

## **How Do Waste-Picker Families Endure? Resolving Pains and Managing Support Systems as Close Relationship “Resourcing:” A CGT with Readily Available Data**

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### **Abstract**

Public waste-management systems in Latin American cities are defective. However, waste-pickers take advantage of this situation and create small family-based waste-processing units. However, little is known about how these families constantly meet their needs, manage suffering or even overcome poverty. How do they get to survive in such a context? This paper presents the classic grounded theory of *resourcing* from close relationships, based on a secondary analysis of data produced during 2009-2011 by a grass-roots NGO. The core category of managing support systems explains how a family constantly approaches or wards off towards an ideal work system through anchoring motivations and system adjusting. The resulting actual system, however, creates pains. They have to be resolved through tolerating dependency and negotiating against deviance, which is what finally allows the family to adapt or thrive to changing economic environments.

**Keywords:** Waste-pickers, Peru, family economy, child labor, informal economy, classic grounded theory

### **Introduction**

Urban waste-pickers (also known as scavengers or recyclers) are at the background of everyday life. However, they are always at the forefront of Latin American waste-management issues (Dias & Samson, 2016; Velis, 2017). Not even Peru's national census of 2007 speaks clearly about their characteristics, roles, or concerns. When a grass-roots advocacy project in Peru triggered executive changes over waste-picking regulations, the interests of the city government and even the country's president about them were ignited for the first time in decades.

A research team and a non-governmental organization supported recyclers during this time. They used a wide array of research designs to inform the interdisciplinary objectives of the project. The gathered data described recyclers' work, epidemiology, and lifestyles in the oldest district of Lima. Nowadays, the recyclers' *barrio* in which research was done has disappeared because of the building of a new

highway. I accessed the data produced during the period and performed a re-analysis over a set of qualitative transcripts.

My research project focused on open coding some of the said data. I found three different main concerns: reproducing family economy at home, avoiding the municipality's law enforcement in the streets, and participating in unions to respond to marginalization. However, the main concerns were later specified. This article describes the grounded theory of resourcing from close relationships as a way of constantly resolve the main concern of managing survival in families of recyclers.

### **Methodology**

This paper uses CGT research design for discovering how participants continually solve their main concern. As said by Giske and Artinian (2007), after finding a main concern, the researcher then focuses on one relevant core category to explain how participants solve it. But the theory is not ready yet. Following Glaser and Holton (2005), the use of theoretical codes integrates sub-categories and properties with the core category.

CGT is characterized by a two-step coding process: substantive coding and theoretical coding. The first step comprises open and selective coding (Holton, 2007). This process is powered by the ability to conceptualize with fit, theoretical sampling and the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1965), which allows to discover major categories, including a core category. After choosing (and not forcing) a core category, the researcher works selectively, collecting and analyzing data only related to the first and other categories related to it. The sorting of memos and theoretical sensitivity by reflecting on the fit of theoretical codes to the substantive patterns found in the data makes a CGT a well-grounded explanation.

### **On using secondary data in CGT**

This paper, part of an undergraduate dissertation project, was based on the available qualitative research materials produced during 2009-2011. They were 27 transcripts from 16 recyclers (members of a formal organization), from 10 recycler families, from which only 17 transcripts (just the ones mentioning families or family issues) were used. The transcripts were a mix of mostly unstructured and exploratory fieldnotes and transcripts. However, the materials were made for different purposes, by different people, and in differing timing. Moreover, the set was written with a generally low linguistic quality by novice researchers.

This project was based in readily available data; in other words, it made what some call a secondary analysis (Medjedovic & Witzel, 2005) or re-analysis (Wästerfors et al., 2014) of qualitative data. But, in absence of data collection, how can theoretical sampling and saturation proceed? Not much research has been written on this issue. Whiteside et al. (2012) noticed the problem of differing quality of secondary materials in Straussian GT, while Andrews et al. lists the concerns of working with data collected for a different purpose and with a different sampling approach compared to CGT. Glaser (2014) himself warned against secondary data "picked up as preplanned" (p. 18) and advised us to work with data collected by novice researchers: "In fact the less

he know the easier it is to let concepts emerge" (p. 18). Yet, guidance on this issue still seems lacking.

