidarity (Lederach, 2008).

In this sense, resilience was taken as a reference in the work carried out with women heads of household victims of the armed conflict in the population of San Juan Nepomuceno. According to Werner (1892), resilience is the capacity of an individual or a family to face adverse circumstances and recover by emerging stronger and with more resources. Resilience was understood as the capacity to overcome adverse events and to be able to successfully develop despite unfavorable circumstances (death of parents, displacement, experiences of fear, terrorism, massacres, homicides, femicides, genocides, gender violence and all the scourges of violence that have afflicted Colombia).

In this context, the conceptualization of Garmezy (1991) cited in Becoña (2006), who defines resilience as “the capacity to recover and maintain an adaptive behavior after the initial abandonment or incapacity at the onset of a stressful event” (p. 127), was taken up. As well as the contributions of Bartelt (1996), cited in Becoña (2006), who defines resilience as “a psychological trait, which is seen as a component of the self that enables success under conditions of adversity and that can be worn down or, paradoxically, reinforced by adversity” (p. 127). Something similar is suggested by Richardson, Neieger, Jensen and Kumpfer (1990), cited in Becoña (2006), who define it as “the process of coping with harrowing, stressful or challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protection and coping skills than those he or she had prior to the disruption that resulted from the event” (p. 127).

Consequently, in the context of the research, resilience was conceived as a protective and self-esteem-building factor for women heads of household and their families in the face of adversity, to face the crisis from a positive and hopeful perspective, as a shared challenge that leads to learning and spiritual growth, allowing them to recover and reorganize again to life in society.

However, in the context of the work with the group of women, it became necessary to establish their level of resilience, and for this reason the application of parame-

terized instruments was used. It was clear that measuring resilience is a complex process that merited interdisciplinary work and therefore it was pertinent to use instruments with the capacity to address the resilient phenomenon in its different dimensions, which could constitute an important opportunity for theoretical development on the subject to move forward in intervention proposals.

Therefore, the importance and relevance of the contributions offered by studies on resilience. These contributions allowed us to have a new way of seeing and understanding the processes through which people go through in adverse situations and how they respond to these from their potential and capabilities to generate positive adaptations. This shift frames a model focused on human and social strengths to respond to the traumatic and painful.

In the context of war, violence and exclusion suffered by several populations, the question is valid: How did the community that lived there survive, work and forge their hopes despite the harshness of the violent reality they lived through?

The situation of a deep-rooted and prolonged conflict, such as the confrontations of armed groups in our country, generates a traumatic experience in rural territories that is experienced as a rupture in the social networks that shape their communities. It is an experience that marks a before and after in the lives of individuals and communities; it is something unpredictable, that one must learn to survive and that provokes a loss of a part of the human being.

It is in this context of prolonged armed conflict and therefore of violence where resilience takes place as an invocative process that leads individuals and communities to the transformation of their conditions; to go through the deep pain produced by the personal and social trauma of what they have experienced, without rejecting it, and to extract from it the strength and a new meaning to move forward; to be reborn again strengthened, as narrated by individuals and communities that have lived closely the war and its consequences. It can be said that it is a rebirth like the one described in the legend of the phoenix. In the words of Lussich, “the phoenix has the power to invoke an experience that runs through every living person, and it is the experience of overcoming a tearing pain” (2011, p. 3).

Taking resilience as a conceptual reference allowed the group of women to reread, understand and resignify their adverse conditions, discovering what helped them not to remain anchored in what happened and to seek alternative ways to build new dynamics of relationship of incidence in the reconfiguration of their social fabric.

Likewise, reference is made to the conflict as another pillar that founded and oriented this work. Conflict as a phenomenon that has become normalized in the life of societies is useful to the extent that it emerges and reveals injustices, how people live, and points out areas where changes are needed, among other aspects. This way of conceiving conflict is based on the constructive approach, understood as a phenomenon inherent to life, which can be a trigger for constructive changes both personally and socially.

The opportunity offered by this approach is evident in conflict management and resolution to respond to a double challenge: political and academic.

- The “political” opportunity refers to the ambition to root a culture of peace by proposing, in particular, a reflection accompanied by appropriate means likely to emerge in a sustainable way from crisis situations.
- The “academic” opportunity corresponds to the need to offer specific formats, flexible possibilities of training in conflict resolution aimed at various actors.

Finally, allusion is made to peace as that horizon of hope that allows the realization of collective proposals where personal and social development are rooted; and intentional forms of new readings of what happens to human beings living in the territories are set in motion, especially when these have been immersed in scenarios of prolonged violence.

