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Public policies and attitudes towards gender equality in Peruvian university students

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Abstract: Gender inequality is a structural social problem, associated with history, culture, education, religion and politics, this difficulty occurs in all social institutions due to the heterogeneity of the structure in the sexual division of labor, socioeconomic inequality, inclusion and inequity in participation in the public space between men and women. Public policies and attitudes towards gender equality in Peruvian university students were analyzed according to socio-academic variables. A descriptive-comparative study, with a quantitative approach, and not experimental cross-sectional, involved 776 university students from a public and a private university in Peru, intentionally selected. Adaptive attitudes (57.9%) were found to tend to be sexist; Likewise, in the study dimensions, the same trend was found in the sociocultural and relational levels, while in the personal dimension students develop sexist attitudes (62.4%). It is concluded, attitudes towards gender equality are sexist reproduction that is influenced by the sociocultural environment of the family, this situation occurs to a greater extent in men, while female students present attitudes of equality in greater intensity to seek equity in the distribution of roles.

Keywords: public policies; gender equality; sexist attitudes; adaptive attitudes; egalitarian attitudes; university students

1. Introduction

Social inequality is an important factor in the analysis of the Social Sciences, referring to unfair and avoidable differences that occur in a society. Therefore, the social construction of gender is based on natural or biological differences that establish cultural differences between human beings, mainly between men and women, these vary according to history and culture; In that sense, these ideas are transmitted at home, at school, in neighborhoods and at work. The central problem of this social structure arises when cultural differences, expressed in norms, patterns, and behaviors, become inequalities, forming gender gaps in education, work, health, political participation, and representation (Castañeda and Diaz, 2020; Landa, 2021).

Therefore, gender inequality is a structural social problem, associated with history, culture, education, religion and politics, this difficulty occurs in all social institutions due to the heterogeneity of the structure in the sexual division of labor, socioeconomic inequality, inclusion and inequity in participation in the public space between men and women. In this sense, this situation has been categorized as an obstacle to achieving fundamental universal human rights (Vega, 2014).

In Peru, in accordance with the normative framework of public policies, some international commitments have been assumed to address this problem, with the aim of promoting and protecting women. The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (1994), the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Platform for Action in the Framework of the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (2001); and according to the regulations of Peru, the political constitution provides for progress towards equality and not discrimination; In addition, a number of laws have been established, such as the Act on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women (2007), the Act on the Organization and Functions of the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (2012), establishing a National Plan for Equal Opportunities as a public policy, as well as institutionalizing the gender perspective in the State's national policies and plans. Highlighting the advances in regulations so that they can be adopted in educational policies (PLANIG, 2017).

In addition, for the implementation of the State's commitment to the conventions that promote gender equality, other policies have been adopted, such as Law 28542, promotion for the strengthening of the family, using the gender approach as a tool, however, it has not had the expected impact because the cultural roles of women in the family have been reaffirmed (maternity, marriage) considered as second-class citizens (Valdivieso, 2022), likewise, the rates of violence against women have increased in the family space, with women being the most affected, 33.7% of women victims of violence suffer severe violence and more than 54% reported the event without having support and a solution (Calizaya-López et al., 2024). In the environment and agriculture sector, the following regulations have been issued with a gender perspective: National Environmental Policy, Law 30754 framework on climate change, Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change, National Strategy for Family Farming, due to the impact on the livelihoods of the population and with the aim of eradicating gender gaps and all forms of discrimination based on sex (Beijing Platform for Action). however, when analyzing these policies, the gender approach is not adequately integrated, due to the confusion of the concept of the term by assuming that it is synonymous with women, observing little national reference in terms of gender (Cornejo, 2023).

Therefore, when analyzing these policies and measures that were taken to advance in the fulfillment of international commitments on gender equality, the norms have not responded effectively to the purposes proposed, given that factors such as family culture, the distribution of sexist roles in the division of labor, educational inclusion in rural sectors and respect for women's rights have not been guaranteed. And it is that the gender approach has a high ideological content affirming the asymmetrical relationships that exist between men and women, and that these stereotypes are formed and strengthened in the family environment, in addition, to eradicate these gaps, policies comprise a complex process of understanding, recommending the use of a comprehensive model that involves political factors, cultural, economic, and health (Vásquez et al., 2022).

Therefore, by focusing on gender equality as the power relationship established by the roles and functions that are mainly assigned to the male and female gender

within the social structure, this equality is not only a basic human right, but also essential to building peaceful, just and equitable societies that promote human potential. being able to develop sustainably (Güezmes et al., 2022).