Glaser's other writings can be used as a creative starting point. In a text devoted to quantitative research (Glaser, 2008), he mentioned that secondary analysis is "uniquely well suited [for CGT but] severely limited for description" (p. 36). He also cited Anselm Strauss suggesting that "data need not be of the very best to yield a very suggestive, solid, important, multivariate conceptual analysis" (p. 37). Furthermore, in an old text, Glaser (1963) recognized the suitability of secondary analysis for teaching discovery. However, I noticed that few classic grounded theory studies were actually built from readily available data, while the majority of sources regarding secondary analysis come from descriptive QDA traditions (Andrews et al., 2012). Facing a difficult task and lacking guidance, I remembered a Glaser dictum: "Remember, GT is a general methodology than can use any data" (Glaser & Holton, 2005, p. 5).

Hence, the following strategy was followed. First, data were not coded using the "conventional" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 105) qualitative coding techniques but by paraphrasing large text portions (Mayring, 2014). This first step intended to give linguistic clarity and a wider understanding of my data. Considering that it is usually stated that CGT is not a method for qualitative description, here I discovered at least three main concerns in my sample, from which I chose managing survival in recycler families, with 73 paraphrases, 60% of which came from six participants from four recycler families. Paraphrases were further re-paraphrased by the finding of common patterns and later summed up by open coding and property-specification. As a result, initially nearly more than 20 categories were found that were latter reduced to six. But the problem with this approach was that working with limited theoretical sampling, codes seemed to fit more data than they actually referred to.

Inspired by the constant comparative process (Glaser, 1965) and remembering the closeness between CGT and other exploratory data analysis methods (Glaser, 2008; Holton & Walsh, 2016), I developed the following strategy for code-specification. After comparing incidents and codes, I built a double entry matrix to compare codes with each other. Going back to my raw data, I specified each possible code-pair patterned relationship. Sometimes I had to look at more than one transcript per participant to find this correlation. This produced an important quantity of hypothesis and memos. Each cell of the matrix was filled with small summaries of the correlations, adding the specific family names (my population) through ending parenthesis. While this can be seen as a mere descriptive step, it turned out to be effective as a substitute to theoretical sampling and for not confounding the types of correlations found. However, the filling of the matrix showed to be time-consuming.

Once the matrix was completed, cells were physically printed and compared. Hypotheses and codes were modified in a close comparison of the best and worst-fit correlations, while new, wider categories were formed and other codes were removed. This process was faster and produced a category list that was later shortened by simple comparison. Newly specified codes were compared again between each other in a similar way as done previously. Correlations were again grouped and coded, and

memos were produced. During the final step, core category candidates emerged from the most saturated codes, while sorting of memos and theoretical coding (by reading and applying Glaser's lists of theoretical codes) allowed to comparatively build the theory.

Even if theoretical saturation wasn't achieved as fully as in a conventional CGT due to the sample limitations, I believe that this process can serve CGT researchers as an alternative while working with secondary data. To address this issue, it is recommended to use some form of data visualization technique, which, in my case, was the use of network graphs with weights to indicate the empirical strength (number of interviewees) of each code between each other for each correlation step. Finally, is worth to note that this process was entirely in Spanish, and this entailed some translation issues during the theoretical write up (Tarozzi, 2013).

### **Resourcing from close relationships**

Waste-picking is a difficult job. Costs of waste materials change in a daily basis as a consequence of a global and local context. The networks of the recycling market are never fully transparent, and the job conditions of waste-pickers are reportedly precarious. However, waste-picking in developing countries is still seen as an alternative to job scarcity, income irregularity and the lack of education or other opportunities, and even as a consequence of the historical advocacy of waste-picker unions.

"Resourcing" is an in-vivo code, a code generated from the words of the participants themselves. The Peruvian Spanish slang for *resourcing* (*recursearse*) basically means managing to earn a living. In technical words, to grab the few resources at hand and invest them the most efficiently to generate the maximum quantities of money in the shortest possible time. The term was used by one interviewee while describing the economic activities done by her husband:

We sell just three blocks from here. There's a lady, they call her *Huayhua*. She's a gatherer (seller). . . We sell what we collect to her. Martin has been doing this for a long time. He has resourced since his youth. Now that's his job; we sustain our family just out of that.

