Care Economy Migration and its Impact: A Review of Methodology of Related Studies

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ABSTRACT

Care economy migration has become a significant global phenomenon, particularly affecting women from developing countries who migrate to high-income nations for employment in care-related sectors such as elder care, childcare, and domestic work. This paper critically examined the methodologies used in various studies on care economy migration and evaluates their effectiveness and limitations. The review highlights the role of different research approaches, including qualitative and quantitative methods, literature reviews, and policy analyses, in shaping our understanding of migration experiences, labor inequalities, and policy frameworks. Findings from the reviewed studies indicate that studies used literature reviews and policy analysis, in depth interviews and ethnographic methods to explore the lived experiences of migrant caregivers. In addition, some studies used quantitative methodologies to assess the economic valuation of unpaid care work and examined the migration decision-making process through a multi-sited qualitative approach. While each methodology provides valuable insights, their limitations, including selection biases, lack of longitudinal analysis, and insufficient use of mixed-methods approaches, hinder a holistic understanding of care economy migration. Addressing these methodological gaps was crucial for developing a more comprehensive and equitable understanding of care economy migration.

Keywords: Care economy, care worker, inequalities, methods, migration.

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INTRODUCTION

Women migration related to care economy is the emerging issues of 21ˢᵗ century. The global trend of migrating women from the least and developing country to the developed country was revealed in different studies. Mostly, women migrate in search of generating income in care economy works for instance age care, house work, child care and domestic work. Several migrant women are employed in care-related work, particularly in high-income countries where demand for such services is growing due to various reason like increase in ageing populations, increase female workforce participation in formal sector, changing family structures and rising demand for specialized care in particular. The finding of Walton-Robert (2019) indicates that the women from the global south were disproportionately affected by gendered and racialized disparities in job hiring, remuneration, credential recognition process and licensing in their country of workforce. The author further illustrates that female nurses especially engaged in care economy are forced to take lower-skilled job because of the delays in license recognition. Similarly, Fast et al. (2024) argued that gender disparities in care giving sector especially in monetary valuation of unpaid care work had created inequality in care burden among female care workers. The authors further highlighted that policy intervention is necessary for economic visibility of care work. In the same way, the finding of Aryal and Guveli (2024) illustrated that the existence of care inequalities between migrant group in developed countries resulted in gender disparities. In addition to this, the authors indicated that migrant care givers are forced to bring their grandparents to take care of their own children, resulting that grandparents' key role on managing financial and emotional cost of migrant care givers' siblings. On the contrary, the findings of Seiger (2021) demonstrates that care economy migration is a reproduction of social injustice. Structural inequalities shape the migration outcomes therefore legal amendment intervention can lead to unintended exploitation regarding low remuneration and low skilled job in country of destination. Conversely, the family played a crucial role in migration decision-making especially among unmarried girls in Nepal and such decision are highly influenced by traditional gender roles instead of individual professional competencies, economic opportunities and choice (Aryal, 2023). Hence, migrant care workers had faced both positive and negative consequences in their workforce country.
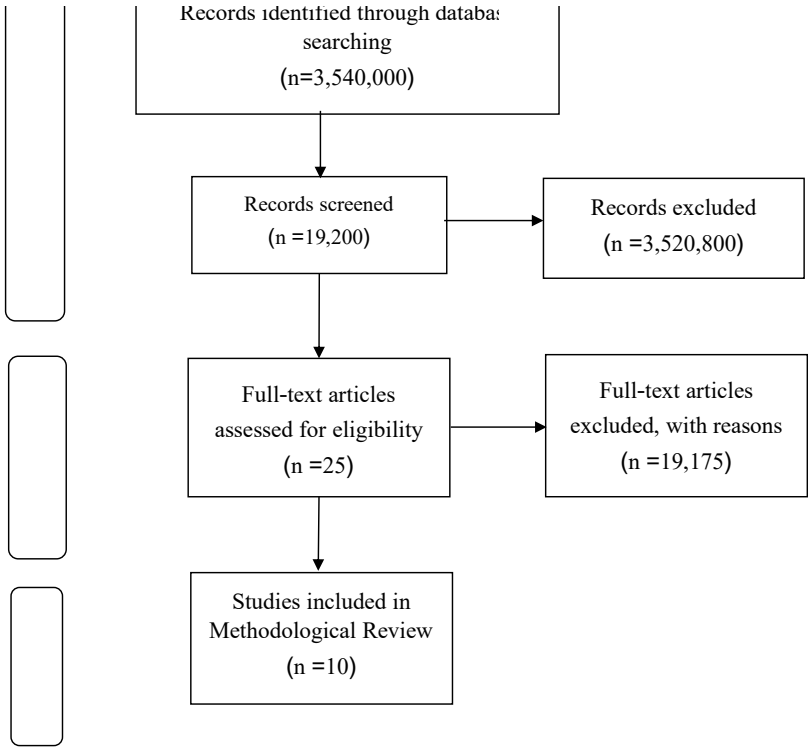
Despite these situations, care economy migration created imbalances in the global care economy. In country of destination, migrant care workers face critical problem in health care and domestic work, low wages, limited labor rights and often face exploitation. Meanwhile, their departure from home countries leads to 'care drain' where both families and communities