On the other hand, attitudes towards gender equality is a basic attitudinal element that must be considered in the profile of university students, in order to train professionals with high academic, scientific and technical capacities, assuming a humanistic, ethical, supportive, responsible position and above all committed to the well-being of the country, however, some imitated negative macho attitudes continue to strengthen the restriction of gender equity (Barrios, 2021).

With respect to sexist, adaptive, and egalitarian attitudes, according to Garcia-Pérez et al. (2010), they explain the following: people who exhibit sexist attitudes reproduce gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms associated with the roles of men and women; adaptive attitudes are based on a more political position, admitting the inequalities that are presented in social discourse, showing doubts in matters related to equality leaving some stereotypes; and egalitarian attitudes based on recognizing inequality due to gender difference and assumes a firm commitment to equality between men and women.

In this sense, universities must integrate gender equality in all programs and curricula that are strategically oriented to create psychological changes in students that contribute to the establishment of rights and freedoms that characterize a developing society. In addition. The mission of training professionals and citizens who intervene in different contexts and scenarios that provide an environment of respect, solidarity that goes against any situation of mistreatment or violation of people's fundamental rights (Castillo et al., 2020; Mayorga, 2018).

The dimensions involved in the construction of gender for this study are structured as follows: Sociocultural dimension, refers to the equitable distribution of family responsibilities at the domestic level between men and women, such as social mandates and stereotypes; relational dimension, is made up of the student's interactions with the family, teachers, fellow students and addresses situations related to violence and leadership; personal dimension, highlights issues associated with academic preferences and choices, expectations in life from a gender perspective (Castillo et al., 2020).

In the analysis of the review of previous studies, no research was found that associates the study variables, considering a theoretical gap in the analysis of public policies and their impact on the achievement of a more just and equitable society, however, studies were found that addressed attitudes towards gender equality independently. in this sense, Atlatenco and De la Garza (2020) studied these attitudes in Mexican students, finding that female students present attitudes with a tendency to equality in the sociocultural, relational, and personal factors, while men consider that they must develop adaptive attitudes in the face of sexist conditions that continue to consider macho attitudes between genders. In Peru, Agramonte and Málaga (2019) investigated gender equality attitudes in university students, finding more favorable attitudes in women about sexual orientation, religious symbolism, couple values, private or domestic sphere, public or work sphere, sexuality, and personal freedom. Likewise, Huamani et al. (2020) also investigated these attitudes, but in adolescents,

finding that it is women who present a favorable attitude towards gender equality, stressing that age and religion are variables that can determine this behavior.

In this sense, the analysis of public policies and attitudes towards gender equality is very useful for science, because the analysis will lead us to understand whether these policies are effective or not, how much they have prospered and above all, it will allow us to channel the prevention, detection and attention of possible sexist behaviors in university students. with the intention of generating a more equitable environment where the development of men and women with principles of equality and justice prevails.

Therefore, it was proposed to analyze public policies and attitudes towards gender equality in Peruvian university students according to socio-academic variables.

2. Methodology

This is a descriptive-comparative study, with a quantitative approach, and not experimental cross-sectional, the information was collected during the months of April to July 2024.

A total of 776 university students from a public and a private university in Peru participated, they were intentionally selected using non-probabilistic sampling, considering that not all of them wished to participate in the study, the sample size was adjusted through the G-Power program, with the following criteria: type of test (you and F), statistical test of greater relevance (ANOVA) to compare k samples (5), type of analysis, probability of 95% and 5% margin of error, and small effect size (0.156), the information was collected during the months of April to June of this year.

The scale of attitudes towards gender equality in university students (Castillo et al., 2020) was used, the scale assesses the following dimensions: the sociocultural dimension (items 1 to 6) addresses the equal distribution of family and domestic responsibilities between women and men, social mandates and gender clarity stereotypes; the relational dimension (items 7–12) includes the interactions that produce in the student with the family, with the teacher and with the peer group, and deals with aspects related to situations of violence and leadership; and the personal dimension (items 13–18) proposes topics related to academic preferences and choices, aspirations in life and expectations from a gender perspective. The scale uses Likert-type responses with five response options from lowest (1) to highest (5) degree of agreement. The application of the instrument is used in university students individually or collectively, with a duration of 15 min, in addition, the way of evaluating attitudes is presented as follows: sexist, adaptive and egalitarian attitudes. The instrument presents high discriminant levels of evidence of validity in the internal structure and reliability, in addition, for the application of the instrument to the local sample it was previously adapted to the Peruvian context, as well as the application of two pilot tests in university students to accumulate evidence of validity and reliability (Revelle, 2019). A question sheet was added to the scale of the socio-academic variables of university students such as: age, gender, occupation, economic dependence, type of family, area of studies, year of studies, type of

university and self-perception of academic performance. Finally, the level of reliability was calculated through McDonald's Omega internal consistency coefficient (Roco-Videla et al., 2024) finding ($\omega = 0.807$) demonstrating high reliability in the scale and the data collected.

