

## Gender perspective and inequality in Peru<sup>1</sup>

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### La perspectiva de género y la desigualdad en el Perú

### A perspectiva de gênero e a desigualdade no Peru

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**Abstract:** This article examines the gender perspective and inequality in Peru, analyzing how historical and theoretical changes regarding the role of women have impacted education and society. Through a focus on Media and Information Literacy (MIL), the challenges faced by girls and adolescents in accessing education and the effects of the pandemic on gender equality are explored. The article highlights the social, cultural, and economic barriers that perpetuate inequality and discusses proposals to integrate gender education into MIL, promoting an inclusive and critical approach.

#### **Keywords:**

Gender Perspective, Inequality, Education, Media Literacy, Peru

**Resumen:** Este artículo examina la perspectiva de género y la desigualdad en el Perú, analizando cómo los cambios históricos y teóricos en torno al rol de la mujer han impactado la educación y la sociedad. A través de un enfoque en la Alfabetización Mediática e Informativa (AMI), se exploran los desafíos que enfrentan las niñas y adolescentes en el acceso a la educación y los efectos de la pandemia en la igualdad de género. Se destacan las barreras sociales, culturales y económicas que perpetúan la desigualdad, y se abordan propuestas para integrar la educación de género en la AMI, promoviendo un enfoque inclusivo y crítico.

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<sup>1</sup> This translation from a Spanish original was AI-assisted.

**Palabras clave:**

Perspectiva de género, Desigualdad, Educación, Alfabetización Mediática, Perú

**Resumo:** Este artigo examina a perspectiva de gênero e a desigualdade no Peru, analisando como as mudanças históricas e teóricas em torno do papel da mulher impactaram a educação e a sociedade. Com foco na Alfabetização Midiática e Informacional (AMI), exploram-se os desafios enfrentados por meninas e adolescentes no acesso à educação e os efeitos da pandemia na igualdade de gênero. O artigo destaca as barreiras sociais, culturais e econômicas que perpetuam a desigualdade e discute propostas para integrar a educação de gênero na AMI, promovendo uma abordagem inclusiva e crítica.

**Palavras-chave:**

Perspectiva de género, Desigualdade, Educação, Alfabetização Midiática, Peru

### **1. Background of the Gender Perspective**

The approaches to women have undergone substantial changes in societies, so it is crucial to understand their theoretical and historical foundations for their incorporation as part of International Media Literacy (IML). They are not recent but are related to the transformations that have occurred, especially in the 20th century, linked to the family and the role of women. Gilles Lipovetsky (1999) identifies the 20th century as the century of women and explains why other changes have occurred. He emphasizes that sensitivity and emotionality, previously appreciated as matters of lesser rank compared to rationality, acquire a primordial value. In his book *The Third Woman*, whose original version is from 1997, he made visible the actions and participation of women in both private and public spheres, not only in the family but also at work and describes aesthetic and affective roles not previously considered. These are disruptive leaps that are evident both in social life and in public discourse, as well as in the academic field. In the latter, there is a lot of reflection on how women open spaces, legitimize their role and bring to light the sentimental and communication aspects, which were previously exclusively private (Lipovetsky, 1999).

Cecilia Mancillas (1999) notes that until the 1950s, the roles of one or the other sex were delimited: "The husband is the provider of the economic income of the home and the one who

ensures the direction of the family. The wife is responsible for the domestic group's emotional cohesion, the house's care, and raising the children" (p. 333). Later, the power of decision-making will change because women begin to have control of the economic resources produced by their work. This favors equal participation in the home, although these new relationships are still conflictive and violent, especially in Latin American countries.

Years later, Alain Touraine (2007) maintains that women build new proposals from subjectivity, which he affirms due to an investigation in which he applied in-depth interviews. He also specifies that the search for women's identity extends beyond themselves. Touraine himself, in an interview conducted by Orozco et al. (2008) regarding the aforementioned book, answers his questions:

We have gone from a society determined by political and economic terms to one defined by cultural terms. Considering this change, I realized that women for a thousand years had not had the right to subjectivity, despite their fundamental roles. Sometimes they were queens or luxury whores, but none of them had subjectivity; they were not a subject. A woman did not have the right to say "I"; she said "they" and "we". (Orozco et al., 2008)

One contribution of Touraine's thinking, well into the 21st century, has been to incorporate women as part of cultural changes, as she adds in the interview:

With this transformation of society and the declaration of this new feminism (...), women are the latest actors; that is, they are the ones who introduce new ideas into society. With the awareness of their subjectivity, women see a world organized around creating the 'woman self'. (Orozco et al., 2008)

With this introduction, I intend to develop a reflection that allows us to understand the subject in its theoretical dimension, to direct us to the purpose of this study, and, especially, to the reality of my country, Peru.