struggle with shortage of skilled caregivers, particularly in healthcare and elderly care. This circumstances disproportionately affects women, both as migrant workers and as those left behind to fill caregiving roles. In addition to this, migrant workers were forced to balance transnational caregiving responsibilities being departed from their own families, further complicates the issue. Though these studies are related to care economy and its impacts, the result of the studies was not consistent and the methodology used in these studies are diverse. In this regard, this paper aims to analyze the methods used on study related to care economy and evaluate their effectiveness and limitation and provides recommendation for improvement. The organization of this paper is as follows. Firstly, it provides the general introduction followed by methods than it presents the results and discussion and finally ended with conclusion.

METHODS

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) model is a structured approach used in systematic reviews to ensure transparency in selecting and analyzing research studies. This method involves a four-phase process: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. In the identification phase, all appropriate published papers were collected from Google Scholar using predefined keywords. All the duplicated papers and relevant abstracts were further screened in the screening phase. The eligibility phase applies inclusion and exclusion criteria to refine the selection. In this research, studies conducted before 2020 were kept in excluded criteria. Only the ten research studies focusing on care economy migration within a specific timeframe (2020-2025) were selected for review. Only the English language-based articles were included. In order to reduce the publication bias, the publication search was limited to research rabbit. Selected studies go through a full text review and research method for qualitative or quantitative synthesis.

Figure 1

Prism Model for Systematic Methodological Review of Sustainable Tourism Development

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Records identified through database
            searching
        (n=3,540,000)
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Records screened          Records excluded
   (n =19,200)              (n =3,520,800)
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Full-text articles        Full-text articles
assessed for eligibility  excluded, with reasons
      (n =25)                (n =19,175)
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Studies included in
Methodological Review
      (n =10)
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Theoretical Frameworks

The reviewed studies employ a wide array of theoretical lenses to examine the structural, gendered, and transnational dimensions of the care economy and labor migration. Many researchers ground their work in feminist theory, particularly feminist economics and the global care chain theory, to highlight how unpaid and paid care work is undervalued and disproportionately carried out by women, especially those from the Global South (Walton-Roberts, 2019; Connelly et al., 2018). The "3R" Framework-Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute-introduced by Elson (2017) and adopted by Ilkkaracan (2018), and its expanded form "5R"-adding Reward *and* Represent-used by the ILO (2024), provides a policy-oriented conceptual foundation for analyzing and addressing gendered disparities in care work. Migration-specific theories such as the migration infrastructure theory, the moral economy of migration, and transnationalism explore the socio-legal pathways and ethical dimensions

of care migration, particularly how institutional structures and family obligations influence mobility (Seiger, 2021; Kea, 2020). Other notable frameworks include intersectionality theory (Crenshaw), which uncovers how overlapping identities such as race, class, and gender shape differential access to resources and protections in care economies (Musolino et al., 2024), and the capabilities approach and agency theory, which emphasize individual agency within structurally constrained decision-making contexts (Aryal, 2023).