Usually, *resourcing* is understood as a merely individual economic activity. However, as this excerpt shows, the meaning of resourcing works as well as a part of a family context (notice the use of both "we" and "he"). A focused census of waste-pickers showed that the whole family is involved in work roles. Moreover, all the members of the different family types in the sample seem to use resourcing through the relationships they have with others (partners, children, parents, neighbors, etc.). But, as we will see, this only generates new obligations and conflicts to be solved in order to maintain a close-to-normal daily productive rhythm.

At the more general level, resourcing from close relationships explains how managing support systems and resolving pains interact within a family system. By managing an efficient support system, the core category of this CGT, the nuclear

family approaches to a system of roles as well as departs from it and empirically adjusts depending of their current limited family situations. However, managing recyclers' families support systems generates an important consequence, which is the accumulation of pain in the family members. This is seen through the codes of tolerating dependency (of the trash and other families) and negotiating (gender and child labor related) deviance. This sums up in the resulting process of resolving pains, that can reproduce or change the support systems.

First, I will introduce the concept of managing support systems, and later I will discuss the process of resolving pains. It has to be stated that the discovered CGT explains interactions within an artificial system, an idea inspired by Glaser's Interactive Family of theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978). This is due to the hypothetical nature of the theoretical proposal and the present limitations of the data. Finally, I will compare my CGT with other theories on families that work as small-scale production units in developing countries.

### **Some context**

Waste-picker families usually organize around a work process, whose critical point is final selling of the materials initially collected in the streets by some member of the family, mostly a man (although this varies widely between and within countries). Families and businesses in Lima generally deposit trash bags or boxes of different sizes at the tips and corners of streets' sideways. Waste-pickers usually seek, find and explore them for relevant (priced) materials, carrying them on large *triciclos* (standard cheap large three-wheeled cargo tricycles). This implies that, at home, somebody must be in charge of the sorting, storing and cleaning of collected materials, whether big or small. This in my sample is mostly done by women and children.

Accidents after touching and lifting some materials are common, generating the need of care. Also, to control their access to certain city areas, municipalities normally employ violence against collectors on the streets through security officials. Unsurprisingly, added to street dangers such as car accidents and robberies, the transcripts talk of self-reported stress, anxiety and violent behaviors at home. Therefore, survival in the broadest sense doesn't just means to bring food to the table, but to be psychologically capable of enduring. Hence, without social support, waste-picking doesn't seem sustainable.

### **Managing support systems**

Managing a support system means, on the one hand, to conform to an ideal type of family support with two traditional main roles (worker and carer). Only a correct delegation of tasks allows to get ahead, but individuals have to also adapt to the always changing economic environment of recycling and the internal limitations of the families. Because of this, systems are based on strategies of adjusting the system in order to maintain the core standard features of work roles intact. Adjusting is sometimes not enough and requires a constant anchoring of individual motivations to properly work.

### ***Adjusting support systems***

This code is linked with an ideal type: one defined by the mutual support between the strong provider who works out of home and the dedicated carer at home. According to this ideal type, carers should divide their everyday time to able themselves to help providers and children, and providers should dedicate themselves to bring food to the table day-by-day.

The data show that this simple support system, although widespread, is insufficient. Because of usually having less time and disposition to dedicate themselves to the physically demanding tasks of waste collection, carers and cared individuals are usually part of trash-sorting at home. However, they are still dependent on the health and earnings made by the collector.

It could be thought that this depends entirely on gender roles, but the data and the literature disconfirm this (e. g., the community of female waste-pickers studied in Ecuador by see Solíz, 2014). Finally, it is worth to note that some children support their parents in the waste collection tasks (which is seen as part of a more "informal" or undesirable lifestyle, as will be shown), while the rest help with care tasks, housework, and waste-picking work at home.

These facts seem to complicate the ideal type, but note that even when this is true, the difference between the core activities (care and provide) is still clear. It is known by the work on ideal types that these exist as extreme stereotypes in the minds of researchers, but nevertheless are seldom fulfilled in their daily lives of participants. However, a clear pattern can be spotted: families try to adjust to the ideal system and at the same time to their limitations.

Recycler families' tasks are very demanding. Sickness and accidents are common due to the hazardous or weighty materials manipulated and carried. This causes temporary work pauses of some members of the support system, thereby generating the need to ask for external economic help or the absorption of tasks by some family member. Furthermore, performers of the two core roles use these strategies.

