Children's health under five years age inside the Wayuu community according to their culture.			
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#### **Abstract**

The current paper addresses the issue of child malnutrition that affects de Wayuu community located in the north part of Colombia. The analysis here exposed, is focused on a specific population group: the early childhood, it means newborns to 5 years old children. This research starts with a light review of some cultural aspects from the Wayuu community that will help the person who analyzes this issue to understand from the indigenous vision that is the one that has fought this situation from the beginning. Then, this paper continues with a deep look into the actions that are being taken to face and resolve this national concern situation and the development and consequences of these ideas. The studies done reflected a high rate of malnourishment in the children. These range from, diarrhea, parasitic, severe infections of the digestive and respiratory system, among some other diseases. On the other hand, some research articles show how corruption has slowed down some efforts to help the Wayuu community. The Wayuu children's malnutrition issue is a topic that reflects some of the darkest spots in Colombian society.

Key words: Culture, Health, Children, Community.

#### Resumen

El presente ensayo aborda el tema de la desnutrición infantil en la comunidad Wayuu del norte de Colombia enfocando el análisis en el grupo poblacional correspondiente a la primera infancia: bebes recién nacidos hasta los cinco años de edad. La investigación acá presentada aborda desde una breve revisión de algunos aspectos culturales de la comunidad indígena que ayudan a entender un poco más la manera en que ellos deben afrontar este problema de mortandad infantil hasta una mirada completa a las acciones que se llevan a cabo para la solución de este problema de preocupación nacional y el desarrollo y consecuencias de estas acciones. Los estudios realizados reflejan altos índices de desnutrición en los menores, estos pueden ser desde, diarreas, parasitismo, infecciones severas en el sistema digestivo y respiratorio entre algunas otras enfermedades. El problema de desnutrición infantil Wayuu es un tema que refleja algunos de los más oscuros puntos en la sociedad colombiana.

Palabras Claves: Cultura, Salud, Niños, Comunidad.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The current investigation is to present an analytical view about the traditional care of the children's health inside the Wayuu's culture, before their five years of age. Taking in account that in this Colombian culture exist factors such as the social, the cultural and the environment; which contributes in a negative way, to an improperly quality of the people's life in a big part of their territory, decision based on the hypothesis that the general life conditions are mainly reflected in the childhood. All this analysis is done in order to make an inside of the social problems and their possible solutions or effective actions which can be proposed, looking for an improvement in many of their life conditions.

Here we make an overview about the possibility to argue in this sense that the quality of life of the human being is reflected with the strengthening of the nutritional condition, as also it is necessary to mention that the kids from La Guajira present physical deterioration characteristics in their appearance, such as their skin color, which looks dull and parched; their gaze is too dull. All this things are just some of the most remarkable health problems.

Nevertheless, it is seen that kids under 5 years of age in this community has that accept the lack of food as something totally common, and in this way they could have a normal life, besides malnutrition can be a cause of retard growth and physical-mental development, until maybe die. Some other relevant aspects to mention about culture from La Guajira are their principles and beliefs which are very strict. a sample of this situation can be evident when a Wayuu wife prepares food and gives to the husband the best dish and then to her kids just scraps. It shows another obstacle to develop and give well-being to kids. To analyze this problematic it must be took into account that childhood is a priority in this situation, making it clear that kids are the future of the Wayuu culture. Points in which we have made our main effort in a way to relate, and to verify the variety of factors that induces some of the uncomfortable issues for this community.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In 2014 according to the screening of the "ICBF" (Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar: entity in charge of the prevention and integral protection of early childhood), reported by the foundation Juan Felipe Escobar, in the Wayuu community are 2,223 children under five years with serious problems of malnutrition, of which 525 have several malnutrition and risk of dying before the age of 7 years, considering that many of the children deaths are not recorded in the health system, according to Camargo, 2015 many children died at home and they are buried unreported; "There are many children who die, but in the bush. We buried them and do not report to the hospital", says a Wayuu woman report by the newspaper El Tiempo.

According to Morelo y otros, (2016), The serious problems of malnutrition reflected in the community Wayuu located in the department of La Guajira in northeastern Colombia, have been a major cause of deaths in children under 5 years of age, given that the malnutrition in children in the community have always been present, and even the figures presented each year are particularly worrying because they are increasing day per day. This is an amazing situation if we take into account that we are in the 21th century, even sometimes we criticize Africa due to his indifference but what are we doing with our problematic in the Guajira?