## **CONCEPTUAL BEACONS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WORKSHOPS**

In the collective unconscious are stored the memories of everything that could not be expressed, the suffering that violence has caused to several generations of men and women, the injustices committed, the outrages and violations, the dispossessions and escapes, the wounds, the murders and the mourning. Resistance, struggles, hope, dignity, courage and perseverance that allow us to be resilient in the face of adversity are also present.

In this collective unconscious, powerful antagonistic forces move, life and death drives that shape the way we relate to and act in the reality that surrounds us. When violence, pain and fear take precedence in a chain that is not interrupted, it becomes necessary to break this cycle, and it is then necessary to unlearn violence, pain and

fear through processes to foster and create humanity. We call these processes, following Contreras et al. (2017) in the primer “Unlearning war”, transformative awareness, from which we can lay the foundations for new ways of relating, growing and reinventing ourselves.

Each of these is described below.

## **SELF-OBSERVATION: RECOGNITION AND TRANSFORMATION**

The first process of transformative awareness is self-observation, i.e., mindfulness and inner listening to the events experienced. Whenever an unpleasant situation occurs, emotions associated with it (anger, anxiety, resentment, fear and anguish, among others) also occur, which we need to listen to in our own story and in the stories of others, recognize ourselves in them, both for the difference and for the commonality, and allow a conversation rich in meaning and significance. Conversing with others about life allows us to enrich our own perspective and with it the capacity to transform our personal experience. Telling ourselves is a way of “putting ourselves on stage” in front of others and listening to other stories is an experience that helps to create new views and meanings of life that provide other ways of proceeding and acting in the face of daily events.

This process seeks fundamentally to “digest” life, not to choke on it, to let the experiences penetrate deeply, to recognize ourselves in daily life. This ability to “digest life” requires dedicating enough time to go through the experiences and sensations, to let them express themselves fully and thus be able to truly flow, leaving behind what we have lived, without pending debts, without intoxication of feelings, without silenced voices.

Leaving an experience behind does not mean turning our back on it and continuing as if it had not happened, “swallowing it whole”, but rather recognizing ourselves in it, feeling the pain, fear and impotence, it produces in us, learning how it marks us, marks us, transforms us. This is the meaning of self-observation and conversation about the moments, the people, the acts, the emotions that inhabit life. It is to open the possibility of understanding ourselves better, to close experiences that have remained pending, often causing damage, to see ourselves as beings in permanent change.

It is a conscious process that helps to unveil emotional conditioning, identify and release accumulated emotions and, little by little, recognize and deactivate violence, pain, fear, installed elements that block the creative and action capacity in the face of adversity.

Simultaneously with the emotional recognition, we can work on the mental plane by being attentive to those beliefs and linguistic expressions that reduce our personal identity and limit our possibilities. Most of these beliefs are installed in childhood and their effects have impoverished life and limited capabilities.

This process of self-observation allows us to recognize the subtle forms of the expressions of emotions (anger, pain, fear, rage and impotence) and of beliefs, gestures and behaviors, which makes it possible to give them another meaning and place, other ways of expressing them and therefore other possibilities when relating to myself, to others and to the environment, in more powerful, harmonious and empathic ways.

Self-recognition does not imply a passive acceptance of what one is or the feeling of being finished. On the contrary, it allows us to relativize the different experiences lived, to observe them in perspective and to feel that in each moment certain options have been taken, discarding other possible ones. This process allows us to observe the resulting fabric as something unique, in which each experience has forged its own flavor and color.

## **ACTION CONNECTION: COLLECTIVE TRANSFORMATION**

In this second process the goal is to accept the multiplicity, the contrary tensions that mark us, the internal and external diversity that calls and the creative and loving ways that emerge. In the face of conflict between diverse desires or interests, confrontation, violence and death seem to be the favorite options of our culture. This implies relationships both within and with other people, in which differences are resolved in the exercise of domination of what is considered stronger (appropriate, beautiful, good and normal) over what is considered weaker (inappropriate, ugly, bad and abnormal).

Domination requires the always violent suppression or silencing of the desire of one of the parties, it does not assume the validity of the different interests and needs of the others, nor the construction of agreements and points of convergence. This

dynamic is based on a notion of power over others supported by force, aggression and denial.

It was learned to be subject to the game of power and to exercise it. The same logic of domination applies to boys and girls, to black men and women (if we are not black), to indigenous men and women (if we are black).