Sometimes providers are also carers, especially if women or children need special support (e. g., in case of disease), or when men are kids or teenagers. At the same time, some female carers share care and collection tasks, while they dedicate even more time to work before becoming pregnant and even as girls. During and after this event, additional help is needed. As stated in a field note:

He is the family head. Plus, the waste-picking job, he is in charge of housework (cooking, cleaning, etc.), for his wife is limited because of a health problem that affects her arm and feet. He is dedicated to the care of his children (in particular his younger daughter), although before she was born his wife helped him with the collection tasks.

Finally, the intensity of the children tasks also seem to adjust in relation to the changing needs of the support system. In other words, intense child labor is usually employed when the family is poorer. Children-collectors (alone or, more constantly, with their parents) constantly appear in the data in a negatively comparative sense. They also appear in a retrospective historical comparison sense.

To summarize, individual recycler families are used to adjust the support systems that are the base of the family economy. This adjustment is done towards an ideal binary-task-based type, but is also limited by the available human resources and the intensity of the current economic needs. Moreover, I see three empirical types of adjustment:

First, a "good team" family type that sticks together and where members support each other in the long run, which can or cannot include help from the outside. Second, an "imbalanced team" system, where a man or a woman carries the major part or all the burdens associated both roles, requiring constant adjusting due to exhaustion and other never fully-fulfilled needs. Third, a "failed team" system, where one of the two main role-types is absent, and no conventional adjustments are possible.

We will see how the system adjustment generates different kinds of motivations. For now, let's look at the need to support originated by the support system in individuals through the category of anchoring motivations.

### ***Anchoring motivations***

Recycling to survive isn't an easy job. This is why, for new recyclers, configuring an efficient support system takes some time. The difficulty increases for both too young or aged, while the system leaves aside the sick and pregnant women. And, as was presented previously, the support system continually adjusts according to available resources and current needs. On the flipside, the fluctuating adjusting of said systems runs in parallel to the search and selection of individual motives by recyclers.

This defines what I call anchoring motivations. Specifically, waste-pickers usually anchor themselves in the idea of taking care of their offspring. Sometimes, this idea is understood in terms of taking care of them directly (i. e., feeding or taking care of the sick), others indirectly (i.e., "my family/child is the reason why I work"). Moreover, this motive gives recyclers enough confidence to keep going on (that is, trusting the imperfect support system they have built for themselves). Recyclers in the three empirical support system types identified show anchoring of motivations. This applies even to the last one, the so-called failed team: "I neglected my work and I come back now after a while... I always celebrated a birthday for all my kids. . . So, now that Christmas' coming, I am fully into work to give him a good Christmas."

Anchoring motivations is present in people of all ages (showing in a different form in those people who don't have children) and in both sexes. It is present in those who collect and those who care, and in recyclers with less and more demanding tasks alike. Apparently, if caring of another family member who's not a child is a priority, the

offspring is still the motivation. It can be argued that it even creates the original need of many parents to help their grown-up children.

This universality gives this behavior a norm-like nature, and the external compliance to the norm seems to be an indicative of social desirability for recyclers. If those strong enough to provide decide not to work hard while their family face poverty or hunger, they face sanctions, like family conflicts that start around demands from fathers to jobless sons. And, on the contrary, if families center around the caring of children, even when they don't have the economic or human resources to do so, they receive the help of other members in the family or even community members.

Furthermore, recyclers and recycler families (though this is a strictly individual behavior) use anchoring motivations to socially distinguish themselves. Interviewees mentioned a wide range of objectives: to move to an apartment to give comfort for their children, to buy Christmas presents for a child, to save money and go visit a far-away daughter, not to involve kids in the hardest work tasks to let them study, etc. Note that every one of these desires potentially informs different actions of money earning, saving, and spending, and that making money by urban waste-picking is a hard and even dangerous job.

### **Resolving pains**

While focusing in family economy, support systems create non-economic consequences in families, like the concern for child-abuse and conflicts between helper and helped families. Recycler families are not far from constantly generated pain. Resolving pains appeared rapidly at the open coding stage, first conceptualized as "enduring" and "making others put up the suffering." One interviewee saw this as an individual experience ("each one carries their own pains"). While this is true, pain seems to require the existence of trustable support systems to be relieved. However, the only stable property of support systems is the individual anchoring of motivations. Thus, it seems very likely that the pain at a family level remains invisible until some or various family members make it evident.