The authorization for the collection of the information was managed through the university authorities, university students were contacted after the academic day in order not to interrupt their educational activities; They were informed about the objective of the research, as well as the purpose of the study, they proceeded to deliver the instrument with the instructions for the completion, the students who confirmed their voluntary participation were given the informed consent, indicating the safeguarding and confidentiality of the data, proceeding to sign the document with which their collaboration was established.

To analyze the data, the following tests were performed, first, the normal distribution of the data was analyzed with the Shapiro-Wilk test, observing that there is no adequate normality ($p < 0.05$) making the decision to use non-parametric statistical tests (Kerby, 2014); second, the descriptive results of attitudes towards gender equality, as well as the socio-academic variables are presented in frequency and percentage tables; third, for inferential analysis, the following statistics are presented: to compare two independent samples, the Mann Whitney U test, and to compare k independent samples, the Kruskal Wallis test with their respective effect sizes (Tomczak and Tomczak, 2014). The statistical program Jamovi (2022) was used for the analysis of quantitative data.

The following ethical aspects were considered to carry out this study, for research with human beings, the guidelines of the Ministry of Health were used through resolution No. 233-2020-MINSA, dated February 2020, the resolution aims to carry out and promote research in Peru, in accordance with national and international ethical standards.

3. Results

The socio-academic variables of the university students were analyzed, finding the following information: 28.2% were men and 71.8% women; 79.8% study at a public university and 20.2% at a private university; 61.3% only study and 38.7% study and work; 80.2% are economically dependent and 19.8% are not dependent; 62.5% were students of social sciences, 26.9% of sciences and engineering and 10.6% of health sciences; according to family type, 62.2% come from the nuclear family structure, 24.7% single-parent and 13.0% extended; and in the perception of academic self-performance, 4.9% consider it to be low, 80.5% moderate or regular, and 14.6% high.

Table 1 describes the attitudes towards gender equality presented by university students, in the general scale, the highest levels are found in adaptive attitudes (57.9%) with a tendency to be sexist; Likewise, in the study dimensions, the same trend was found in the sociocultural and relational levels (65.7% and 64.4%), while in the personal dimension students develop sexist attitudes (62.4%).

Table 1. Attitudes towards gender equality presented by university students.

Scale	Attitudes	F (x)	%
General	Equal	5	0.6 %
	Adaptive	449	57.9 %
	Sexist	322	41.5 %
Sociocultural	Equal	20	2.6 %
	Adaptive	510	65.7 %
	Sexist	246	31.7 %
Relational	Equal	37	4.8 %
	Adaptive	500	64.4 %
	Sexist	239	30.8 %
Personal	Equal	6	0.8 %
	Adaptive	286	36.9 %
	Sexist	484	62.4 %

Note. $F(x)$ = frequency; % = percentage.

In **Table 2**, comparisons of attitudes towards gender equality were made in two independent groups (sex, occupation, and type of university), for the gender variable differences were found in the general scale and in the personal dimension considering sexist attitudes in male students; in occupation there are only statistically significant differences in the personal dimension, with sexist attitudes corresponding to students who only study; and according to the type of university, students in public universities have sexist attitudes to a greater extent than those in private universities.

Table 2. U-test to compare two independent groups.

Scale	Group (M/DE)	*p* (TE)	Group (M/DE)	*p* (TE)	Group (M/DE)	*p* (TE)
General	Man (58.9/7.98) Woman (57.2/8.54)	0.000 (0.152)	Studies (58.7/8.65) Study and work (57.9/8.03)	0.138 (0.063)	Public (58.9/8.39) Private (56.5/8.26)	0.002 (0.159)
Sociocultural	Man (18.9/3.66) Woman (18.5/3.95)	0.281 (0.049)	Studies (18.5/3.90) Study and work (18.8/3.82)	0.184 (0.056)	Public (18.8/3.83) Private (17.8/3.91)	0.005 (0.144)
Relational	Man (18.2/3.86) Woman (18.2/4.46)	0.698 (0.017)	Studies (18.2/4.41) Study and work (18.2/3.94)	0.841 (0.008)	Public (18.4/4.27) Private (17.4/4.34)	0.027 (0.113)
Personal	Man (22.2/3.54) Woman (20.0/4.03)	0.000 (0.332)	Studies (22.0/4.12) Study and work (20.9/3.50)	0.000 (0.187)	Public (21.7/3.90) Private (21.3/3.44)	0.008 (0.082)

Note. U = Mann Whitney U statistic; M = mean; SD = standard deviation; p = level of significance (0.05); TE = size of the effect.