This process seeks the emergence and acceptance of different desires and interests and the construction of relationships with others guided by values of solidarity and cooperation. This difficult task requires a continuous creative effort in which harmonious solutions to daily conflicts are sought, jointly building forms of coexistence that privilege equity, respect for diversity, human dignity, peace and freedom.

The personal work of self-observation, recognition and personal transformation is developing a new intersubjectivity in which individuals and collectives mutually transform each other and articulate in networks that make it possible to deploy creative, solidarity and self-management capacities in the search for a good life and well-being.

It is vital to understand that we are responsible for a construction in which we can participate to break situations that imprison and limit, as well as to contribute new visions that help to create more harmonious and peaceful forms of coexistence; to know that we are part of history and at the same time holders of a history not yet told, bearers of knowledge, worthy of claiming rights as part of the social and political construction of the world in which we live. This process of collective reinvention makes it possible to leverage and weave new stories in which the efforts made every day do not fall apart in absurd struggles but are nourished by broader and more vital perspectives that allow us to continue walking and building together.

Considering all the above, the workshops were built, seeking to create vital and mobilizing experiences relevant to reality and the women's searches. Experiences that provide routes for those who travel the paths of their lives, recognizing themselves in the cycles they have lived, in the relationships they have built, in the memories they have kept, in the faces they have worn. Experiences that open the possibilities of going to the past as a source of knowledge for the present. Experiences that invite to open fissures in the perceptions and daily feelings in which spaces for creation and reinvention can slip in.

## METHODOLOGICAL CRITERIA IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE WORKSHOPS

The experiences proposed are based on some methodological criteria shared with those proposed by Mónica Tobón (1997), which are explained below.

- Playful experiences: that promote experiences of personal growth that are friendly, pleasant, welcoming, and that allow women to find an alternative to their daily routines, which are full of tension, worries and responsibilities.
- Meaningful experiences: that allow women to build a new vision, sensation or sense of themselves or the world. Through activities and situations that serve as devices that provoke sensations, reflections and openness to new questions, searches, ideas and values related to the way they perceive themselves, their relationships, their work, their ways of acting.
- Diversity approach: where differences, diversity and the multiple in the events that make us singular and common are approached and validated. Through activities that propose new approaches to the events to explore them with a look that reveals other options for interpretation and meaning
- Expression of one's own ideas and sensations: generation of situations that favor the expression of women in a careful and motivating environment in which it is possible to trust and allow the emergence of the different voices that converge there, setting one's own and the group's rhythm.
- Mobilization of creativity: which implies working with the capacity to invent, to imagine other ways of seeing an object, a situation, an event or an image, to elaborate a new understanding of the experiences lived and from this to recreate and model them again as carriers of vital lessons, enabling life. It also requires finding ways to nurture curiosity and the capacity for wonder that arises from uncertainty.

## WORKSHOPS

### WORKSHOP NO. 1. RECOGNIZING AND TRANSFORMING MY CHARACTER

**Figure 22.** *Texts of the participants during the activities*



**Source:** own elaboration.

**Objective:** to reflect on the experiences of pain and find another way to re-signify it.

**Estimated time:** 8 hours.

**Resources:** board, magazines, glue, wool, colors, cardstock, markers, tape, frosting, candles and drawings.

#### Activity description.

The facilitators introduce themselves and explain the objective of the meeting. They are asked to introduce themselves, to say what they would like to find in the work to be done; this information is written down on a flip chart or board. At the end of the workshop, this is reviewed again to validate if the expectations of the participants were met.



Simple work rules are also established to provide a space that is protected and cared for by all.

- Be willing to participate.
- Respect the different processes.
- Keep whatever happens in the space.
- Commit to themselves.

Dynamic of presentation: participants are asked to introduce themselves based on an object and then present it to the group.

### **Exercise: getting to know each other**

#### **A. Vowels in the name exercise**

Identify the vowels in their name to introduce themselves through the movements associated with these.

- A: identity, self-esteem (arms spread out at shoulder height)
- E: Surrender, empathy, service (arms and hands outstretched in front, open, giving)
- I: Connection with the transcendent, the sacred, the uncertain (arms and hands linked, directed to the sky)
- O: Inclusion, diversity (arms encircling, as if embracing)
- U: Production, concretizing, giving to the earth (arms and hands directed to the ground)

#### **B. Each one chooses a card with the animal she most identifies with and socializes it in the group, the facilitator takes note of this.**

## Exercise: recognizing

- **Contact exercise**  
Soft music, breathing of 4, 2, 4 to get in touch with oneself. Eyes closed, think about their daily life and identify what causes them pain.
- **Personal work**  
Cut out one or two images that represent that pain, that discomfort. Remember in which moments of my life this pain occurred, and with whom do I associate it. Socialize.