## **2. The gender perspective in education.**

In education, particularly in the classroom, the interactions between students and their teachers, as well as between female and male students, have been changing. Many studies have stressed the importance of identifying gender stereotypes in family discourse, at school, and in the media.

UNESCO has been active and proactive regarding gender, education, and communication. It states, "Despite the achievements made, some 250 million children and young

people remain out of school, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics: of which 122 million are girls and 128 million are boys" (UNESCO, 2024a). In addition, women represent almost two-thirds of adults who have not accessed reading and writing, are subject to poverty, are geographically isolated, suffering from early pregnancies and violence (UNESCO, 2024a).

It has provided a long-term view by proposing the 2030 agenda, in which gender equality as a public policy is a priority to provide education with the tools that contribute to more just and inclusive societies (UNESCO, 2022). MIL is part of UNESCO's purposes and is defined as "a set of essential skills to foster critical thinking amid the constantly evolving digital landscape" (UNESCO, 2022).

UNESCO states in different documents that education should allow the training of critical children and adolescents "to use information critically, navigate the online environment safely and responsibly and ensure trust in our information ecosystem and digital technologies" (UNESCO, 2024b). Likewise, to confront in the 21st century "the proliferation of disinformation and incitement to hatred" (UNESCO, 2024b).

In the article "Gender Equality and Media Literacy" by Martín Jiménez et al. (2016), professors at the University of Valladolid, the authors present the results of research in higher education and conclude: "the relevant role that academic training can play concerning the development of media literacy and the need to promote a critical stance regarding the media treatment of gender in the media" (p. 326).

### **3. Effects of the pandemic**

Organizations, authors, and researchers have pointed out the COVID-19 pandemic for its severe effects and setbacks in education due to the interruption of the school year. The need to undertake systematic and comprehensive actions due to the affectation of children and adolescents is emphasized (UNESCO, 2024c). The effects are related to the impact on their opportunities in schools, in higher education, and their job prospects. School dropouts are noted, especially among girls, which severely affects equality. UNESCO also refers to historical inequalities resulting from poverty and extreme poverty, indigenous and rural populations, as well as the disabled population, all of which affect the rights to education (UNESCO, 2024d). But, undoubtedly, the problem is not only one of access and permanence but also of the socio-emotional well-being of the educational communities that have been harmed (UNESCO, 2024d).

#### 4. The Peruvian case

Cultural conservatism in social and political spaces extended to the debate on gender equality in Peru is manifested in prejudices and the denial of dealing with these issues in educational institutions.

Research carried out at the Institute of Peruvian Studies (IEP) by Ames and Rojas (2020) identifies the risk factors of Peruvian children, which are added anxiety, depression, and family burden. Problems such as teenage pregnancy, for example, require special attention. After the pandemic, many voices insisted on highlighting the loss of learning opportunities due to school dropouts. Years ago, it was noted that the gaps in access to education for men and women had narrowed; however, in the Amazon and rural regions and poor urban areas, the enrollment of adolescent girls is lower than that of their male peers. In a working document of the National Superintendence of Higher Education (SUNEDU) on "Gender and higher education" by Chávez Irigoyen (2023), it is noted that, although the number of female and male students enrolled in undergraduate studies is very similar, there are differences in the disciplines they study and in the levels of return, that is, labor remuneration. "The Peruvian university system has undergone a significant incorporation of women into higher education in the last 30 years" (Chávez Irigoyen, 2023). However, gender differences are expressed in the careers chosen because while women opt for service careers, maintaining gender cultures, men lean towards engineering and production. The labor market continues to penalize women, who receive lower pay and in situations of health emergency, in addition to female underemployment.

In a report by CARE (2020) on school dropout, it is stated that girls assume domestic responsibilities and care for their siblings, drop out of school, and the rates of teenage pregnancy are high. In Peru, educational inequality is related to gender, family income, and area of residence. If we add to this gender violence, girls and adolescents in rural areas are the most affected. "Usually, the girl does not have a voice; she is not allowed to participate. This makes the patterns that were already with her become more ingrained, and they feel invisible..." (CARE, 2020).