If we goes deeper in this rates, it is possible to find several influential factors such as: different terrestrial ecosystem that exist in La Guajira inside which predominate desert and dry jungle affecting the cultivation of food. Nevertheless, it is necessary to add the closing of the borderline with Venezuela, which is a factor that has a strong influence over the lack of food to the infants in this region. Even, it is significant to mark a report realized by Defensoría del Pueblo (2014) which let us know that during the borderline closing in 2014, The Public Defender with some others territorial institutions provided nourishment to more than 24.000 Wayuu families between February and May in the year already mentioned. According to this, we can say that most of institutions in Colombia are trying to solve this hard and poignant fact. however, it is necessary to all the workers of this institutions have sincere intentions to take out La Guajira of this nightmare and finally help Wayuu Children who really are the harmed.

In this order of ideas and according to Morelo, y otros (2016), the rivers unfortunately contribute also with this problematic now that are scarce and they are not abundant, the rain is infrequent then the agriculture decrease and animals die not having enough protein for children. on the other hand, the lack of safe water for the community is not effective bound to ironic political parameters, these facts are probably not responsibility of the community, but there is one factor that is influencing to the malnutrition and mortality in children under 5 years, this is the cultural issue.

The Wayuu community and many others communities have their beliefs, rules and ways to govern the population in a way that the things work and peace prevails with each family communication, but that way of acting it is affecting the integrity of children in the population. Mothers being heads of households, they have an order of prioritization that affect children's health due to they have to be responsible first with their husbands and then with the animals because they are who provide all supplies; then the house and finally children.

It is shocking that while many statal entities and activists make efforts to save this children, but their proper culture avoid or refuse every kind of aids. As a result of this, it is going to be developed the following literature review focused on realize: How does the Wayuu cultural group is involved in the children's progress health in their community?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The current investigation let know some aspects about the health of children under five years in the Wayuu culture with some factors such as the social, cultural and environmental fields, these factors contribute negatively to live improperly in the region and unfortunately are reflected mainly in the childhood. Therefore, it exists some cases like water scarcity, malnutrition, shortage food, imparted beliefs and even some cases of humanitarian aids that never were delivered for reasons of distances, by their population members, affect children's nutritional conditions during their growing period, but all this disconsidered members don't take into account that theses humanitarian deficit that does not contribute to the well-being of their population.

In this sense, it can be argued that the quality life of the human being is reflected with the strengthening of the nutritional condition. In addition, it is possible to mention that the kids from La Guajira present physical appearances with deterioration characteristics such as their skin color, which looks dull and parched, their gaze is too dull, and also it is difficult to walk when they get 2 years of age.

Nevertheless and in spite of this, kids under 5 years of age in this community have had that accept the lack of food as something totally common, and in this way they could have a normal life, besides malnutrition can be a cause of retard growth and physical-mental development, until maybe die. Some other relevant aspects to mention about culture from La Guajira are their principles and beliefs which are very strict. a sample of this situation can be evident when a Wayuu wife prepares food and gives to the husband the best dish and then to her kids just scraps. It shows another obstacle to develop and give well-being to kids. To analyze this problematic we have to take into account that childhood is a priority in this situation, making it clear that kids are the future of the Wayuu culture.

### 1.1 Figures

According to report of Ministerio de Cultura (2010) titled "Wayuu, gente de arena, sol y viento" carry out as a commemoration of 200 years of independence of Colombia, in La Guajira it exists 21 indigenous shelters, and according to the census of 2005 realized by DANE there live 270.413 people, registering the 48,88% that are men and the 51,12% are

women. Then, by each 1000 women, in this community are born 78 children by year. Nevertheless, based on the study Ministry of Culture, 50% of these children present a high rate of malnourishment mainly for children under 5 years of age.

In this regard, it is necessary to clarify that 50% of children are suffering from malnutrition in early childhood, who according to the Wayuu culture children become part of the family and are recognized as part of this just until they are old enough to work in agreement with González (2012); That is from the age of 6 years, they perform labors ranging from fishing, reap the harvest, grazing goats and even they go in search of water. This last task is one of the most complicated because the Rancheria river is the only that it is located in the region of the Wayuu community and many families are out of the way.

### 1.2 Wayuu Culture

This brings up to the question of whether children really are respected and if they have a value for their mothers, because it is evident that Wayuu rules are only focused on take care of the goods that they have and older people but not in the future of their community. Wayuu Community is one of the most interesting cultures of America, because of their resistance through hundreds of years. These aspects force the rest of the world to offer respect and admiration but if we check the Wayuu laws and culture, the opinion changes immediately. Thus, we will cite some of those Wayuu principles.

First of all, we must cite "El Palabrero" or "Putchipu" (Similar to a lawyer in the western society), this historical character is the most respectable authority in Wayuu community due to according to Alarcon (2012) is in charge to get reconciliations between families in conflict. This reconciliation depends on how the offense is going to be repaired, and at this time is when "Putchipu" must make an offer to both families.

