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Sociodemographic factors associated with the level of citizen insecurity in the Peruvian population

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Abstract: Introduction: Citizen insecurity is a complex, multidimensional and multi-causal social problem, defined as the spaces where people feel insecure mainly due to organized crime in all nations that suffer from it. **Objective:** To analyze the sociodemographic factors associated with public insecurity in a Peruvian population. **Methodology:** The research employed a non-experimental, quantitative design with a descriptive and cross-sectional approach. A total of 11,116 citizens participated, ranging from 18 to 85 years old (young adults, adults, and the elderly), of both sexes, and with any occupation, education level, and marital status. The study employed purposive non-probability sampling to select the participants. **Results:** More than 50% of the population feels unsafe, in public and private spaces. All analyzed sociodemographic variables ($p < 0.05$), showing distinctions in the perception of citizen insecurity based on age, gender, marital status, occupation, area of residence, and education level. It was determined that young, single students, who had not experienced a criminal event and reside in urban areas, regardless of gender, perceive a greater sense of insecurity. **Contribution:** The study is relevant due to the generality of the results in a significant sample, demonstrating that the study contributes to understanding how various elements of the socioeconomic and demographic context can influence the way in which individuals perceive insecurity in their communities, likewise, the perception of citizen insecurity directly affects the general well-being and quality of life of residents, influencing their behaviors and attitudes towards coexistence and public policies; which will help implement more effective actions in the sector to reduce crime rates.

Keywords: citizen insecurity; sociodemographic variables; public and private spaces; crime; population

1. Introduction

Public insecurity constitutes a complex, multidimensional, and multi-causal social issue. It is defined as the perception of vulnerability experienced by individuals in some spaces, primarily due to the presence of organized crime in the nations that suffer from it (Triana, 2020). This phenomenon affects the general population and is now closely linked to economic growth. Paradoxically, increased trade and investment flows can generate new forms of crime. In this context, the responsibility for creating secure social foundations lies with the government, legislators, the judicial system, and public opinion. The objective is to foster an environment of peace that guarantees the social, economic, and political conditions necessary for the country's development.

However, the absence of these conditions can exacerbate the perception of insecurity, affecting all development systems and, most importantly, increasing fear

among the population due to high exposure to crime (Kanashiro, 2021).

Therefore, Sandoval (2013) emphasizes that citizen security focuses on protecting people from violent crime and dispossession, highlighting its fundamental role in maintaining social order and protecting individual property.

The conceptual complexity of citizen insecurity is evident in the extensive scholarly literature and empirical studies conducted across diverse international contexts. This multifaceted phenomenon defies singular theoretical explanations or models of causation. Instead, it necessitates a nuanced understanding that considers the specific contextual factors of each locality, urban space, region, or nation, as these unique characteristics and challenges significantly influence the manifestation and perception of insecurity (Huamani et al., 2019).

According to the pollster IPSOS Peru (2024), 87% of Peruvians feel insecure when walking the streets at night, perceiving a lack of protection, considering that the streets are dangerous even during the day (67% feel insecure). Furthermore, 63% indicate that insecurity has increased in the last twelve months, and 31% of Peruvians also indicated that they feel insecure inside their own home due to the high crime and delinquency rate that has been observed in the country, considering that they can be victims at any time due to the high presence of a thief, hitman, extortionist, stalker, and kidnapper in any public or private space.

The evaluation of citizen insecurity relies on various instruments designed to assess this social issue. In this research, the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1985) was adapted to evaluate citizens' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the security services provided by the State, allowing for the determination of the population's perceived level of security or insecurity. This survey system considers a set of dimensions such as tangible elements, considering physical aspects, equipment, and appearance of the people who provide the service; reliability, the ability of those involved to provide services reliably; responsiveness is the availability of human resources necessary to meet the needs of users; safety, capacity, and ability of employees to perform their work; and empathy, the ability of those involved to understand the needs of users by attending to them in a personalized way (Garcia et al., 2022).

