

# Gender equity and mosquito-borne diseases: approach from the humanities

## Abstract

The article offers a vision of how gender equality is related to diseases transmitted by mosquitoes, from the perspective of the object of study, within the framework of the Humanities. The authors critically review the plurality of concepts, the scope and limits around "gender equity" to describe the persistence of dissent regarding the consensus around this definition. The article exposes the scenario set by the emergence of diseases transmitted by mosquitoes today. The authors' analysis contains the links, connections and common logic of articulation and development on the power of action (praxis) of gender equity, within the framework of these diseases, to transform discriminatory experiences from the perspective of the humanities. They conclude that gender equality becomes an urgent and necessary need for the prevention, control and effective management of diseases transmitted by mosquitoes, since it is essential to transform the conditions of vulnerability of girls and women, needing to transform human nature in pursuit of introduce expert criteria from the humanities to introduce cultural changes and in the ways of thinking, feeling and acting of people and of humanity as a whole.

**Keywords:** gender equity, mosquito-borne diseases, humanities, cultural change, social development

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## Introduction

Humanities cannot develop without constant updating. When one delves into the object of these sciences, it can be observed that they unfold in a direct link, for better or for worse, with social reality, the dynamics of social changes and the multiple problems that affect girls, women, men and children; that is, of the problems of concrete people. One of the essential problems of humanity is universal access to health services, an essential issue, as long as it is the most precious and elementary right to live. The scope of health for all constitutes one of the main goals to which humanity aspires in the 21st century, for this reason, in a coherent way; the International Community established the Sustainable Development Goals related to health. The implementation of actions to achieve these Goals presupposes an impact on social inclusion, human rights for all people and the demand for universal access to health. These problems bring about the alteration of the division and social articulation of work; as well as the role historically given to males and females in the intellectual field, humanities, sciences, techniques and arts. An issue that forces us to reconsider, in this moment, a new general culture, and new forms of socialization and relationships that break the traditional borders that exclude the systems of power, education, scientific and humanistic research, as well as the thinking and doing in art and human relations.

In the last two decades, studies on gender equality have increased, from the humanistic sciences produced in Latin America. Among the authors who assume gender equality as an object of study are: González,<sup>1</sup> Bohórquez, Anctil & Rojas,<sup>2</sup> Bericat,<sup>3</sup> Rodríguez,<sup>4</sup> Paredes,<sup>5</sup> Ricaldi,<sup>6</sup> Murguialday.<sup>7</sup> However, the bibliographic search carried out reveals a gap in the analysis of diseases transmitted by mosquitoes from the humanities. The research regarding these fields is dispersed and disaggregated, without revealing the relationships and interactions that occur between both problems. The article contributes to the solution of the problem configured by the insufficient treatment, which from the theory and the methodology has been carried out, to how the relational dynamics between gender equity and mosquito-borne diseases takes place, as an object of study, in the field of

humanities. Based on a documentary review of press articles, reports from international and national organizations, academic literature, and qualitative research, the text reflects on the relational dynamics between gender equity and mosquito-borne diseases; as an object of study pertinent to the Humanities.

Due to this, approaches will be presented around the conceptual treatment of gender equity and the context delimited by the emergence of mosquito-borne diseases. To then go on to make visible the links, connections and common logic of articulation and development on the power of action (praxis) of gender equity, within the framework of these diseases, to transform discriminatory experiences from the perspective of the humanities. The results presented in this paper are produced in the context of the VectoCaribe International Project.

## Conceptual referents

The concept of gender equity has spread relatively recently to refer to a multidimensional space tending to achieve justice and access without exclusions of a sexist nature or attached to sociocultural norms of exclusion of girls and women to goods, services, activities, relationships and values related to the most basic and relevant needs for the existence and reproduction of people, in the societies in which people live in a concrete way. Associating diseases transmitted by mosquitoes with the concept of gender equality implies concentrating on those aspects of this space that generate, or contribute to generate, justice for all people and guarantee of all rights, especially the most precious of all: health. In other words, what is particularly interesting are the gaps or conditions that create a space of exclusion or fragility that place girls and women in conditions of vulnerability in the face of these diseases; It is the relationship that exists between the way in which societies organize the care of all people in these diseases, in the different contexts in which they live, work or study under the operation of health systems. In this sense, it is worth noting that Paredes<sup>5</sup> conceptualizes gender equality as "...the deliberate treatment of situations of justice, which people receive, because they are subjected to unfair inequalities, because of their sex (...). This author

reduces the heuristic and epistemic capacities of the concept “gender equity” while limiting it to one of its dimensions: the scope of justice. On the other hand, Dosal, Mejía, Capdevila<sup>8</sup> state that: gender equity is a multidimensional concept. It is made up of multiple political, legal, economic, educational and family factors resulting from the interplay of socio-cultural variables. Hence the depth of the lags and the difficulties of correcting them (...). Here the argumentative capacities of what turns out to be “gender equity” are expanded.