In **Table 3**, the results of attitudes towards gender equality in more than two independent groups were compared, adding post-hoc tests, according to the variable year of studies there are differences, students in higher years show sexist attitudes on the general scale and in the sociocultural plane, and students in the first years show

sexist attitudes on the personal level. In addition, the comparison was made according to area of studies, no differences were found in students of social sciences, health and engineering.

Table 3. H-test to compare more than two independent groups.

Scale	Year of studies	N	Media	OF	*p* (TE)
General	1ro	220	57.7	8.53	
	2nd	135	57.9	7.73	
	3ro	222	58.3	8.62	0.020 (0.017)
	4to	94	59.3	7.72	
	5to	91	60.6	8.93	
	6to	14	56.1	9.04	
Sociocultural	1ro	220	18.0	4.12	
	2nd	135	18.7	3.68	
	3ro	222	18.6	3.87	0.003 (0.023)
	4to	94	19.2	3.58	
	5to	91	19.5	3.56	
	6to	14	17.9	4.09	
Relational	1ro	220	17.7	4.26	
	2nd	135	17.9	4.29	
	3ro	222	18.4	4.43	0.285 (0.008)
	4to	94	18.4	4.02	
	5to	91	19.1	4.28	
	6to	14	18.4	4.22	
Personal	1ro	220	22.1	3.5	
	2nd	135	21.2	4.16	
	3ro	222	21.3	3.86	0.046 (0.016)
	4to	94	21.6	3.78	
	5to	91	22.0	3.85	
	6to	14	19.9	3.35	

Note. H = Kruskal Wallis statistic; N = sample; SD = standard deviation; *p* = level of significance (0.05); TE = size of the effect.

In **Table 4**, the results of attitudes towards gender equality in more than two independent groups were compared, adding post-hoc tests, according to the variable academic self-performance there are differences, students with low performance show sexist attitudes on the general scale and at the relational level. In addition, the comparison was made according to type of family, no differences were found in students with a nuclear, single-parent and extended family type.

Table 4. *H*-test to compare more than two independent groups.

Scale	Self-performance	N	Media	OF	*p* (TE)
General	Low	38	61.0	7.08	
	Moderate	625	58.4	8.44	0.047 (0.005)
	High	113	57.9	8.61	

Table 4. (*Continued*).

Scale	Self-performance	N	Media	OF	*p* (TE)
Sociocultural	Low	38	19.6	3.79	
	Moderate	625	18.6	3.8	0.197 (0.004)
	High	113	18.2	4.26	
Relational	Low	38	19.6	3.33	
	Moderate	625	18.2	4.27	0.035 (0.006)
	High	113	17.9	4.65	
Personal	Low	38	21.8	3.28	
	Moderate	625	21.5	3.87	0.685 (4.020)
	High	113	21.8	3.69	

Note. H = Kruskal Wallis statistic; N = sample; SD = standard deviation; *p* = level of significance (0.05); TE = size of the effect.

4. Discussion

It was proposed to analyze public policies and attitudes towards gender equality in Peruvian university students according to socio-academic variables, in this sense, the policies that have been established in the constitutional charter of Peru and in the Law of Equal Opportunities are a response to all the efforts that have been made in recent years at the international level. However, the implementation of these norms in accordance with the proposed national plan (PLANIG, 2017) has yielded some results, especially in the vindication of labor and academic rights for women, in the political aspect results have been achieved but they still mean insufficient; however, when analyzing these policies, the gender approach is not adequately integrated, due to the confusion of the concept of the term by assuming that it is synonymous with woman, observing little national reference in gender matters (Cornejo, 2023). Therefore, when analyzing these policies and measures that were taken to advance in the fulfillment of international commitments on gender equality, the norms have not responded effectively to the purposes proposed, given that factors such as family culture, the distribution of sexist roles in the division of labor, educational inclusion in rural sectors and respect for women's rights have not been guaranteed. And it is that the gender approach has a high ideological content affirming the asymmetrical relationships that exist between men and women, and that these stereotypes are formed and strengthened in the family environment, in addition, according to the context, most Peruvian families continue to transmit macho behavior patterns that strengthen the sexist attitudes of their members. In this sense, Mamani et al. (2020) explained that sexual machismo has been associated with socioeconomic level, deducing that people who present this type of behavior tend to have a lower degree of education, low economic income and are in disadvantaged social strata, developing disrespectful, selfish, distrustful and irresponsible behaviors mediated by the idea of superiority and possession of men over women.