Research on sociodemographic factors associated with citizens' sense of insecurity is crucial for understanding how various elements of the socioeconomic context influence individuals' views of safety within their communities (Huamani et al., 2019; Quintero, 2020). This issue is particularly significant, as the experience of citizen insecurity directly impacts residents' overall well-being and quality of life, shaping their behaviors and attitudes towards social coexistence and public policies (Trejos et al., 2022). Despite growing academic interest in this field in recent years, substantial gaps persist in our specific understanding of how sociodemographic factors interact with and modulate perceptions of citizen insecurity (Alcántara and Argomedo, 2024). It highlights the need for more comprehensive and nuanced research to clarify these complex relationships and inform the development of effective policies in the public safety areas and community well-being.

Most previous studies have analyzed sociodemographic factors and the perception of safety in isolation without relating or associating variables in a local and national context. This fragmented approach has created a theoretical gap that limits

understanding of how these variables influence each other and underscores the need for a more comprehensive analysis that can capture complex dynamics in different social settings (Anticona-Valderrama et al., 2023; Gonzales and Barbarán, 2021; Leiva and Ramírez, 2021; Peralta et al., 2019).

Existing production has examined various aspects, such as the influence of age, educational level, economic income, and socioeconomic environment on the perception of security. However, in many cases, these studies have not considered all sociodemographic factors simultaneously or explored how they interact with each other to determine the perception of insecurity (Alcántara and Argomedo, 2024; Huamani et al., 2019; Quintero, 2020). In this sense, the absence of an integrated approach limits the in-depth understanding of how these combined factors influence citizens' overall perception of citizen security.

In addition, understanding these aspects will allow for better decision-making at the governmental, legislative, and judicial levels; it will also serve as a basis for other studies that will complement this one and improve the interventions of security operators in the country. Therefore, it was proposed that the sociodemographic factors associated with citizen insecurity in the Peruvian population be analyzed, considering variables such as age, sex, marital status, occupation and educational level.

2. Methodology

The present research used a non-experimental, quantitative design of a descriptive basic level and cross-sectional (Calizaya et al., 2022). The information was collected during the last quarter of 2023 and the first quarter of 2024.

2.1. Participants

A total of 11,116 citizens in the range of 18 to 85 years old (youth, adults, and older adults), of both sexes, with any occupation, level of education, and marital status, participated. Participants were selected by nonprobability sampling. Exclusion criteria ruled out people who were unwilling to give voluntary consent and those with severe cognitive impairment. Likewise, the G-Power program was used for the sample size, considering the following parameters to use the appropriate statistical tests: Exact test for association with normal Chi-square model, type of analysis a priori, error 0.05, reliability 0.95, and moderate effect sizes (Ramos-Vera, 2021).

2.2. Instrument

To understand how citizens perceive public and private security, the Díaz (2021) citizen security questionnaire was used and validated for a Peruvian sample ranging from 15 to 80 years. This questionnaire was developed following the SERVQUAL service quality model to evaluate citizens' perceptions of security in their locality. The instrument consists of 42 items and employs a 5-point Likert scale, where value 1 (one) represents a quite few and 5 (five) is a lot. It can be administered individually or collectively, lasting 15 to 30 minutes. The scoring system indicates that higher scores reflect greater satisfaction (presence of security), while lower scores denote dissatisfaction (presence of insecurity). Additionally, sociodemographic variables such as age, sex, marital status, occupation, and educational level were included.

Calizaya-López et al. (2022) conducted a construct validity analysis in a Peruvian sample, using confirmatory factor analysis to evaluate the initial structure of the questionnaire. The results showed a fit comparable to the original model, which allows us to conclude that the instrument is valid for the Peruvian population. Regarding the scale's internal consistency, the McDonald Omega test-retest reliability method was used, which obtained a high level of reliability (0.949). Therefore, the scale presents solid validity indexes and high reliability.

2.3. Procedure

Upon obtaining approval for the study, local authorities and researchers collaborated to coordinate data collection within the community. The survey instrument was digitized using Google Forms and distributed through virtual and physical channels. Platforms of social media and e-mail were used for virtual distribution. On the other hand, physical surveys were conducted in public spaces such as markets, sports complexes, parks, squares, and shopping malls. In addition, social institutions and higher education organizations were involved to encourage participation. Before administering the survey, participants were given clear instructions, informed of the study goals, and given an informed consent form that guaranteed the confidentiality of their data.