Although it is not intended to exhaust the problems related to the conceptual treatment of gender equality, it must be understood by the differentiated impacts of diseases transmitted by mosquitoes experienced by women, men and populations with different genders. Thus, the documents how do mosquito-borne diseases affect women differently? of the year 2023 explains how diseases transmitted by mosquitoes exclusively affect women both in health and pregnancy; unpaid care, work and from the perspective of health sector personnel. The definitions around the concept of gender equity become multifaceted and complex, also involving important cultural and geographical differences. In this work, it is considered that gender is not binary, but that the illusion of gender as corporeal identity is created: social norms come to have an impact on the constitution of the subject who identifies with a masculine or feminine gender, thus causing, the discrimination of all bodies that do not respond to these norms established in the heteronormative matrix.<sup>9</sup> The look at gender equity in the context of mosquito-borne diseases implies the recognition of exclusion and marginalization as well as trying to build sustainable logics for inclusion, since it is not an issue that is outside of the society, of the human being, and of the relationships that girls and women establish and promote, both social relationships and relationships with their community and family environment. Consequently, in order to achieve gender equity in the face of these diseases, it is necessary to take, implement and build democratization policies consistent with the logic of sustainability of the dynamics of inclusive male-female relationships. In this framework, gender relations are also an expression of forms of appropriation, distribution, access and use of health services, since they influence and are influenced by them. The central issue would be to build societies of rights for all people.

### **The humanities and gender equity in contexts of diseases transmitted by mosquitoes**

Around the object of study of the humanities there are different visions and points of view, the diversity is so great that the existence of an ambiguity regarding this matter can be sustained. Among the authors who deal with this question. The changes operated in human relations, in the future of humanity, print a different dynamic to the assignment of roles, functions and position in the power structures to males and females. The humanities’ ability to respond to current demands regarding the reduction of gender gaps and asymmetries that place girls and women in conditions of vulnerability to mosquito-borne diseases focuses attention on this issue. The demand to guarantee universal access to health services brings as a consequence the tendency to increase the necessary empowerment of women. Although mosquitoes do not identify or select their victims according to gender, it is a reality that mosquito-borne diseases affect women differently, from health and pregnancy outcomes to a greater burden of unpaid care, both at home and in the health sector.<sup>10</sup> In some nations, this trend has strained the capacities of health systems to react to these diseases and gender asymmetries. These systems are incapable of responding to such demands for growth with their own resources; there is little willingness in the international community to provide

multilateral action; for being historically designed to reproduce inequalities associated with gender. Together with the growth in demand for health services, the problem of the quality of care systems emerges. Quality is understood as the effectiveness of health care, epidemiological, cultural, educational, economic services with higher levels of access for all, without exclusions. Gender equality in the context of mosquito-borne diseases also includes the financing of health systems and the implementation of public policies focused on eliminating gender gaps.

Equity, thus focused, demands transformations in education and culture regarding respect for people’s bodies, which requires changing people’s way of thinking, so that they coherently assume roles, responsibilities, functions and incorporate attitudes and behaviors in a practical inclusive way. The change in relation to the role played by females and males, and in general of all humanity, is a vitally important element in achieving gender equity in this context. It is not simply about introducing legal changes in social processes and relationships; it is essentially about transforming such processes and relationships with the introduction of equity for all people. From the humanities, women and girls are considered as active elements in the fight against these diseases, with their own interests, perceptions, logic and life objectives, which must be respected and included in management, control and prevention strategies, but also with a series of obstacles and limitations of participation, of access to power that must be reversed, since these prevent women from assuming the role that corresponds to them in the process of confronting existing inequity conditions, affecting their own development and that of society in general.