The methodological approaches in the reviewed studies reflect both the complexity of care economies and the diversity of global contexts examined. The majority of the studies adopt qualitative methods, including ethnographic fieldwork, multi-sited case studies, discourse analysis, participant observation, and in-depth interviews (Seiger, 2021; Aryal & Guveli, 2023; Kea, 2020). For example, Seiger (2021) uses a multi-sited ethnography and digital research to study Filipina mothers migrating to Japan, while Aryal (2023) incorporates perspectives from both home (Nepal) and host countries through interviews coded with NVivo software. Sampling strategies include purposive and snowball sampling, which are suitable for hard-to-reach populations such as migrant caregivers (Aryal & Guveli, 2023). Quantitative work is represented by Fast et al. (2023), who use descriptive and regression analyses to assign economic value to unpaid care work in Canada, highlighting gender disparities. Large-scale meta-analyses and policy syntheses are also employed to evaluate broader patterns. For instance, Ilkkaracan (2018) conducts a comparative policy review, while the ILO (2024) uses global statistics and institutional data to frame care work as a global governance issue. Musolino et al. (2024) apply comparative qualitative case studies across 16 countries to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated inequalities in care work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 2 presents two bubble diagrams that illustrate the thematic focus and methodological approaches of the reviewed studies. The left diagram highlights the most frequently used keywords, with larger bubbles indicating higher frequency. Prominent themes include "Care Related Economy," "Gender," "Migration," and "Care Works," suggesting a strong emphasis on labor, gender dynamics, and mobility within care-related research. The right diagram showcases the frequency of research instruments employed, where "Case Studies," "Policy Analysis," and "Systematic Literature Review" appear most commonly, indicating a preference for qualitative and review-based methodologies. The varying bubble sizes visually represent the prominence of each theme and method within the literature.

Figure 2

Bubble Diagram Showing the Frequency of Keywords Used (left) and Frequency of Research Instruments Used(right) in Reviewed Studies
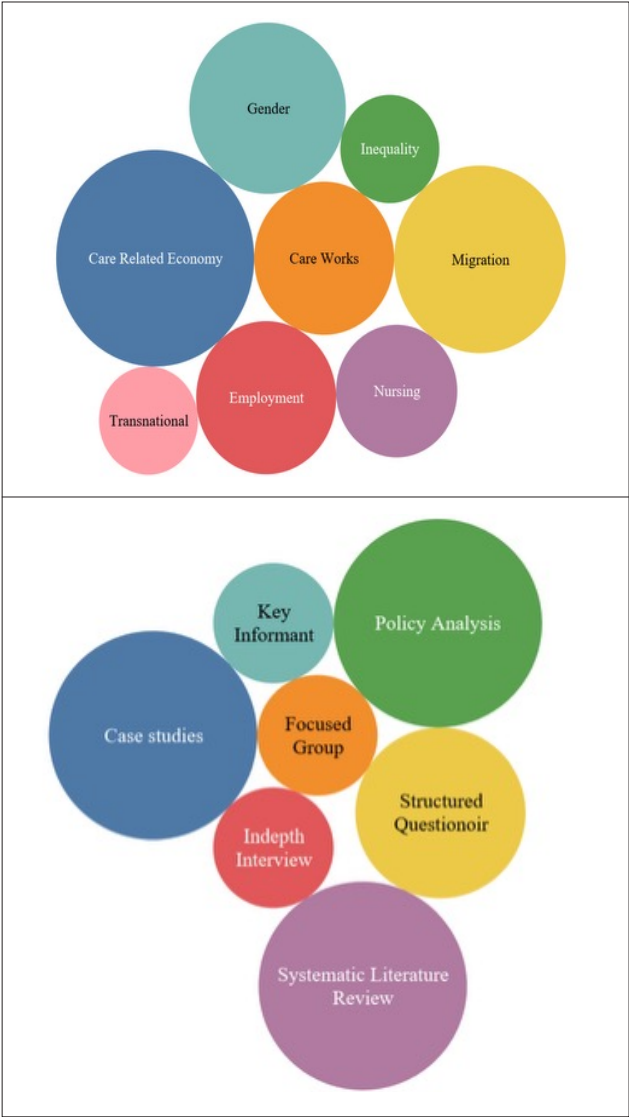

Table 1 provides a comparative analysis of various studies related to the care economy and migration, indicating their theories, methods and key findings. The theoretical framework, methodologies used and key findings are discussed and analyzed below.

