



*Research paper / Artículo científico*

## **An exploratory investigation of the perspectives of educated parents on the gender roles and stereotypes in child and adolescent sexuality**

Una investigación exploratoria de las perspectivas de padres educados sobre los roles y estereotipos de género en la sexualidad de niños y adolescentes

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### **ABSTRACT**

The exploratory research presented in this article investigated the perspectives on the gender roles and stereotypes in the care of children and their sexual education of a small group of educated parents, using a patriarchal model. The sample consisted of 30 parents of which 20 participated in in-depth interviews, and 10 in two focus groups, 5 in each group. All 23 women and 7 men possessed a third-level degree, and some held a postgraduate diploma. It was found that even educated parents reproduce patterns they learned within the traditional family. A man decides and enjoys free and dominant sexuality, while a woman is required to have a beautiful body and be a wife who submits sexually to her husband. The study concludes that the caring role of women, the subalternity and maternalism-marianism of female identity, and the care of the body and the norms of beauty are the female characteristics that still dominate social thinking. However, due to the increasing participation of women in the labor market, women are becoming gradually more autonomous.

**Keywords:** Parents, gender role, gender stereotype, sexuality, children, adolescent.

### **RESUMEN**

La investigación exploratoria presentada en este artículo investigó las perspectivas sobre los roles y estereotipos de género en el cuidado de los niños y su educación sexual de un pequeño grupo de padres educados, utilizando el modelo patriarcal. La muestra estuvo conformada por 30 padres de familia de los cuales 20 participaron en entrevistas en profundidad, y 10 en dos grupos focales, 5 en cada grupo. Las 23 mujeres y los 7 hombres poseían un título de tercer nivel y algunos tenían diplomas de posgrado. Se encontró que incluso los padres educados reproducen patrones que aprendieron dentro de la familia tradicional. El hombre decide y disfruta de una sexualidad libre y dominante, mientras que una mujer está obligada a tener un cuerpo bello y ser una esposa que se somete sexualmente a su marido. El estudio concluye que el rol cuidador de la mujer, la subalternidad y materialismo-marianismo de la identidad femenina, el cuidado del cuerpo y las normas de belleza son las características femeninas que aún dominan el pensamiento social. Sin embargo, debido a la creciente participación de la mujer en el mercado laboral, la mujer se está volviendo cada vez más autónoma.

**Palabras claves:** Padres, roles de género, estereotipos de género, sexualidad, niños, adolescentes.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Parents are helping their children in most activities of their daily life, such as feeding, sleeping, cleaning, homework, guidance in education, and health monitoring, among others. In Latin America, Ecuador, and in Cuenca in particular, the mother is the parent that takes care of the children in around 90% of the households (ONU Mujeres, 2020).

Gender identity represents the perception and expression of oneself as a male, female, or transgender (Simonelli *et al.*, 2007). In several cultures, two genders are considered,

each corresponding to biological sex (Endendijk *et al.*, 2017; Núñez *et al.*, 2015) without accepting the expressive diversity of gender that does not always correspond to the biological sex. There is a broad agreement that gender is one of the key aspects of sexuality (De Meyer *et al.*, 2014). The WHO defines human sexuality as "a central aspect of human being encompassing sex, gender identity and role, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction" (Human Reproduction Program, 2017). Gender identity, sexuality, and the relationship between gender and sexuality of children and adolescents are multifaceted processes influenced by biological, social,

cultural, interpersonal, and personal factors (Fausto-Sterling, 2019; Marcell *et al.*, 2017).

Through proximity, parents transmit to their children, from birth through to adulthood, gender stereotypes, roles, and the development of their sexuality (Halim *et al.*, 2018; Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016; Klein *et al.*, 2018; Milanowicz & Bokus, 2013). In the patriarchal model, stereotypes and gender roles frame men with virility and machismo, and women with subalternity (social construction of power asymmetry: men dominate and women submit), femininity (body care and beauty norms), motherhood (the idealized mother-child relationship as well as the notion that mothers are responsible for the fostering of child development), and marianism (growing up as a virgin woman) (Ayala & Murga, 2016; Eskola Torres, 2017; Lopez-Zafra & Garcia-Retamero, 2012). Furthermore, food, physical activity, clothing, behavior, expression of feelings, and relationships are all associated with gender. In this context, it is assumed that men should be strong and protective; and women should be beautiful, submissive, introverted, and virtuous (Endendijk *et al.*, 2017; Facio & Fries, 2005; Simonelli *et al.*, 2007).