2.4. Data analysis

The Google Forms program generated a database in a spreadsheet of the Xls extension. Data collected via physical questionnaires were subsequently digitized and integrated with the virtual responses using Microsoft Excel, creating a comprehensive dataset for analysis. The database was then exported to the statistical program JAMOVI, allowing the necessary statistical tests to be analyzed and used. The normality of the data was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test, which indicated that the data did not follow a normal distribution. As a result, non-parametric tests were employed. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to compare two independent samples, while the Kruskal-Wallis test, followed by post hoc tests, was applied to compare multiple (k) independent samples.

2.5. Ethical considerations

The study adhered to the ethical guidelines established by the Ministry of Health of Peru, as outlined in Ministerial Resolution No. 233-2020-MINSA, published on 27 April 2020. These guidelines were designed to promote ethical conduct in health research involving human subjects. The Ethics Committee Minutes No. 033-CEPI-UCSP, issued by the San Pablo Catholic University Peru, were obtained.

3. Results

The initial dataset comprised 11,500 surveys, of which 384 were excluded due to incompleteness, resulting in a final sample of 11,116 participants. Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed in the analysis. Categorical variables are presented as percentages, while numerical variables are summarized using appropriate statistical measures. The Shapiro-Wilk test was utilized to evaluate the

distributions of study variables, including sociodemographic factors and perceptions of citizen insecurity. This analysis indicated non-normal distributions for these variables (Fau et al., 2020). Furthermore, exploratory data analysis identified the presence of outliers. Effect sizes were incorporated into the comparative analyses with interpretations based on established thresholds: 0.1, 0.3, and 0.5, denoting small, medium, and extra effects, respectively (Mair and Wilcox, 2020).

Descriptive analyses of the sociodemographic variables yielded the following results: The mean age of participants was 31.32 years (SD = 12.93), ranging from 18 to 80 years. Gender distribution showed 47.1% male and 52.9% female participants. Marital status was categorized as single (63.1%), married (28.1%), cohabiting (5.5%), divorced (1.8%), and widowed (1.5%). Occupational distribution comprised housewives (8.7%), students (38%), self-employed individuals (32.6%), and dependent workers (20.7%). Educational attainment was reported as primary (4.3%), secondary (18.7%), technical (19.4%), and higher education (57.6%). Regarding residential areas, 15.6% resided in rural areas and 84.4% in urban areas. Age groups were classified as young (55.9%), adult (40.8%), and older adult (3.3%). Furthermore, in response to the question, “Did you experience a criminal act in the last six months?” 25.7% of participants responded affirmatively, while 74.3% reported no such experience.

Table 1 describes the level of citizen insecurity, and the survey dimensions show that more than 50% of the population feels insecure in public and private spaces. In addition, low scores in the study dimensions indicate insufficient physical aspects, equipment, and human resources for the service; lack of capacity of the authorities, the Peruvian National Police, operators of the prosecutor’s office, and the judicial system to provide services reliably; absence of capacity and ability of employees to perform their work; and the lack of empathy on the part of those involved to understand the needs of users.

Table 1. Level of citizen insecurity and dimensions of study.

Variables	Low	Middle	High
Citizen Security	51.2%	47.6%	1.3%
Reliability	42.5%	55.7%	1.8%
Responsiveness	53.1%	45.0%	1.9%
Confidence	49.4%	48.3%	2.3%
Empathy	55.9%	42.7%	1.4%
Tangible elements	47.7%	42.9%	9.4%

Table 2 presents the associations between the sociodemographic variables and the level of citizen insecurity, revealing significant associations for all variables ($p < 0.05$). These sociodemographic factors help differentiate the perception of citizen insecurity based on age, sex, marital status, occupation, area of residence, and education level.

Table 2. Association of sociodemographic factors with citizen insecurity.

Sociodemographic variables	Chi-square (X^2)	Gl	Significance
Sex	796.965 th	131	0.000
Area of residence	573.119 th	131	0.000
Occupation	2250.823 ^a	393	0.000
Level of schooling	2802.137 ^a	393	0.000
Marital status	3779.092 ^a	524	0.000
Population group	1529.175 ^a	263	0.000
Did he go through a crime?	965.711 ^a	131	0.000

Note. gl = degrees of freedom; significance = *p* value (0.05).