Secondly, it exists some established parameters considered as an offense or affront in Wayuu culture. According to Alarcon (2012), these parameters could be about hurts, dowry, robbery, crime of kids and crime of animals. Besides, conciliations consist in delivering some goods to the victim's family such as Gems, Necklace, and the most common and important: animals like goat and chicken among others. Thus, we can understand why the animals are the most important in Wayuu society.

Even, animals are considered more important than children taking into account that animals are used as their currency of exchange. Because of this, children are just considered a responsibility that does not represent any money. In addition, another relevant situation is dowry given that Wayuu community uses their daughters as an object because first of all as Alarcon (2012) says, they help to extend the lineage and secondly girls represent more money or goods when family receive dowry in change allowing that their daughters get married.

On the other hand, Morales (2015) refered that through the newspaper El Espectador, that this indigenous group affirms that in the last 5 years, 4.700 children have died but ironically the local and national authorities indicate that they do not have any consolidated figures, even when they know the present terrible situation that reign in the region. Entities of regulation indicate that families do not report children's death and also they are buried with a registry in the centers of health.

### 1.2.1 Wayuu Medicine

According to Lopez & Lopez-Hernandez (2011), in the Wayuu Community the health care is divided between Western medicine and Indigenous medicine, according to this, they indicate that Western medicine named Ayulee is to deal superficial disease, physical body, benigns, and they think that these diseases can be cured at home and domestically by the people in charge as grandmothers.

In contrast with this, it exists the Indigenous medicine or Wanuluu to deal the other kind of diseases; these diseases are distressing owing to evils of the outside world, they are spiritual diseases according with their beliefs, and come from an unknown world. Furthermore, a person can be cured only with the help of a Chaman of the little town when they indicated that the soul go far away of the body and the person is dying, instead of being cured with generic medicine and being treated in a special way.

These two types of diseases have existed in the community forever, although Western medicine has gained strength as the community loses its traditions. The community classifies as western diseases: the parasites, stomach infections, diseases of the respiratory system and digestive tract and even according to the Nazareth's Hospital, in the

year 2005 the diseases above mentioned occupied the top three causes of morbidity that affects the population of ages between 0-14 years.

According to Lopez & Lopez-Hernandez (2011), these western diseases are a sign of malnutrition, and consequently it is a direct result of physical hungry in children's community, but as it has been said before, wayuu culture just pay special attention to indigenous diseases, so children who suffer malnourishment are attended with lower priority by their families.

### 1.3 Discussions

According to Morales (2015), DANE (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística: is the institution responsible of the Planning, Analyzing and Diffusion of official statistics of Colombia) maintain that in 2012, of each 1000 children under 5 years of age born alive, the 38,9% died. what bring it to the idea that it is just the "top of the iceberg", given that it does not exist exact figures and a decisive of this is that Wayuu families do not report as it was said before: "to report them is just to lose time, some of my grandchildren have died in hospitals, they rot there, because there is not suitable attention" said Arpuchana, Grandmother in the community. In the other hand, The pediatrician of the Clinic of Maicao indicates that by cultural issues are not consulting doctors nor lead children to hospitals as they seek alternative medicines.

These figures mentioned above, based on Guerrero (2015) have been the point of disagreement in many sectors of the country, such as the generated between the President of the Republic, Juan Manuel Santos and the President of the Association of Indigenous Traditional Authorities, Javier Rojas Uriana. The origin of the discussion was given by a speech of the President in which he stated that "only 294 children have been killed in the last 5 years for reasons of malnutrition". Which belies the Wayuu leader indicating that "it is outrageous that the president denies these figures when actually the association is who is visiting the Rancherias (group of huts or shacks that form part of a little town) and areas where lives of the community".

Even Guerrero (2015) affirms that the figures since January to June 2015 are 23 children died and not 11 how indicated the President Santos. Therefore, we can say that actually there is not an institution that can confirm with security which are the exact figures

until the moment, because to this situation it has to be added the deaths not reported by the Wayuu because when this happens, the families simply perform the rituals of burial without putting in the knowledge of the authorities conducting a possible census without truth information.

This situation, also affects an inhabitant of Pancho, a hamlet Wayuu, his name is Vicenta Siosi, who has a deep concern for the only river that they can provide water and food, and is that El Cerrejon shows interest to alter the course of the Rancherías river in order to exploit a coal mine that is close to him. Vicenta, presented a public letter to the President of the Republic in which he requests as a way to ask that he stop this project for the good of her community.