In sexuality, men are granted active, dominant, and free sexuality (Allen & Smith, 2011). Women on the other hand are supposed to give a passive, innocent, submissive, uneroticized sexuality, to be a virgin, to have sex only in marriage, to be a mother and to be self-sacrificing to satisfy male sexual desires and requirements (Cunningham & Russell, 2004; Sandnabba *et al.*, 2003). Because of this, adolescents that have premarital sex do it in secret, as if they were committing a sin, they have sex without condoms or contraceptives because the shame involved means they are too embarrassed to purchase these items in pharmacies, causing early pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. These result in anxiety, shame, and depression, especially in women. The stereotypes and social roles of the patriarchal model are detrimental, not only in the aforementioned effects on sexuality but also because they lead to a dichotomous way of thinking about many other issues. When hierarchies are formed from these dichotomous categories, discrimination, violence, exclusion, and violation of rights can occur (Endendijk *et al.*, 2017; Jamal *et al.*, 2015; Khan & Hamid, 2020).

With the flourishing of feminist movements seeking justice, equality and changes in the roles and stereotypes of gender, health and education programs emerged that promote the rights of women in all areas of life. Positive changes took undoubtedly place such as greater integration of women in all areas of the labor market and a gradual increase in the number of women in leadership positions. However, contemporary feminist theories raise concerns that women continue to do housework in addition to their jobs in the labor market because the role of men at home remains unchanged (Lopez-Zafra & Garcia-Retamero, 2012). Moreover, women's empowerment is held back by religious groups promoting marianism and motherhood (Cornejo-Valle & Pichardo, 2017; Reyes Fonseca, 2021), consumerism promoting the sale of beauty products and female eroticism (Coffey, 2020), social networks and media reinforcing stereotypes and gender roles (Heathy, 2020; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Rosewarne, 2007), and in many countries exist the lack of a political and social will to recognize and legalize women's rights (Khan & Hamid, 2021). On top, in many countries, girls suffer more child abuse than boys, from feticide to neglectful mistreatments, such as giving them less food, denying them health care,

depriving them of education, or handing them a much greater share of the household chores (Singhi *et al.*, 13). Gender and sexuality stereotypes and roles are also taught by parents within the traditional family and are often reinforced in society and educational institutions (Milanowicz & Bokus, 2013; Halim *et al.*, 2018).

Several studies revealed that in Latin America, and in Ecuador in particular, the stereotypes and roles of care, reinforced by the Catholic religion, have been assigned to women within the patriarchal framework of subalternity, marianism, and motherhood. Despite the activity of feminist movements, these stereotypes and roles of care have not changed significantly (Boira *et al.*, 2017; De Meyer *et al.*, 2014; Giordano *et al.*, 2009; Goicolea *et al.*, 2012). In Ecuador, six out of ten women over 15 years of age experienced gender violence, of which 53.9% were psychological, 38.09% physical, 25.7% sexual, and 35.3% patrimonial. Of the women who suffered physical violence, 87.3% received it from their partner (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2012). The teenage pregnancy percentage in Latin America is 15% of all pregnant women; in Ecuador, it is 16.8% (UNICEF, 2014; CARE *et al.*, 2016). In Ecuador in 2020, 45% of the victims of gender violence were adolescents between 15 and 17 years old and the average number of femicides was 6 per month (Yungán Pinduisaca & Cajas Luzuriaga, 2020).

Inspired by these findings, this research investigated gender roles, stereotypes, and sexuality of children and adolescents under the historical-cultural anthropological theoretical approach of care, identifying whether highly educated Ecuadorian parents continue to reproduce patriarchal care: gender roles, and stereotypes in the lifelong care of girls, boys and adolescents; autonomy (capacity to choose and decide) (Pinquart, 2017); subalternity, motherhood, body care and beauty standards; sexuality and marianism; and positive changes (whether there had been positive changes for the benefit of the rights of women and girls).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative study with a phenomenological approach was conducted in the period May-July 2016 in the city of Cuenca, Ecuador. Cuenca is a city that has been characterized by its fervent Catholic faith. Since the 20th century, there have been movements organized under the umbrella of "Catholic Action". These groups, under the slogan of "moral citizenship", aim to recover areas of a traditional and conservative society that have been lost due to the social and political changes of modernity (Martínez Borrero, 2017).