I propose that resolving pains and managing support systems are the two sides of the coin of close relationship resourcing. All families tolerate some degree of pain. From the available data, it is possible to see that families at different levels of pain correlate with the effectiveness of their support systems. In other words, the variability in the different forms of pain seems to be explained by the different levels of effectiveness of adjusting support systems (as shown, e. g., by the "good," "imbalanced," and "failed" team types). Imbalanced systems and families with unfulfilled necessities usually experience family conflicts and violence. And the major part of families doesn't make "good" systems.

Resolving pains indicates two distinct codes that relate to specific system adjusting strategies: tolerating dependency and negotiating against deviance. The first accounts for the tension of co-dependence and setting limits within and between families. Alternatively, negotiating deviance indicates the switching of certain social norms regarding work and family life during the family mobility process. In both cases,

there are pain accumulation and releasing moments, but they are better resolved in the second one.

While tolerating dependency refers to the everyday tension in recycler families, negotiating against deviance accounts for a rather long-term change. Thus, it is normal to see one as a more adequately resolving pattern. But this is not the case. In fact, the patterns of creating and suffering pain unites both concepts, and recyclers try to resolve all pain as part of their survival process. In other words, resolving pains is never a perfectly accomplished cycle.

### ***Tolerating dependency***

Recycler form dependency bonds to be able to survive, both with trash and other family members. Through tolerating boundaries, recyclers manage the daily pain generated by the work tasks, encouraged by their anchored motivations. This toleration softens the suffering, while making the family receive some of it, but they are always inconclusive, because they still let pain to be generated.

***Tolerating within-home dependency.*** The support system created by recyclers and their families has a stage. While collection happens at the street, the storage and sorting of collected materials usually takes place at home. It is a moment of interaction between collectors, carers, and cared members of a same family. They can't storage outside their houses because it is illegal, and the municipality agents often surveil their entrances. Many stories of disappeared bikes and conflicts with other community members confirm they can't do it even informally.

For these reasons, recyclers cannot be completely separated from the garbage at home. They even look for supplies in it. In other words, they become co-dependent with the trash.

Thanks god, the school pants, shoes, and shirts are presented to me, and my son is studying wearing that. . . . For example, everything I wear is what I found recycling. Everything my kids and my wife wear, I found recycling. It's just I don't get enough money! It isn't enough for anything, just for eating, no more than surviving.

But accumulating waste in home carries some risks, sharp and toxic materials among the first. Furthermore, toxicological evidence confirmed that these risks are particularly worrisome among this population. Despite this, recyclers recognize the consequences and they mainly point towards the risks for their children. They can't get rid of the materials once and for all, but they can learn how to negotiate with the risk in order to protect others. They need to learn how to live in contact with garbage in a small work space.

I try to keep an adequate workspace. I try not to mix my home space with the recycling space. So, I do sorting right there in that corner facing the main entrance of my house. But this harms me too because I am working with paint

cans and . . . they are toxic . . . so little by little I try to get rid of them, even if I need them anyways, tho.

Along with this woman, four individuals recognize that this is not an easy move. Coexisting with waste somehow adds to all the suffering of the hard recycling job. Since they form a co-dependent tie with waste, I suggest that some recyclers need to learn how to negotiate with risky waste individually. But, more importantly, they need to convince carers that storing those materials is completely necessary, especially if they have children at home. These negotiations aren't always perfect.

Doris: I have seen him working without any gloves. I should too. But still...

Martin: I believe gloves are okay, but maybe just for some things, as you say, like glass and those things. But in carrying trash, tying it up. . . they're annoying. . .

Doris: They won't allow you to analyze things by touching. . . . But I anyway think he should use gloves. I believe that's why my girl gets sick, again and again. . . . I helped him when she was a baby, and I just washed my hands. So, I guess I was contaminating her . . .

Martin: She makes her drink cold milk. When her body is warm, she gives her cold milk!

Logically, broken negotiations will lead to family conflicts seen in this case and a number of other ones. Furthermore, the pattern shows again intermingled with between-family conflicts. But even old and single recyclers live like this, and conflicts make part of their lives as well. Thus, it can be said that the general concern generated by a hazardous work space is resolved through negotiations, but they aren't always effective. However, they seem as the only way to resolve the pain and take care of children.