The described is related to the results obtained in the present study, where the attitudes most frequently presented by university students are adaptive, with a tendency to be sexist and these are expressed mostly in male university students, results similar to those found by Mamani et al. (2020) and Azorín (2017), defining that macho students present emotional imbalances that put them at risk of increasing

disorders producing violent behaviors with lack of anger control that affects the partner or their close social environment.

Likewise, according to the contextual analysis, it was found that students from public universities present sexist behaviors to a greater extent than those from private universities, results like those of Castillo and Choque (2018) explained that public university students who are economically and socially disadvantaged tend to express repressive behaviors against women, being typified as more aggressive and violent.

According to the variable year of studies associated with age, students in higher years show sexist attitudes on the general scale and in the sociocultural level, and students in the first years show sexist attitudes on a personal level, therefore, young university students present ideas of roots about traditional sexism strengthened by the families of origin. In addition, if these ideas are sustainable over time, it is most likely that university students will strengthen sexist attitudes by formalizing a relationship, normalizing these negative attitudes, enhancing violence against women (Ortiz, 2018).

In addition, the academic performance variable allows us to distinguish whether academic training reproduces sexist attitudes in university students, in this sense, it was found that students with lower performance present these behaviors to a greater extent than those with higher performance, therefore, this contribution generates some attributes and roles in the educational context explaining that students regardless of the male or female sex who perform better academically they demonstrate more hard-working and responsible attitudes, while low-performing students demonstrate less interest in academic activities and are more behaviorally problematic due to internal and external relationship factors, reproducing negative attitudes around gender equality (Espinoza and Albornoz, 2023).

In the variable type of family of the student, no differences were found in the development of sexist attitudes, because Peruvian families with a nuclear, single-parent or extended structure are influenced by the sociocultural environment, therefore, the student who comes from these families strengthens the macho culture through the cognitive and behavioral dimensions, reflecting the practices in the behaviors they develop in the spaces of social relations. Demonstrating the family's beliefs and the pattern of behavior received in parenting (Oudhof et al., 2019).

Therefore, the results of this research can be used from a more applied perspective so that educational institutions can integrate a gender equality perspective into the university curriculum, as well as, through university welfare programs, to deal with this problem in depth to identify groups and areas at risk. making proposals for intervention in student welfare programs to reduce sexist attitudes, prioritizing the academy and the level of training.

5. Conclusions

In relation to public policies to eradicate gender inequality, the norms have not responded effectively to the purposes proposed, given that factors such as family culture, the distribution of sexist roles in the division of labor, educational inclusion in rural sectors and respect for women's rights have not been guaranteed. And it is that the gender approach has a high ideological content, affirming the asymmetrical

relationships that exist between men and women, and that these stereotypes are formed and strengthened in the family environment.

The results show that attitudes towards gender equality in university students present high levels of adaptive attitudes (57.9%) with a tendency to be sexist; Likewise, in the study dimensions, the same trend was found in the sociocultural and relational levels (65.7% and 64.4%), while in the personal dimension students develop sexist attitudes (62.4%).

Sexist attitudes reproduce gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms associated with the roles of men and women, this behavior is more developed in male students who only study and depend economically, their origin is from a public university, they have low academic performance, and they are students in the last academic cycles. However, female students present attitudes of equality in greater intensity to seek equity in the distribution of roles.

6. Limitations

There were some limitations in the development of the study, the low participation of students due to a topic loaded with stereotypes and the fear of being identified limited the collection of a larger sample, in addition, the selected sample was limited to only two universities, making it difficult to generalize the results to the university population in Peru; the cross-sectional design does not allow for the use of more rigorous statistics, and the economic factor and the lack of financing make it impossible to have a larger and more diversified sample.

Based on these results, it is suggested to continue studying issues related to gender equality in the different stages of life, to understand the behavior of the variable in children, youth, adults and older adults, likewise, a larger sample should be expanded in order to compare the results of this study and continue to accumulate more knowledge about the study variable; likewise, qualitative studies are needed to better understand the analysis from the perception or evaluations of people.; and the policies in implementation must be redirected and reformulated with important strategies to reduce the inequality gaps between men and women, strengthening the family through education to break the stereotypes that currently continue to develop in the nucleus.

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