**The Role of Women in the Colombian Workforce**

Gender roles in Colombia have changed with the migration from rural to urban areas, but family and household organization is still marked by sexual segregation and a difference between male and female goals. The traditional role of the man in the Colombian household is to provide for the family, while the traditional role of the woman is to care for the children and the home. Today, with more women holding higher-paying jobs and occupying prominent positions in Colombian society, these traditional roles are not as common in urban centers but are still evident in rural regions.

Throughout Colombian history, lower class women have worked outside the home to contribute their salary to the family's survival. In fact, there were two women for every one man working in textile factories until the 1940s. In these factories, different jobs were coded “male” and “female” jobs. In the 1920s and 1930s, female dormitories put young women workers under the care of nuns, even during non-working hours. If a woman became pregnant, she would likely be fired. Women often helped each other keep pregnancies and marriages secret to avoid losing their jobs.

In today’s modern economy, women hold more powerful positions in the workplace, but female roles still vary according to social class. In upper class and some middle class families, women avoid working outside the home in order to preserve family status, honor, and virtue. Women from lower class and lower-middle class families often hold jobs outside the home or work in the fields to contribute to the family’s subsistence, giving them a greater degree of equality. Many couples farm fields owned through the wife’s family.

Over the last few decades, women have assumed visible and important roles in society. The changing role of women was evidenced in 1982, when the Women’s World Bank was established in Colombia to provide small loans to women starting their own businesses in rural areas. Upper class and middle class women dedicate themselves not only to the family but also to social issues and the church. Women from these groups hold a number of prominent public positions and are considered among the most politically active in Latin America.
As women in working positions begin to earn more respect in Colombian society, men’s and women’s roles will likely continue to change. Urban centers are leading the transition of these gender roles, but recent efforts to support working businesswomen in rural areas have contributed to the growth of female entrepreneurs in remote locations.

Adapted from:


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