## Exercise: transforming

- **Creative work**  
Tear the cut-outs little by little and reconstruct with them a new figure, decorate it as you wish and socialize with the group.

## Exercise: sharing

What did I manage to see?  
What does what was built say about me?  
What do I see in others?

Facilitator's words that capture the lived experience.

*“Our first birth is through our parents and the second through ourselves”*

Octavio Paz

## Workshop analysis

The psychologist placed drawings on the floor of the room, so that the women could identify themselves with an animal. Once the cards were chosen, questions were asked such as: why do you like the animal on the card, why do you identify yourself with the animal, do you remember a painful situation, and so on. Afterwards, a magazine was handed out with the purpose of remembering an image that would be related to the symbol of pain. Then they were invited to transform those memories into a work of art.

This exercise was filled with meaning; willingness, attitude and an outpouring of emotions was observed in each of the victim women. There was a lot of crying as they socialized their artistic creation with a lit candle. To finish, they lit a candle that was shared, the light for all.

It is important to mention that this process began with the focus groups in which the women were oriented for the first time through questions. They talked about what they lived and felt in their territories marked by violence; they mentioned that the care and trust with which they were received was a key factor for them to be able to express themselves, since they had never had a space with an accompaniment exercise like this one. The participants proposed the dates for the workshops and that they be held in continuous full-day sessions.

This workshop began with a playful and creative dynamic that progressively allowed the participants to connect with themselves and the authentic expression of what they experienced. They were able to clarify those emotions and feelings that were blocked and that were silenced for so long, producing pain, resentment, anguish, fear, sadness and anger.

Through creative expression, they were able to re-signify these feelings, heal those deep wounds that the armed conflict had left in their being; transform them into purposes of peace, hope and possibilities of a full personal, family and community life.

From the different criteria of participation and local transformations, a construction of identity was denoted simultaneously with the collective conformation of this identity within the world of a person. Thus, we articulate a process of participation in which children, youth and other generations are part of, being aware of the barriers we establish to recognize the other as a person with capabilities and potential.

It is an opportunity to experiment with new creative and playful ways and it is a challenge because of the weaknesses, but above all because of the attitudes of empowerment that are learned and tested from and with praxis.

## WORKSHOP NO. 2. THE FIVE FINGERS OF MY LIFE

**Figure 23.** *Texts of the participants during the activities*



**Source:** own elaboration.

**Objective:** to reflect on vital moments, experiences and the ways in which women perceive themselves.

**Estimated time:** 8 hours.

**Resources:** board, magazines, glue, wool, colors, cardstock, markers, tape, frosting, candles and drawings.

### Activity description

The facilitator presents the objective of the workshop and collects the participants' expectations, asking them what they expect to learn from the work to be done, and takes note of their answers on a flip chart or board. At the end of the workshop, this is reviewed to validate whether the participants' expectations were met.

The rules of the workshop are mentioned to provide a protected and cared space for all participants.

- Be willing to participate.
- Respect the different processes.

- Keep whatever happens in the space.
- Commit to themselves.

### **Exercise: playing**

We are invited to make a circle and say the name of each one, each time harder, two or three rounds are made. In the same circle we massage the partner's back.

The participants are distributed in different parts of the room occupying a space. When the music starts, they begin to move freely around the room. Then, the facilitators will give the following instructions.

- Now we move like birds, light, soft.
- Now we move like hippopotamuses, heavy weights, we brush against each other.
- We are in a hurry, we are ants at work, we move fast, now in slow motion, we don't look at anyone, we go to a precise target.
- We move like monkeys, we climb trees to the top, we jump like monkeys.
- We enclose ourselves in an egg, we are very small, very small.

When the music ends, time is allowed for each one to stand up slowly. Then each one is invited to tell how she lived the experience, the difference between the movements and comment on which ones she felt more identified with as a person. Each time one of them speaks, the others can comment on her expressiveness, creativity, etc.

