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# Using research to promote gender equality



by [Maria Balarin](#) in [Blog](#)

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In the Peruvian social sciences, half of all university students are female. However, only 1 out of 3 working professionals are women, 1 out of 3 university professors are women, and 1 in 5 media experts are women. So why do we see fewer women in academic events, media, and leadership and teaching positions? And what can be done about it?

*[Editor's note: This post is the second in a blog series on think tanks and gender]*

we recently produced a series of studies on gender inequalities in the social sciences, incorporating a diverse range of perspectives that explore: the barriers that women experience throughout their careers; the narratives they construct to explain their trajectories; the added difficulties that women experience in the highly masculine field of economics; and the early experiences of young women who opt for academic or research careers. We've also included a comparative revision of higher education policies that seek to generate equal opportunities for men and women.

These studies have shown that the proportion of male professors in higher academic posts (27.8) nearly doubles that of females (15.5). Only 36% of women over 45 years of age reach the highest teaching posts compared to 54% of their male peers. While researchers' and academics' salaries are low in general, more men (25.4%) than women (15.6%) are in the higher earning group.

There are few differences between men and women when it comes to research production. While [research production in Perú](#) is generally weak - reflecting the precarious research environment - both men and women publish in equal amounts. When it comes to women's participation in academic events and the media (such as, for example, providing expert commentary on issues), however, the differences are stark. Men's participation in all types of media (radio, television, newspapers, etc.) doubles that of women in all cases.

### **Why these disparities exist**

Even when our studies use different methodologies, they arrive at similar explanations as to why these disparities exist. On one hand, the broader context in which social research and academic careers develop is extremely precarious in Peru, with no public funding or policies to promote research. This has contributed to the weak institutionalization of academic and research careers, in which informal networks play a stronger role than professional and meritocratic processes. While these factors affect all academics, women seem to be more disadvantaged because the rules of the game are built around predominantly male paradigms.

On top of this our studies find that gender inequalities can be attributed to:

- the unequal division of domestic and care work that generates barriers that institutions do not acknowledge as creating different starting points for men and women, and therefore tend to reproduce
- the predominance of subtle and not so subtle discrimination mechanisms that translate into stereotyping, patronizing comments and other behaviours and beliefs that often undermine women's work and their own self-confidence
- early socialization practices in the family, schools and universities which generate different orientations towards and appreciation for certain subjects, methodologies and forms of knowledge
- the fact that gender inequalities are often taken for granted by both men and women who take them to be natural, rather than socially or culturally produced.

While the weak national and institutional context in which academic and research careers develop in Peru may deepen gender inequalities, the literature suggests that the patterns and causes of such inequalities are similar throughout the Americas region. Women academics face a number of barriers in their career progression, which manifest in a staggering erosion of professional women at every stage of the career ladder ('the leaking pipeline'), as well as in the stagnation of women in the lowest positions ('the glass ceiling'). These challenges are the product of a series of factors that are intermingled, which we outline below, exacerbating the difficulties women face.

Women must contend with a series of subtle mechanisms of gender discrimination and differentiated valuations about the work they do. They must also learn to manage the complicated relationship between domestic and professional life, which often burdens them more than their male counterparts. This is largely due to the fact that academic institutions do not implement institutional policies – such as flexible working hours, parental leave packages, differentiated hours allocation models, or sexual harassment policies - targeted at promoting equal opportunities for women and their professional development, and which may contribute to change entrenched institutional cultures.

These factors constitute barriers that add up and affect women in different ways depending on their social background, ethnicity, and their territorial and institutional context. As a result, some women are more affected than others by these multiple barriers.

The lack of women in the academic world is not just a problem of social equality, justice, and representation, or the about the challenge young women face in learning from role models that are similar to them. This is also a problem of efficiency. We are losing talent, abilities and perspectives that could contribute to the academic world, potentially providing solutions to the issues that the social sciences study.

### **Moving forward**

The key to moving forward will be raising awareness about the existence and causes of gender disparities. Grupo Sofía is actively contributing to this through its campaigns, engagement with the media and by circulating its research findings in various forums. We have created a toolkit for individuals and organizations who organize academic and policy events and in it propose a number of questions and routes they may take in order to ensure greater gender equality. We have also created a directory of female social science experts which can be used as a resource by the media and by event organizers, as well as studies of policy alternatives for tackling gender inequality in academia. To read more about the group's activities and proposals visit: <http://www.gruposofia.org.pe/>

*Please note: These are the author's personal opinions and do not necessarily reflect those of the Think Tank Initiative.*

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