Moreover, according to Redacción (2012), the project is a plan to alter the course some 26 km and this hurts even more to children because as previously it was mentioned they are responsible for the collection of water and the search for food, which is very worrying in the case. On the other hand, mothers who are responsible for managing supplies in each household, are also in charge of the minor food ration, which must be for children since they are the last to be fed, first are the largest such as grandparents, uncles, the father of the home, then the animals and finally they.

Concerning with all these cases, it is possible to affirm that while institutions and and indigenous leaders discuss trying to define who has really the reason about statistics, many other unscrupulous people take advantage of humanitarian aids or even of resources provided by government. In addition, it could be the background reason about why many people are missing for aids.

## 1.4 Solution's Programs

It is necessary to mention that according to Londoño & Barraza (2015), the geographical conditions of the region does not favor much to the efforts of the State to provide care and aid to the Wayuu population, it is for this reason that the ICBF in partnership with the Office of the Public Defender have developed a program of Microfocalization which seeks to establish the exact location of the families and thus be able to offer the aid appropriate through the Mobile Care Centers.

These Mobile Care Centers have been a great help to the Wayuu community, since its entry into operation in July 2014 until July 2015 has provided care to approximately 85 children Wayuu who were in total malnutrition as Londoño & Barraza (2015) stated in interview with Blu Radio. On the other hand, the ICBF also seeks to offer aid of supplementary feeding for the family to which goes the attention with the purpose they have a balanced diet, It is difficult to check that the child is fed by the resources it receives each family, due to that the community is more important to be fed the person who works and not a child that a provides no benefits for the family and for the future of the community.

An example of this is the implementation of liquid Bienestarina for children as manifest Londoño & Barraza (2015), because previously it was offered to families powder Bienestarina and this ends up being used to feed the goats and develop Arepas; food that are considered a "Manjar" only for the older people, and continued high rates of malnutrition in childhood, even, It also seeks to provide support to the public entities of the Guajira as it is stated in public calamity since July 2014 due to the food shortage that suffer from these days.

This shortage, do mandatory to deal a very important point for the Wayuu communities in agreement with Londoño & Barraza (2015), and It is economy used to be based on the exchange of goods, such as food, crafts, animals and food through the Venezuela is harmed this exchange, since in most cases Wayuu families cannot easily find food and basic needs and if they find these products across the border, the Bolivariana National Army can take away whatever products, It is considered contraband, regardless whether or not they binational indigenous community.

Finally, the causes of malnutrition of children in early childhood according to (Especiales Pirry (2015) are serving as a shield for many state institutions that simply take advantage of the situation in which are the Wayuu children, Appropriating the resources intended to solve famine and brazenly claiming that if they are providing humanitarian assistance to the community when it is not true; as manifested Matilde Arpushana in this inform.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

The culture and traditions of life of the Wayuu community, specifically its social domestic organization is worth highlighting for the leading role that currently the woman has, in comparison with the great majority of indigenous communities and ancient communities not only in Colombia but the whole world, where the issues of a woman limits itself to home care, the reproduction and the upbringing of children. All the same, this protagonism cannot be simplified as the reason of the infantile malnutrition and even more, stigmatize the Wayuu women as bad mothers and to the Wayuu community as one with deficient capabilities for the upbringing and formation of human beings.

The real dimensions 'problem of malnutrition Wayuu's Child cannot be observed in its entirety due to the wayuu's idiosyncrasy that prefers to bury and not to report cases of children dying of malnutrition, furthermore the obvious preference of treatments using alternative or traditional medicine, that compared to decent treatment called Western medicine (the Wayuu in Guajira have no way of receiving) could bring other results, sometimes positive and sometimes not.

The government neglected in which indigenous communities live in Colombia is a factor of great importance to check the origin and development of the problems of malnutrition among children in the Wayuu community. Starting with limited economic opportunities, passing deplorable health conditions like hospitals without the capabilities to cope with the problems of the people in the area, whether or not they are indigenous, to the aid offered as Bienestarina it has been controversy instead of nutrients source.

The geographical location of the Wayuu community, which coincides with the culture that developed due to its environment, is another difficult factor that must be overcome for survival; weather conditions do not allow for comprehensive development of agriculture and forced the community to survive livestock and fishing. With the increasingly aggressive climate change, fishing will become more scarce and livestock sue the few resources that could be achieved, dyeing the horizon of this problem in an even more pessimistic tone actions are not taken promptly.

The cultural and child health preservation should be issues of vital importance in the development of a country like Colombia, given its multiculturalism and its demographics pyramid age shows a higher percentage of young people in the country, whom will be

Colombians larger generation' parents who must carry the country towards its development.

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# Appendice