### **Exercise: remembering**

The facilitator guides a moment of relaxation for each participant to get in touch with their memories, then invites them to write down the five most important moments they have lived during their 20s, 35, 47, 53 or 60s (when I went to school, when I fell in love for the first time, my 15th birthday, my first child, having a job, making my own decisions, taking care of my mother or father, etc.).

Each one will draw the outline of her hand on a piece of paper and on each of the fingers she will write each of the moments.

The drawings are glued together as an exhibition, and everyone looks at the work of the others. On a board or flipchart, five columns are made, and what they wrote is collected in each one and read collectively.

### **Exercise: Sharing**

The perceptions of the chosen moments are discussed.

- What is similar about them.
- What they tell us about us.
- What they make us feel.
- do we move forward or have we stopped

### **Closing the activity**

The facilitators collect the experience and point out the positive aspects that each moment brought to reinvent themselves again as women. Collectively, a ritual of gratitude is performed, where the value of life and the possibility of redefining it despite adversity is recognized.

### **Workshop analysis**

The women were asked to walk around the classroom to a table and were given a sheet of paper and a marker so that they could draw the outline of their hand and write on each finger each significant moment of their life, whether positive or negative. Then they proceeded to form a circle and there they expressed the feelings that marked their life and closed with a story. At the end of expressing the facts and seeing that the fibers of the people were touched, a moment of contemplation and strengthening took place.

The experience of corporal and playful work provided a free, spontaneous space, without judgments, which generated an atmosphere of trust, tranquility and participation in the subsequent activities.

The organization of the group in a circle, starting with the oldest person and then closing with the youngest person in the group, allowed the recognition of ancestral wisdom and the empowerment of the quietest women in the group. Sharing the significant moments of their lives as women and finding common points reflected the cultural and social context in which they have developed and marked their lives and decisions.

By seeing how they have reinvented themselves throughout their lives, they were able to visualize new projects that were formalized in the following workshops. This led to the recognition and acceptance of themselves as women, of their bodies as personal territory, the development of their identity, self-control, understanding the body as something intimate, personal and their own. The body is seen as a power that was violated in its essence through emotions, sensations and feeling. Thus, it is recognized that when one ceases to be a subject to be an object, one feels violated and only the dynamics of forgiveness allow healing and recovery of that integral being again.

### WORKSHOP NO. 3. CONFLICT AS A TOOL FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

**Figure 24.** *Texts of the participants during the activities*



**Source:** own elaboration.

**Objective:** to understand the role of conflict in the construction of utopia.

**Estimated time:** 8 hours.

**Resources:** photocopies, newsprint, markers, pencils and colored wool (7).

## Activity description

### Exercise: Motivating each other

The facilitators greet the group and invite the participants to choose a person they do not know in the group or the person they know the least. Then they are given a piece of candy to give to that person and tell them what they want to achieve in the workshop.

### Exercise: working

The space is organized into three stations and the participants are divided into three groups, and they are asked to name a leader in each group. Subsequently, each group goes through each station and works on the activity that is proposed there.

At the first station, the activity consists of writing down the contributions they can make to the community and how they could see the results in five years. They also write down the skills that each woman has.

In the second station they find a playful space that invites relaxation and enjoyment. It is proposed that each pair give each other a gentle massage, then taste different flavors (sour, sweet and salty). At the end of the exercise, the participants shared how they felt about the experience.

In the third station, the participants were asked to write on a sheet of paper the goals they had achieved in the different stages of their lives (childhood, adolescence, youth and maturity) and those they have achieved in the present; also, the dreams and goals to achieve in the future: short-, medium- and long-term projects. During the activities the facilitator handed out colored wool yarn.



## **Exercise: remembering**

The space is set up with mats and relaxing music, the participants are invited to get comfortable and get ready for the activity. The facilitator leads an oriented relaxation to imagine a situation of happiness so that they can connect with it and experience the positive emotions that were present in that situation. Then they are invited to form a circle, share how they felt, and each one gives a sweet to the partner of their choice with a promise or a thank you.

## **Closing the activity**

The workshop concludes with the elaboration of their own bracelet with the wool yarns received during each of the activities, symbolizing hope and the intention of being happy in their life project.

## **Workshop analysis**

The women can connect with the proposed exercises, they become aware of the importance of enjoying a space for themselves, in which they feel recognized and valued. They experience that joy, care and enjoyment are vital aspects that have also been present in their lives despite the adversities they have experienced.

They become aware of the skills, strengths and goals they have as community leaders; feeling productive, creative and proactive also makes them project themselves with hope in the face of life and reality itself.