Table 1

Details Showing Author; Year of Publication, Title, Theory, Methods, and Major Findings of the selected study

S. N.	Authors	Year of publication	Title	Theory	Methods	Major Findings
1	Margaret Walton-Roberts	2019	Occupational (im)mobility in the global care economy: the case of foreign-trained nurses in the Canadian context	Global care chain theory, Gendered labor migration theory, Occupational im(mobility) theory	Literature review and policy analysis, Case study of Filipino and Indin nurses	International trained nurse face long, expensive and unclear credential recognition process and licensing; Migrant nurses are forced to take lower-skilled job (personal support workers) because of delays in licensing leading to wasted human capital; Gendered and racialized disparities- women from the global south specially Filipinas and Indians are disproportionately affected by systematic biases in hiring the job.
2	Sanjaya Aryal & Ayse Guveli	2023	Flying families between the UK and Nepal: compromised intergenerational care amidst a restrictive migration policy context	feminist theory of caring, theory of transnational domestic work,	Qualitative research with a cross-national design, employing in-depth semi-structured interviews for data collection Purposive and snowball sampling,	Migration Policies Impact Care Exchanges; Emergence of 'Flying Families'; Grandparents Play a Key Role in Care circulation; Care Inequalities Exist between Migrant Groups; Financial and Emotional Costs of Care Migration;
3	Fiona-Katharina Seiger	2021	Migration infrastructure, moral economy, and intergenerational injustice in mother-and-child migration from the Philippines to Japan	Migration Infrastructure theory Migration theory of Moral Economy	Multi-Sited Ethnography, Qualitative research method including- discourse analysis, FGD and participant observation, Interviews and online research	Legal Amendments Led to Unintended Exploitation; Family-Related Visas Used for Labor Migration; Structural Inequalities Shape Migration Outcomes; Migration as a Reproduction of Social Injustice

S. N.	Authors	Year of publication	Title	Theory	Methods	Major Findings
4	Janet Fast, Karen A. Duncan, Norah C. Keating and Choong Kim	2023	Valuing the Contributions of Family Caregivers to the Care Economy	grounded in economic valuation theory and care economy theory	Quantitative research with descriptive statistics, regression analysis and dominance analysis	Monetary valuation of unpaid care work. inequality in care burden. Gender disparities in care giving. Economic visibility of care work. Need for policy interventions
	Sanjaya Aryal	2023	Gender or Gendered Demand of Care? Migration Decision-Making Processes of Nepali Care Workers	Gender and migration theories capabilities approach and agency theory	Qualitative research method in-depth interview, multi-sited approach on gathering perspectives from both host and home countries NVivo software was used for coding and analyzing transcripts Purposive sampling method with Snowball sampling technique	Migration decisions are not solely influenced by traditional gender roles instead, individual and contextual factors such as professional competencies, economic opportunities, and migration policies play; Family plays a crucial role in migration decision-making; The migration process is shaped by policy frameworks, including bilateral agreement; While migration provides economic upliftment, it also reinforces inequalities, as not all aspiring migrants can access the same opportunities due to barriers like gender, socio-economic status, and regulatory constraints.
6	Ipek Ilkkaracan (UN Women)	2018	Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment: Recognizing and Investing in the Care Economy	3R Framework (Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute unpaid care work)	Policy analysis and synthesis of international practices	Highlights the centrality of care work to sustainable development and gender equality; proposes public investment and policy reform to redistribute unpaid care work and reduce gender disparities in economic participation.

S.N.	Authors	Year of publication	Title	Theory	Methods	Major Findings
7	ILO	2024	Migrant Workers in the Care Economy	5R Framework (Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute, Reward, Represent)	Policy brief using global statistics and review of ILO instruments	Migrant care workers are essential to global care systems yet face structural vulnerabilities and inequalities; calls for inclusive governance and labour protections that address gender, migration status, and economic inequality.
8	Musolino et al.	2024	Caring during COVID-19: A study of intersectionality and inequities in the care economy in 16 countries	Intersectionality theory; Matrix of Domination (Collins)	Comparative qualitative case studies across 16 countries	COVID-19 exposed and intensified existing inequalities in the care economy, particularly for women from marginalized communities; intersectionality is key to understanding differential impacts and shaping inclusive responses.
9	Kea, Pamela	2020	Gambian Educational Migration, Care and the Persistence of the Domestic Moral Economy	Domestic moral economy; transnationalism	Ethnographic case study: Interviews and participant observation	Gambian parents' and children's educational and migratory pathways are intergenerationally entangled, showing persistence of familial obligations. Transnational care arrangements (e.g., grandparents raising children) facilitate migration and future mobility.
10	Connelly, R., Dong, X.-Y., Jacobse, J., Zhao, Y.	2018	The Care Economy in Post-Reform China: Feminist Research on Unpaid and Paid Work and Well-Being	Feminist economics; "recognize, reduce, redistribute"	Meta-analysis of 11 studies using 7 large surveys including CHARLS and CFPS	Economic reforms reduced state-provided care and shifted burdens to families, increasing gender inequality. Women face "time poverty" and limited labor participation. Care deficits especially affect children and elderly in low-income rural areas