The comparison of sociodemographic variables (2 groups) with citizen insecurity revealed statistically significant differences in the area of residence and whether individuals experienced a crime. People living in urban areas and those who have not experienced a crime feel more insecure than those in rural areas or those who have gone through a criminal event. However, regarding gender, both men and women report feeling equally insecure, with no significant differences (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Comparisons of sociodemographic variables (2 groups) with citizen insecurity.

Sociodemographic variables	Statistic U	<i>p</i>	TEA	Group
Sex	1.54×10^7	0.893	0.00147	Men Women
Residence zone	6.68×10^6	<0.001	0.180	Urban Rural
Did he go through a crime?	1.06×10^7	<0.001	0.0971	Yes No

Note. *U* = U of Mann by Whitney; *p* = significance (0.05); TE = effect size.

Table 4. Comparisons of sociodemographic variables (+ of 2 groups) with citizen insecurity.

Sociodemographic variables	Statistic X^2	<i>p</i>	TEA	Group
Marital status	109	<0.001	0.00978	Bachelor Married Cohabitant Divorced Widower
Occupation	51.8	<0.001	0.0148	Housewife Student Independent Dependent
Education level	85.8	< 0.001	0.0222	Primary High school Technique Superior

Note. X^2 = Chi square; *p* = significance (0.05); TE = size of the effect.

Table 4—The comparison of sociodemographic variables (with more than two groups) and citizen insecurity revealed differences in marital status, occupation, and

educational level using post hoc tests. Singles, students, and people with higher educational levels report feeling more insecure compared to the other groups.

4. Discussion

The aim was to analyze the sociodemographic factors associated with the level of citizen insecurity in the Peruvian population. In this sense, an association ($p < 0.05$) was found between the variables, considering that they distinguish the perception of citizen insecurity according to age, sex, marital status, occupation, area of residence, level of schooling, accumulating knowledge and filling significant gaps in the specific understanding of how sociodemographic factors interact with the population perception of citizen security (Alcántara and Argomedo, 2024).

Citizen insecurity in Peru is notably high, with over 50% of the population feeling unsafe in both public and private spaces. Many perceive a lack of protection, viewing the streets as dangerous, even during the day. Additionally, a significant portion of citizens feel insecure within their own homes due to the high rates of delinquency and crime observed across the country, which has instilled fear in the population. These findings coincide with the data reported by IPSOS Peru (2024) and are supported by reports from the National Institute of Statistics and Informatics (INEI). The most reported crimes correspond to crimes against property, such as theft and fraud, which accounted for 66.4% of the crimes reported in the last months of 2022. The most affected departments were Ucayali, with 76.7% of crimes in this category, followed by Metropolitan Lima and Piura, with 74.1%.

Also, the low scores across the study dimensions highlight deficiencies in physical infrastructure, equipment, and human resources within the citizen security services. This situation is primarily attributable to the inadequate fiscal allocations to the security sector and the constrained financial resources available to local governmental entities. These budgetary limitations significantly impede the implementation of comprehensive security strategies and the acquisition of necessary equipment and personnel. These limitations hinder the ability to provide an adequate security service, particularly in hiring additional personnel to patrol the streets and training them effectively (Gonzales, 2020). Furthermore, there is a need for investments in technological equipment, vehicles, and computer systems to protect public spaces.

Similarly, the limited capacity of government and legislative authorities, the National Police of Peru, prosecutors, and the judicial system to provide reliable services is a critical issue. The population lacks confidence in those responsible for security and justice, leading to underreporting of criminal acts. Consequently, many criminals remain free due to the alleged lack of sufficient evidence for prosecutors. Additionally, a significant percentage of personnel within state institutions lack the necessary competencies and qualifications for their roles, diminishing the potential for improving sector policies and effectiveness. The lack of empathy from those involved further exacerbates the issue, as fear spreads due to the high crime rate while authorities display passivity in addressing the problem. This situation is worrying because operators in the sector often show apathy towards the daily criminal experiences and hardships facing citizens (Alcántara and Argomedo, 2024; Huamani

et al., 2019; Quintero, 2020).