The women head of household were able to review their lives as an authentic existence, they do not live just for the sake of living, they live with meaning, time does not pass randomly, nor does it remain, it is dynamic and constant, in spite of the limited situations experienced in the case of the conflict, which have affected them socially, family, physically and personally, they have been resilient and have projected their lives, have overcome pain, have channeled life with social, family and community projects being human beings in permanent construction.

## WORKSHOP NO. 4. NETWORK OF ACTORS IN CO-MANAGEMENT FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING

**Figure 25.** *Texts of the participants during the activities*



**Source:** own elaboration.

**Objective:** to motivate the proposal of a network of actors capable of generating knowledge about the problems of the community group and its territory.

**Estimated time:** 8 hours.

**Resources:** photocopies, newsprint, markers and pencils.

### Activity description

The facilitator summarizes the previous workshop and gathers the group's expectations, then leads the creation of four maps. An economic map where the following are considered: interests, capacities, entrepreneurial potential, occupational aspirations and management capacities. An environmental map showing the resources under development in the region of San Juan Nepomuceno, their problems and alternatives. Another one of conflicts where the risks, causes, alternatives and management to be developed are identified. Finally, a map of networks where programs, local policies, institutions and organizations working for the development of the region are recognized and located.

After the completion of the maps, a plenary session was held where the participants socialized what they identified as relevant in each map, and this committed them as women leaders of the community.

## **Closing the activity**

The activity concludes with a creative presentation of the commitments.

## **Workshop analysis**

The women participants shared the commitments made in the working groups: They are committed to working as a team, and to making a commitment to associativity and the formation of micro-enterprises.

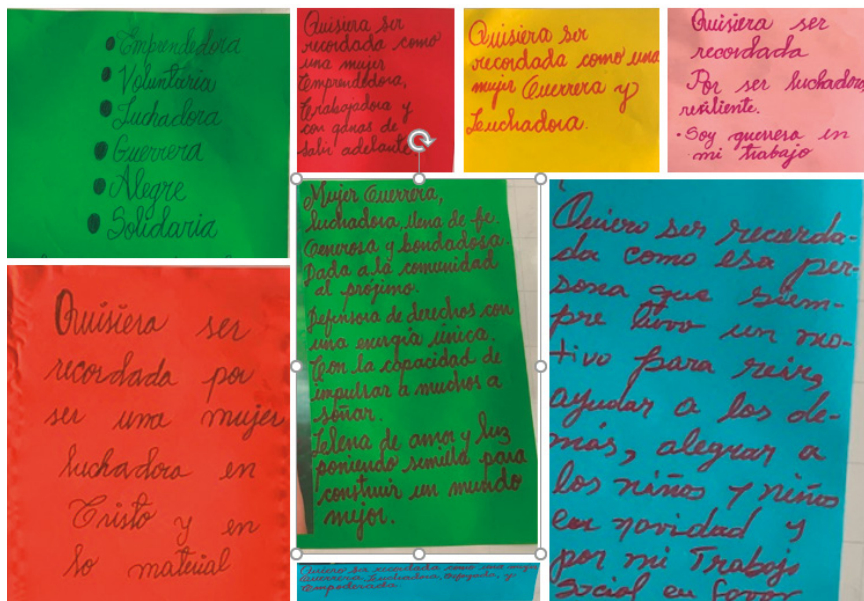
The researchers of the Universidad Nacional Abierta y a Distancia (UNAD) commented that their academic pedagogical project includes the *Sistema Social de Inclusión Unadista - SISSU and the Centro de Emprendimiento*, with which they can generate and support projects. The participants also comment on the idea of a rural community tourism project and for this they propose to network with UNAD, SENA and other foundations.

In the face of adversities or difficulties, the women head of household understood that they had to organize themselves to energize projects of family and community interest that would allow them to seek the greater good, improve their living conditions and those of the region. They recognized the need to promote entrepreneurship and the development of the social, economic and cultural context through the socialization of their short-, medium- and long-term projects.

The women heads of households understood that they had to organize themselves to energize projects of family and community interest that would allow them to seek the greater good, improve their living conditions and those of the region.

## WORKSHOP NO. 5. ILLUMINATING AND PROJECTING OUR HISTORY

Figure 26. Texts of the participants during the activities



Source: own elaboration.

**Objectives:** to provide an insight into women scientists who have made great contributions to humanity, showing in a brief way, in addition to their contributions to scientific development, the socioeconomic and cultural context in which they did it and the barriers they had to overcome, particularly because of their gender. To recognize the contributions that the women group participants have made to their community and how they want to be remembered.