According to UNESCO, the differences in access to education and the significant disparities in learning outcomes have negative consequences, causing the young to suffer from a lack of education. These women cannot fulfill their life projects and reduce their aspirations, resigning themselves to domestic chores (UNESCO, 2024a). CARE states that the continuation

of poverty leads "to them not having life opportunities, fewer possibilities to continuity of studies, there is a greater risk of teenage pregnancy because they are more likely to be abused, to repeat social patterns of the family..." (CARE, 2020).

Poverty and the condition of women have direct consequences on their condition in the educational system. It seems to me that AMI's actions should not rest solely on the identification of gender stereotypes but on raising the reality that girls and adolescents face.

With this purpose, the book *Desaparecidas* (Muñoz Nájjar, 2023) contributes to focusing on the issue of gender and media literacy from the reality of Peru. In addition, it records cases of women not only from Lima but also in cities such as Urcos and Huamachuco. These stories show the violence expressed in the disappearance of women, femicide, sexual exploitation, or human trafficking, in addition to confirming the inaction of the police and justice system, the impunity and indifference of the State and the political class (Muñoz Nájjar, 2023, p. 25).

In this regard, I highlight some ideas and proposals that I think will help us to think about how to develop gender violence issues in AMI, both in the most disadvantaged urban sectors and in rural areas. Muñoz Nájjar (2023) proposes to talk about it publicly because one of the biggest problems is "the culture of silence practice" (p. 25). She takes the example of the Servants of Saint Joseph mission in Amazonas, where they work to seek gender equality among Awajun and Wampis women in Checacupe, Canchis, Cusco, and Urcos. "The idea is for teachers and students to become aware of what machismo and patriarchy mean, the main causes of femicides and sexual violations. In recent years, for example, we have managed to reduce teenage pregnancy among our students..." (p. 26).

The author adds that one of the obstacles is the families themselves because instead of supporting the girls who end up pregnant by reporting the cases, they accept agreements with the aggressors, be it a teacher, a police officer, or a taxi driver, "It also happens, in certain situations, that there are relatives, they can be nephews, cousins, brothers, uncles (...) among themselves they go making arrangements" (Muñoz Nájjar, 2023, p. 27).

In a press release published on the Unicef website on October 15, 2021, intending to publicize the content of the State of the World's Children (EMI) Report of that year, Ana Mendoza, a representative in Peru of that organization, stressed that two of the five leading causes of mortality in adolescence are interpersonal violence and suicide and that both are closely related to mental health problems. "This situation was further exacerbated in this

population because they were the ones who had the most restrictions due to the pandemic" (Muñoz Nájjar, 2023, p. 29). As a result of isolation, the shift to virtual schooling and, in many cases, to non-schooling, the lack of interaction with the school environment and its supports, and the lack of use of public spaces for play, physical activity, and sport, have forced young people "to adapt to new circumstances, losing many of their natural and everyday environments." (p. 29).

In the EMI, there is revealing information. For example, anxiety and depression account for almost half of mental disorders among adolescents aged ten to nineteen in the world; 45,800 adolescents die from suicide every year; suicide is the fifth most frequent cause of death among adolescents (Muñoz Nájjar, 2023, p. 29). As a specific fact, doctor Yuri Cutipe maintains that "in September 2021, there were more than 925 thousand mental health cases treated nationwide, 246,242 of which corresponded to minors under 18 years of age. The causes: clinical depression, anxiety disorders, and abuse syndrome (p. 30). Adolescents are significantly affected because "There is a lot of neglect and a continuous attempt to discredit the victims, since the first thing the authorities say when a complaint is filed is that the missing person left voluntarily with her boyfriend or to a party" (Muñoz Nájjar, 2023, p. 57).

Vulnerability is associated with people who are discriminated against or in a situation of defenselessness, such as adolescents, the elderly, the disabled, displaced persons, internal migrants, women victims of violence, members of indigenous communities, children, and Afro-descendants. (Muñoz Nájjar, 2023, pp. 65-123)

Muñoz Nájjar (2023) takes several cases as examples of the harsh reality experienced by adolescents and emphasizes how much they see their opportunities reduced because they will replicate their parents' lives. These are issues that must be addressed in the classroom, even more so because the authorities are absent, and they are "easy prey to false promises. The conditions of vulnerability that surround being a woman expose them more easily to trafficking for sexual exploitation" (p. 123).

I conclude by pointing out that the gender issue in the AMI must consider the reality of girls and adolescents and the violence and dangers to which they are exposed. It is essential to talk, get to know, and dialogue with them and the families for whom these issues appear difficult and who often prefer to ignore them to develop media and information literacy.

Furthermore, gender issues in education are a matter for men and women.

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