Concerning the sociodemographic variables in citizen insecurity, it is a significant contribution that helps to understand how the social, demographic, and economic conditions influence the perception of citizen insecurity level. Therefore, in the gender variable, there was no difference in the perception level of citizen insecurity; men and women perceive insecurity in all its dimensions. However, the Organization of American States (OAS, 2012) report on citizen security from a rights and gender equality perspective distinguishes between the threats people suffer based on gender. On the one hand, men are victims of robbery, simple assault, fraud, gang violence, homicide, contract killings, homophobic violence, and kidnapping. On the other hand, women, being more vulnerable, are victims of fraud, sexual assault and harassment, kidnap and rape, femicide, human trafficking and smuggling, sexual exploitation, violence in all its typologies, and homophobic violence, which have characterized themselves over time.

About age demographics, the data indicate that younger and single individuals report higher levels of perceived citizen insecurity compared to their adult and older adult counterparts. This heightened perception can be attributed to their increased daily exposure to potential threats through academic pursuits and social activities. Students, in particular, emerge as a notably vulnerable subgroup, especially within academic environments where the incidence of crimes such as robbery and kidnapping has shown a marked increase in recent months. This vulnerability may be exacerbated by factors such as predictable schedules, the concentration of valuable personal items, and potentially lower levels of situational awareness characteristic of this demographic. These findings align with those reported by Gamboa et al. (2021), which indicate that young people are often targeted due to their high use of technological devices, leading to incidents of abuse of authority, robbery, and intimidation with weapons.

The level of education also plays a significant role in the analysis of insecurity. As individuals become more educated, their chances of professional and career success increase, making them targets for extortion, kidnapping, or aggravated robbery. This situation not only affects the victims but also impacts their families and social circles, heightening overall fear within the population about the potential risk of becoming victims of such criminal activities (Jiménez and Méndez, 2020). The area of residence is characterized by the area where the population resides, according to the results, citizens in urban areas feel greater insecurity than those in rural areas, in this sense, the social, economic, and cultural dynamics are distinguished from one area to another, producing greater commercial and economic interaction in urban areas. as Kanashiro (2021) mentions, insecurity is related to economic growth, leading to greater flows of business and investments that can be generated by this economic dynamic to new forms of crime, exposing people in this area to be victims of crime in a greater proportion compared to citizens in rural areas.

To address the high-security levels, it is essential to formulate new policies and implement effective and responsible interventions by the State. This effort should involve authorities at all levels, from the top officials to operational staff, and ultimately include the active participation of the organized public in demanding their right to live in a safe, calm, and peaceful environment (Aguilar Reyes et al., 2024; Coz

and Pariona, 2023). When authorities demonstrate genuine concern for the needs of citizens and respond effectively, it tends to enhance public confidence in their ability to maintain order and ensure protection. It is a principal issue that could be addressed to restore order and security; as the United States has demonstrated by considering that economic development must involve a sustainable process of citizen security, to guarantee safe financial and commercial transactions, allowing greater job opportunities and per capita income, improving the quality of life of families, maintaining order and sustaining security in all its dimensions against criminal organization; situations that must be considered by Latin American countries that in the last 10 years have not been able to comply with citizen security plans, directly harming their population (Conzales and Barbaran, 2021; Pazinato and Tavares dos Santos, 2024).

Several limitations emerged during the research. First, the cross-sectional study design restricted the scope of more robust statistical analyses. I'll rewrite the paragraph while maintaining its length and improving its academic tone:

Secondly, data collection was impeded by challenges in accessing information from the target sample. This obstacle was mainly due to the general distrust of potential participants when approached in public spaces, which resulted in many people refusing to participate in the study. This reluctance potentially introduces a selection bias and may affect the sample's representativeness. Third, limited financial resources extended the data collection period.

It is vital to continue investigating citizen insecurity across the general population, correlating the study variable with other relevant factors, and employing a multidisciplinary approach to understand and explain the full extent of this issue. Likewise, the results of this study suggest implementing, creating or modifying existing laws that severely punish those involved and better guarantee the rights of the majority of citizens.

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