**Estimated time:** 8 hours.

**Resources:** photocopies, newsprint, markers and pencils.

## **Activity description**

### **Exercise: recognizing ourselves**

Prior to the workshop, the women were invited to go to a photographic studio, hired by the researchers, to have an artistic photo taken. This activity was a central part of the motivation and closure of the workshops.

Presentation dynamics: through the case presentation strategy, the women participants were posed with questions and the possible answers to the situations mentioned in each case were explored through riddles, to break the ice and set the stage for the following activities.

Subsequently, images of women scientists performing various activities (dancing, singing or playing sports) were presented and contrasted with those images of people dressed in lab coats, in which actors participated, to guess who in fact were real scientists.

### **Exercise: transforming**

The following question was asked: Why aren't there more women scientists? In this sense, the participants were asked about how they physically imagine women who do science, which allowed us to know the imaginaries and stereotypes that the participants associate with people who do science, whether they are men, women, gays, trans, white or black, in relation to the very fact of being a male or female scientist.

Next, the exercise of images is used to explain the stereotypes that are created around what it is to be a male or female scientist and who the people who generate science really are, with the aim of transforming the participants' perception of gender roles.

### **Closing of the activity**

Finally, participants are invited to take a tour of the art exhibition “Coming out of the shadows”. At the end of the tour, they are given their photograph and the question is posed: how do they want to be remembered based on the inspiration of the exhibition of women scientists and the work carried out in the workshops?

## Workshop analysis

Some of the women felt identified with the life stories of women scientists, their contributions to science and society. Some participants felt inspired to study mathematics and other sciences, but due to the social prejudice of their time, family or partner, they were not able to do so.

The exercise made it possible to recognize that many of the women participants consider that those who mostly do science are men and white people. In fact, most of their partners made comments to them such as “studying is not for you”, “you won't be able to do it”, “now where did you get these ideas”, “you have other things to do”.

The women spontaneously commented on how their experience of life as a couple had not allowed them to fly, so the workshop became a space for encountering their feelings and deepest desires for personal, academic and professional improvement.

Some said that whenever they expressed their desire to study, they received comments such as “you are too old for that”. But after the workshop, they felt their desire was validated and the strength to carry it out emerged.

The commonality found in the responses to how they want to be remembered is for their service to their community, for being fighter and courageous women, for being cheerful, enterprising, supportive, and for their desire to strive.

## GENERAL ANALYSIS OF THE WORKSHOPS

The women victims of the armed conflict recognize themselves as survivors of the conflict, not as victims. They came to the workshops with feelings of stress, tiredness, sadness, pain, defeat or anxiety, troubled, wearing masks. But they left “full of faith, joy, happiness, content, hopeful, liberated, strong, calm, with peace, hope, optimism, free as a bird and satisfied” (textual expressions).

The research team carried out the intervention with women heads of household who were victims of the Colombian armed conflict in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, taking as a reference the diagnosis made from the application of a sociodemographic data sheet, the realization of focus groups and the filling out of parameterized psychometric instruments: the Personal Resilience Factors Inventory and the Wagnild and Young's Resilience Scale.

The elements provided by the diagnosis were fundamental to choose resilience as a central conceptual axis, which together with self-observation (recognition and transformation) and the action connection (collective transformation) oriented the intervention carried out. At the methodological level, the following criteria were considered: playful experiences, meaningful experiences, mobilization of creativity, expression of one's own ideas and sensations.

These aspects became key elements in the process of healing the wounds left by the Colombian armed conflict in the Montes de María, especially in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, and in the visualization of training alternatives and productive projects.

It is important to highlight that in the process of the workshops it was possible to see, through their statements, how the women, victims of the armed conflict, recognize themselves as survivors of the armed conflict and not as victims. It was observed that they arrived at the workshops with feelings of stress, tiredness, sadness, pain, defeat, anxiety, troubled, with masks, and ended up full of faith, joy, happiness, hope, liberated, strengthened, calm, with peace and optimism.

## Chapter 5

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research process carried out with the women of the Municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno shows how in each phase the action research methodology prevailed and how it facilitated a jointly constructed intervention work, where each phase of the research was validated with the group of women: planning, diagnosis, return of information, design and implementation of workshops, systematization and conclusions of the work developed. We can say, without fear of misunderstanding, that the process itself empowered the women who participated and the research group of the Escuela Normal.