***Tolerating between-homes dependency.*** The second way in which pain is resolved starts in the systemic adjustments that require the help of other families, and specifically the provider family. Many relatives help recycler families, which are constantly adjusting their support systems according to their limitations. Also, this is shown by the relative statistics of land-tenure that compares Lima and the population here addressed. By normalizing this help, families become co-dependent.

Helping is a social imperative among recyclers. Between-family help allows to survive in times of need. This help can involve sharing knowledge to work, work burdens, money, a place to live and even security. Recycler families can receive help from parents and at the same time from other family-members. On the contrary, extreme isolated cases are seen as deserving unconditional community help.

Because I take care [of my sick] husband, I can't go anywhere now. Sometimes my son brings me left over junk for me, and with that I put together some money for the month. That added to what the neighbors give to me. And sometimes I also go out and I use whatever I get to earn something, even . . .

[my two sons] died recently, and my other son works but he gives me anything at all.

This particular case contrasts with recyclers who get help from their parents. This kind can be more or less conflictive depending on the helper family power. On the one hand, there is disciplinary dependency. In particular, renting a room demands multiple-family cohabiting. Conflicts originate in not paying the rent, comparison of rights or life-styles, and other mutual complaints that appear with time. On the other hand, cooperative dependency is characterized by flexible parents, and doesn't generate suffering. Compare these two examples:

There are a lot of trouble with the brother of my husband. He had told Juan to build a second floor for the house, and three weeks ago he came here. They started arguing . . . Meanwhile, my daughters were watching TV in the first floor. . . . They almost hit each other. My daughters came out crying, telling them to stop.

Sometimes my daughters don't have an even job . . . in the firm they work at . . . . So, their work last a short time, sometimes days, or two weeks. . . . In those moments I have to give them a hand.

Tolerating between-homes dependency is also a role differentiated pattern. Providers are used to receive help from their parents. This help is usually related to stability: provider men give away bikes, work options and spaces to other providers ("my dad gave me this bike," "this little room his dad gave to us"). Compared to them, carers usually receive sporadic help due to pregnancies, sickness, or having no other options for help, as shown by direct support for doing tasks, loans, and sharing work knowledge (from the woman cited previously: "my mother-in-law, she tells me 'Doris this is coated paper' or 'this is plastic'"). Also, they seem not to ask for help to their parents as providers do.

Worth noting is that more disciplinary dependency turns to a greater independence desire, which expresses by establishing limits for help to avoid creating further compromises (as in "we're thinking to move to another place"). But this, obviously, depends on the capacity of the family to become independent. But it is important not to forget that cooperative dependency is still dependency too. Thus, by tolerating dependency, recyclers reproduce the between-families helping mechanisms, even if they allow themselves to soften conflicts.

### ***Negotiating against deviance***

Negotiating against deviance implies an accumulation of tensions. Formally, these tensions are related to the recycler families' social mobility process in the long run. This is not an easy process as it usually involves family conflicts and confronting ideas taken as norms in the past, like the compliance to gender roles and the acceptance of child labor. But these are also two areas that should take a socially accepted form. Negotiating against deviance is the difficult process of switching the social norms that families comply to while they economically grow.

***Negotiating gendered conflicts.*** The third effect of the constant support system adjustment is the accumulation of pain through sex differences. Chi-squared data confirmed the significance of dividing work tasks by sex in the sample. Ideally, providers (collectors and sellers of waste) should struggle with street violence and defend the family in case of conflicts with other families. But these providers are not always men:

And look what time is it! What time will he leave at? He's not going out today, I don't think so. Also, things between us aren't working out recently. It's not been so long ago that he's realized that he's leaving his family aside. I talk to him and try to persuade him to go out to collect together, but he says no, that I have to stay with the baby, that he's still very young and I have to take care of him. But I tell him to go out and see if we can collect a bit more.

I couldn't find one family where a woman dedicated exclusively to collection and a man to care. The opposite was prevalent and eventual shared roles too. And while children didn't have work roles divided by gender, more limited patterns emerged in adulthood, with all women dedicated to some form of care. Even women who mainly worked as collectors had a main focus as carers, as can be deduced by these excerpts:

[. . . ] because I also collect paint cans, which are toxic. But what else can I do? I need them too . . . . And neither can I leave my daughter. What would her life be without me?