Source: (Aryal, 2023; Aryal & Guveli, 2024; Connelly et al., 2018; Fast et al., 2024; ILO, 2024; Ilkkaracan, 2018; Kea, 2020; Musolino et al., 2025; Seiger, 2021; Walton-Roberts, 2020)

Across the studies, consistent findings emerge regarding the marginalization, undervaluation, and systemic barriers faced by care workers—particularly female migrants from the Global South. Walton-Roberts (2019) details how foreign-trained nurses in Canada, especially those from the Philippines and India, face prolonged, costly, and opaque credentialing processes, pushing them into lower-skilled positions such as personal support workers and wasting their human capital. Aryal and Guveli (2023) identify the rise of "flying families"-migrants who shuttle between the UK and Nepal to fulfill care obligations-emphasizing the emotional and financial costs of transnational caregiving. Seiger (2021) notes that legal reforms in Japan intended to facilitate family reunification have paradoxically led to exploitation by enabling labor migration under the guise of family visas. Other studies, such as those by Fast et al. (2023) and Connelly et al. (2018), highlight the economic invisibility of unpaid care work and the need to quantify its contributions to national economies. Musolino et al. (2024) show how the COVID-19 pandemic exposed and deepened inequalities in care work, particularly for racialized and low-income women, while the ILO (2024) calls attention to the global need for inclusive labor protections for migrant care workers. Finally, Aryal (2023) illustrates that migration decisions are influenced not only by traditional gender roles but also by professional competencies, socio-economic conditions, and policy frameworks, reflecting a nuanced interplay between agency and structure.

Collectively, these findings reinforce that the global care economy is deeply gendered, racialized, and stratified, shaped by historical inequalities and contemporary policy frameworks. While care work is essential to both social reproduction and economic development, it remains underpaid, undervalued, and under protected, particularly in transnational contexts where migrants face bureaucratic, legal, and cultural barriers. The studies suggest that while migration may provide upward economic mobility for some, it simultaneously reproduces global inequalities, limiting access to decent work, especially for women from poorer regions. The frameworks used—especially those emphasizing intersectionality, capabilities, and transnationalism—offer valuable insights into how power operates across borders, shaping who gets to care, who is cared for, and under what conditions. There is a growing consensus that meaningful transformation requires not only policy reforms that invest in care infrastructure and recognize unpaid work but also global governance frameworks that account for gender, migration status, and socio-economic inequalities. These insights offer a compelling call for a paradigm shift in how care work is conceptualized, measured, and supported across national and global systems.

Most qualitative studies used purposive and snowball sampling, which are appropriate for accessing hard to reach populations such as migrant workers. However, these methods may create the risks of selection bias and limited generalizability. Future research could incorporate stratified random sampling or quota sampling to ensure a more representative sample. Likewise, studies relying only on qualitative or quantitative methods would be more effective if they used the mixed-methods. The quality of the study would enhance by comparing the experiences of migrants with those who remain in their home country and incorporating longitudinal data to identify the trends. While snowball and purposive sampling were useful, combining these with stratified or quota sampling would improve representation and validity. Overall, the studies could be strengthened by integrating more diverse data collection methods, enhancing theoretical frameworks and ensuring greater representativeness in data presentation.

CONCLUSIONS

This methodological review of selected studies on care economy migration highlights both the strengths and limitations of different research approaches. Qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, ethnographic observations, and discourse analysis provide rich insights into the lived experiences of migrant care workers. However, these approaches often lack generalizability due to small and selective sampling techniques. On the other hand, quantitative studies offered crucial economic data that make care work more visible but had limitation in capturing the complexities of personal migration narratives. Most of the studies lacks mixed-methods approaches that could combine the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research. Additionally, these research does not adequately incorporate intersectional and feminist theoretical frameworks that would highlight the compounded effects of gender, race, and socioeconomic status in migration experiences. Future research should prioritize diverse data collection techniques, including stratified and quota sampling, to enhance representativeness. By addressing these methodological gaps, research in this field can contribute to more effective policies that support and protect migrant care workers globally.

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