In these aspects, a process of resilience was evidenced, the capacity to grow, to face adverse situations in life, with emotional balance, product of the healing and forgiveness process that has been carried out through the intervention, the accompaniment and the workshops.

The research team carried out the intervention with women heads of household who were victims of the Colombian armed conflict in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, taking as a reference the diagnosis made from the application of a sociodemographic card, the realization of focus groups and the filling out of parameterized psychometric instruments: Personal Resilience Factors Inventory and the Wagnild and Young Resilience Scale, where it was found that they were people with a high percentage of resilience and proceeded to potentiate, through workshops, dialogues and closeness, the capacity of the human being to overcome adversities and the management of emotions.



At the methodological level, the following criteria were considered: playful experiences, meaningful experiences, mobilization of creativity, expression of ideas and one's own sensations. These aspects became key elements in the process of healing the wounds left by the Colombian armed conflict in the Montes de María, especially in the municipality of San Juan Nepomuceno, and in the visualization of training alternatives and productive projects.

The research team provided psychological, philosophical, ethical and personal growth elements that made it possible to strengthen resilience, teamwork, renewal of hopes and life projects, dialogue, communication, acceptance, reconciliation and forgiveness processes.

Taking resilience as a conceptual reference allowed the group of women to reread, understand and re-signify their adverse conditions, discovering what helped them not to remain anchored in what happened and to seek alternative paths from which they built new relationship dynamics that influenced the reconfiguration of their social fabric.

Finally, this research marks a new direction in the framework of the actions that have been developed in different scenarios with the victims of the armed conflict, given that the central concerns of the State almost always revolve around processes to compensate the situation that the victims of the conflict had to live through, based on reparations of an economic or symbolic nature. However, these two actions, while important for facilitating the conditions for a peaceful society, represent a limit for the actions of governmental entities, because the interest of institutionality must go beyond the economic and symbolic. It must go beyond these frontiers, so, in a way, this research showed that the victims of the armed conflict need strong psychosocial attention to heal the wounds left by violence. For, despite time, the pains are still intact, and money and a word of apology cannot simply heal them. A whole process of intervention in communities is needed to delve into the souls of the victims, to know their pains, their sorrows, their feelings, their unfinished dreams and thus contemplate the possibility through psychosocial interventions to conclude inner dreams.

In a way, this was the differential character of the research, since the action was focused on knowing the individual realities of the 25 women victims of the conflict and thus making decisions to heal the spiritual wounds; so that they in turn could influence the life projects of their families, as promoters of peace and life.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout history, the face and the traces left by women in the different spaces and scenarios of society have been made invisible, especially those women of popular extraction who silently build social fabric in their daily lives; hence the importance of undertaking research in which the contributions of women are examined, to settle this historical-cultural debt. Therefore, research projects that favor the creative, productive, affective and spiritual development of women heads of households who are victims of the Colombian armed conflict should be continued, so that they become great multipliers of their integral growth process at the family and social level.

In the legitimate aspiration to make Colombia a democratic and inclusive nation, it is essential to bet on this type of research in which these women have much to tell and contribute to the healing of wounds and the processes of reconciliation, inclusion, peace and social coexistence.

It is of vital importance to continue working on studies and research on resilience as an interdisciplinary process, in a country like ours, marked by exclusion, marginalization, family and social violence with the firm purpose of advancing in the construction of a theoretical development on this topic to elaborate new intervention proposals.

Continue with the projection of the “National Observatory of Reconciliation and Social Inclusion” project, considering the promotion and training in aspects such as entrepreneurship in women victims of the armed conflict.

Research projects that favor the creative, productive, affective and spiritual development of women heads of households who are victims of the Colombian armed conflict should be continued, so that they become great multipliers of their integral growth process at the family and social level.

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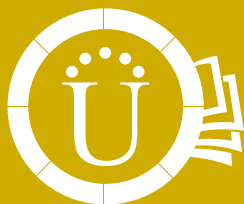
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# ANNEX 1.

## FOCAL GROUP

### QUESTIONS:

- How do you feel about the situation you have experienced?
- What situations or circumstances do you think you could heal in your life?
- What actions or changes have you made regarding your personal reality in the last year?
- What do you do to cope with some of the difficulties in relation to family and personal matters?
- What do you do to cope with some of the difficulties in relation to social matters?
- What would you like to do to face some of the difficulties you expressed in relation to personal, family and social matters?



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