My husband can't work because of an accident he had. I am stressed all the time, thinking in the things I have to do, looking for my husband, that he is well, that my child doesn't get asthma.

Additionally, from eight individuals, four men and four women both collect and care or have taken both roles before. However, from these, two women dedicated entirely to collect before having children; and two men only dedicated themselves to caring others during a particular spell of time. Women are the only ones who talk about "time" (as in "if he collects I have more time for my two little children" or "I keep thinking in the things that are left for me to do").

Enduring in pivotal moments shows differently between sexes which is evident when comparing the responses to conflicts between different families. Both men and women find agreement in the need to be strong, to endure recycling. However, conflictive or failed negotiations typically involve men as strong opponents. Specially punished are jobless or limited men, what seem to confirm the enduring acceptance of the core ideal typical features of recycler's systems. Talking about these conflicts, women instead focus on "machismo" and feeling fear or helpless. In contrast, less dependent women also free themselves from recycling routines; this coming with the cost of needing help of others with care or even money if a job is not stable enough.

The binary and prevalent difference between showing strength and sorting out limitations is striking. But in various cases, female action or words define the future of this divide. Indeed, where women get upset with men or have a wider margin of

action, change within the family seems plausible. This can be shown in examples where women choose to complain about the conditions that certain men keep them into (including conflicts and hunger).

It is possible to theorize the implications for some families of the ideal type that gives origin to adjusting. We could first add to it that men and women could be said to be expected to respectively collect and care. However, as previously stated, the ideal type is merely a model to which they compare themselves.

In reality, the work process and its adjustments generate pain, which resolves through gender-differentiated conflicts that also exacerbates the acceptance of the ideal type. However, tolerating gendered conflicts generate even more pain. On the contrary, a smoothening of some conflicts occurs when families agree to depart from the ideal type after a negotiation process (by assessing conflicts directly with men or by chasing jobs outside recycling), which usually seem to happen after crises have taken place.

***Negotiating Child Labor.*** For a matter of ease, kids and teenagers alike are considered children. Child labor was a taboo among recyclers, despite indirect references. Four interviewees said to have collected waste with their parents as children or to be currently doing so with their own. In other two cases, there was an important involvement of children in care tasks. In all, the time dedicated by children interfere with school, even in the caring second case: "The interviewee says that his son has had troubles in his educational process, due to health issues [that affect her mother] (a critical spine problem), which is disturbing for his son. This is causing him bad grades at school."

On the other hand, child labor doesn't always create the same amount of pain. Two interviewees recalled their work experience as children positively, for example, while describing turn-taking and the managing of work hours. But nowadays, recyclers actively try to avoid that their children collect waste, or at least to ease the burden by not letting them get in contact with hazardous waste in work-at-home tasks. Variations seemed to parallel the presence of some patterns.

First, at least from the recyclers' viewpoints, informality correlated with the abuse of child labor, which could deductively also indicate pain. As was evident, recyclers' stories also revealed that the importance of child labor in the past, when families were also poorer. However, recalling child labor in a positive light seemed to depend more on the actual team quality of the family, and less on the relative negativity of the memories. Indeed, it shouldn't be a surprise that poverty generates pain, and that getting out of poverty relates to the desire of ending it.

Also, the concern about the abuse of child labor was more prevalent among those who anchor their motivations in childcare. In other words, most women showed concern about the limits of child labor. But also, some men insisted in being flexible about the obligations of children, and particularly those who have been involved in some role of care. This opens up the idea that concern about the limits of child labor and the departure of the ideal type could go hand in hand.

Nevertheless, it could also be said that caring about children always provide an economic benefit. Not charging kids with too much work helps to adjust the system when facing emergencies and long-term family limitations. As was stated in a field note:

Then, I conclude that in the case of this interviewee, child labor can't be exactly seen as a problem. That is, it is not economic exploitation (long hours of hard work)... Activities such as helping at home, at a family business or collecting waste to get some cash during holidays or non-school hours. And finally, this kind of work helps the family in the present.

To summarize, children should submit themselves to the grown-up designed family rhythm. But the time load allocated to children tasks depends on the concern that the family has about the consequences of child labor in the children's future life. This concern depends, particularly, in carers. Judging by past and present data, one could theorize that this process unfolds in a way similar to tolerating gendered conflicts. However, the data seem to show that it also depends on the effectiveness of the support system (i.e., getting out of poverty). Thus, it could be a parallel but more slow process that steams from and contributes to systemic change in the long term.