Gender equity should not only be taken into account when planning the management of coping resources at the local level, but also in relation to global trends and how these affect the social situation of women and men, it is imperative to take advantage of these processes to direct them towards the achievement of better results; that is, consider the micro and macro scenarios when defining public policies to reverse asymmetries, but under comprehensive approaches that include each of the actors and also consider the effects on them. For this, it is essential to have selected and processed information, embodied in indicators that give us adequate signals for making responsible decisions, directed towards the real problems and obstacles to development; those that are contributed by the Humanities, given its global and transversal nature. From the humanities it is necessary to provide key indicators that reveal the reason for the scope of gender equality to effectively manage these diseases. They should also provide scientific data on this parameter for the many countries that lack robust civil registration systems, vital statistics or registration of nationally representative samples. Such equity imposes the production and provision of goods and services for the care, protection and promotion of differential public health. Health must be understood in an inclusive sense, containing its valuation as a space for correction and overcoming of all kinds of differences, challenging the historically imposed patriarchal social model that is based on the social division of labor and power by sex, where the humanities reveal the close link between the epidemiological profiles of a population and the characteristics of accessibility, financing and management of the health system.<sup>11</sup>

Combating the lags and difficulties that gender inequality generates for dealing with such diseases reflects how the problems that violate rights or widen the gaps between males and females affect the entire society. What is relevant is how the virtues and defects of the health systems and the Humanities help or deteriorate the lives of women and girls. Female participation in confronting these diseases in all contexts

is decisive. Certainly, based on the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016-2030): adolescent health,<sup>12</sup> female access to health services is growing, but with poor data bases. In fact, a large part of the female population is still excluded, strategies for the control, management and prevention of mosquitoes are neglected to treat them differently based on widespread and legitimized inequalities, the focus on collective coexistence is increasing, wasting, even, an important transforming potential of the women themselves. Although the World Strategy for the Health of Women, Children and Adolescents (2016-2030): adolescent health is not the only international effort in favor of gender equality in a health problem, the Humanities reflect the relevance of seeking greater female involvement in activities to combat these diseases. For this, the formation of a health culture of justice, egalitarian and inclusive is imposed, which provides power to women in this organization.

The Humanities contribute to the application of gender equity in the design of health and epidemiological policies, in the context of the diseases referred to, because with their expert criteria they allow the identification and reduction of the differential impact of these on women and men, which they are generally raised with the false assumption that their effects are the same for both. In addition, the conception of public policies from the perspective of gender equality faces a constant tension between "being" and "should be", while on the one hand, it implies recognizing, valuing and promoting the roles played by women and girls in each specific context and their contributions to reducing or eliminating inequality gaps and, on the other hand, overcoming the rigidity of the division of roles; the exclusion and subordination that affects them in order to achieve equity and sustainability.<sup>13</sup>

The trending concern of the Humanities lies in how to ensure projects and strategies for the prevention, control and management of diseases transmitted by mosquitoes, which contributes at the same time to women gaining autonomy and improving their social gender condition. In any case, it is important to identify when gender equality and the protection of people's lives can be simultaneously objectives in the interventions of health systems and when not. The task of thinking about gender equality in the context of diseases transmitted by mosquitoes implies an even more complex task: changing the oppressive structures that have made possible the occurrence of the violation of a right and therefore a specific act of violence.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

The approaches to the concept of gender equity, reviewed in the first section, indicate the plurality of approaches that have existed around the conceptual treatment of this term. They provide insights to critically understand and explain the paradigms and logic that have led the "evolution" of the Humanities and how they have influenced social relations and decision-making through more inclusive public policies, both at the national and global level. Questioning the logics that make possible the gaps of asymmetry between males and females, and consequently the relationships derived from them, helps us to define new relationship paradigms and values that guide the construction of new logics, rationalities, relationships, which allow us to build forms of societies where the life of all people is the center of development objectives. Overcoming errors and inequities must be conducted through awareness of the need for a change in sexist and excluding paradigms. Therefore, the Humanities are essential to generate useful instruments in processes of awareness, construction of the future vision, of what we want to achieve, construction of new rationalities, and generation of change processes, which guide decision-making and assumption of behaviors that incorporate equity

in mentalities and practices in dealing with diseases transmitted by mosquitoes. The Humanities reveal that effective action will only be possible when the scope of gender equality is incorporated into the strategies and projects for the management, prevention and control of diseases transmitted by mosquitoes.

Understanding the need for the gender equity-diseases transmitted by mosquitoes-Humanities link, under democratic criteria, leads to criticizing the very patriarchal bases of the social architecture process and the assumption of humanizing, inclusive approaches and with logics of development that articulate the environmental problem, gender, equity, the scope of the inclusion of robust health systems under new logics and rationalities that carry the possibilities of achieving the same conditions of life, work and roles for all. The Humanities make visible that until gender equality is incorporated into the conception and implementation of the management, prevention and control of diseases transmitted by mosquitoes and there are substantive changes in the logic of social power and the bodies of people, the efforts to achieve better results will remain a pipe dream; since the reproduction mechanisms of the systems of domination and violence will go unpunished in the face of the demand for more inclusive societies for all people.

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## Conflicts of interest

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