### **Discussion**

Usually framed as part of the sometimes loosely defined "informal economy," waste-picking has been approached from the individual point of view. But now we can see how the activity is done at its fullest thanks to the secondary analysis of data produced during one year of exploratory field research. The theory of *resourcing* applies to groups of individuals as a research unit, grasping the ways in which families of waste-pickers survive in a day-by-day basis.

At least since the 1980s, Latin American governments and development NGOs showed a major interest in the life conditions of "marginal," "poor," or "informal" social groups. More recently, participatory and small-scale economic sustainability approaches better respond to the region current development status. Hence, explaining waste-picker individual and family survival can help to defy some obsolete frameworks still guiding negotiations and policy decisions regarding this historically overlooked group. This is even more pressing when one considers the delay in recycler formalization initiatives in Peru compared to other developing countries (personal communication with J. Herrera, ex-president of FENAREP; see also Rateau & Tovar, 2019).

Two popular but contrasting frameworks are used to support waste-picker families' survival. The social and solidarity economy theory (Coraggio et al., 2011) tries to understand and make visible the wide diversity of small-scale informal economic forms in developing countries, including cooperatives and family economies (Arruda et al., 2015). This theory also states that capitalism and modernity is constantly defied by the so-called small-scale cooperation. On a more management-related end, the family business approaches (e. g., Alderson, 2011) explore the optimization of family capital generation through capitalism.

The theory of resourcing from close relationships relates to both ideas, because it explains capital creation through human resource management and the creation of bonds that defy or admit economic exploitation. The grounded theory also explores the place of carers and those who are cared, a recurrent theme in feminist economics, linked to the first. Exceeding the various accounts of informality, still popular among those working with similar populations, the theory explains how family members manage economic and emotional support when framed by an extremely demanding context.

However, several theories have tried to do the same before. For example, the theory of survival strategies (also named as life strategies, family strategies, among other terms) focuses on the systems that frame family economies and the resources managed by them and its members, including social capital. This theory is common in rural studies (Ames, 2014; Fontaine & Schlumbohm, 2000; Najman, 2019) and has been used too to understand the economic adaptation of rural-urban migrants in Latin America, particularly since the 1980s (Altamirano, 1983; Béjar Rivera & Álvarez Alderete, 2010; Tovar, 1996; Uquillas et al., 2003).

Nevertheless, there are some differences between this theory and the theory of resourcing. In the first place, survival strategies include a wide range of social, cultural, demographic, and political phenomena; while these can be present in the substantive population, the focus was only on families. Secondly, urban recyclers in the population were far from being newcomers striving to survive in the city: the population are inhabitants of the very traditional Cercado de Lima district.

Third, the survival strategy theory has been widely criticized for preconceiving rationality (Cuéllar, 1996; Rodríguez, 1981; Torrado, 1981). As was shown, the family decision-making process allows for ambiguities and confusion, and is far from being adequately understood using rationality axioms. Hence, even if more recent accounts (e.g., ordinary rationality) can give a new light on the phenomena we are interested in, we develop an even more data-grounded model for achieving the same.

This theory has, however, some data limitations. Theoretical sampling wasn't possible and some codes need to be further saturated through new interviews, ten years after the original codes and interviews were collected. This could also be a great chance for verification. Additionally, the linkage between tolerating dependency and the core category is still somewhat weak. But, since the population was mostly men with a balanced sample size, great care has been put to avoid pre-conceived gender relevance (Glaser, 2002).

## **Conclusions**

The theory of resourcing from close relationships explains the constant interaction between managing a support system based on work roles and resolving the pains created by such a system. The resourcing further optimizes according to how well poor families adapt to an ideal support system type, according to their limitations, and fueled by motivations anchored in the wellbeing of the most vulnerable. But building systems isn't perfect, and the economic progress of a family will depend on within and

between tolerating and negotiating against pains. This theory, as opposed to other ones, accounts for the short- and long-term tensions within families of waste-pickers as economic units. However, it could be useful to understand other delicate interactions among urban social groups and even wider socio-economic phenomena dealing with survival.

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