Twenty in-depth face-to-face interviews and two focus groups were conducted in this research. The sample was purposive, given the inclusion of parents of children and adolescents of different ages. The interviews involved four parents of children under 5 years, five children aged 6 to 10, and 11 adolescents between 11 and 17 years. It was planned that there would be an equal number of mothers and fathers. However, even though both men and women were invited, 15 women and 5 men participated in the interviews. The interviews, based on a semi-structured guide (Table 1), were conducted in the parents' homes. The data collected through interviews reached data saturation.

Twelve parents were invited to each focus group, but only five attended each group, and those who did not attend gave no reason for their absence. Each group was made up of four women and one man. The age of the participating parents in the interviews and focus groups varied between 35 and 50 years. All were professionals holding a university degree and some possessed a postgraduate diploma. The focus groups were held in rooms of the Faculty of Medical Sciences of the University of Cuenca. They were conducted with a semi-structured question guide (Table 2).

**Table 1.** In-depth interview questions.

| #  | Question                                                                                                                               |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Who takes care of the feeding of the children at home?                                                                                 |
| 2  | Who eats the most, the girls or the boys? and why do you think this difference exists?                                                 |
| 3  | What physical activities do you offer girls and boys?                                                                                  |
| 4  | Do girls and boys like the same physical activities?                                                                                   |
| 5  | Do girls and boys behave equally in sport?                                                                                             |
| 6  | How should girls and boys behave at home, school, and outside?                                                                         |
| 7  | In the relationship between a boy and a girl, what role does each person have?<br>Who seduces, who makes decisions, who has the power? |
| 9  | What are the expectations of girls and boys in love relationships?                                                                     |
| 10 | Where receive men and women a lot more common information about sexuality?                                                             |
| 11 | At what age do boys and girls in your community start watching pornography?                                                            |
| 12 | In your community, at what age does sexual activity begin? What does the family think about this?                                      |

**Table 2.** Focus group questions.

| # | Question                                                                                           |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | My daughter told me one day that she wanted to play football, what do you think of this situation? |
| 2 | My son told me one day that he wanted to be in the ballet dance, what do you say?                  |
| 3 | What do you think of sports clubs that include the same activities for boys and girls?             |
| 4 | Describe the nutrition of boys and girls at home                                                   |
| 5 | Is it true or false, boys are more active and girls more delicate?                                 |
| 6 | Who takes care of the feeding of the children at home?                                             |
| 7 | How do you deal with the sexuality of daughters and sons at home?                                  |
| 8 | How would you react if your son or daughter asked you about contraception?                         |

Testing of the pilot guide was conducted through two interviews and one focus group. After testing, some

changes were introduced to the semi-structured guide, particularly with the use of verbal, non-verbal, and crutch techniques. The wording of the questions was changed as some words were not well understood by the interviewees. Changes were also made to make the interviewees more comfortable expressing their views on the topics, such as having the interviewers avoid expressing surprise, and maintaining neutral body language.

The research team consisted of professors from the University of Cuenca with experience in the education of girls, boys, and adolescents, and in gender research. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, and 90 minutes for each focus group. The interviews were conducted by two researchers who participated in the pilot test. One asked the questions and the other observed, and after the interviews and focus group discussions scripts were made of what happened during each event. Thereafter, the parents were asked to read the scripts and verify the correctness of what was written. All parents confirmed the expressed and written information. This verification could not be done with the focus group transcripts because we were unable to arrange a time when all group participants could reunite before the end of the data collection period.

The team jointly coded and analyzed the data in Atlas.ti. The analysis of the data was done using open descriptive coding. The analysis was triangulated, and the team consulted with experts in gender and sexuality regarding the interpretation of the results. The Bioethics Committee of the University of San Francisco de Quito approved the research (registration number 2015-209E). All participants signed informed consent. The study respected the bioethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

### 3. RESULTS

#### *Stereotypes and roles throughout children's lives*

Twenty-five out of the thirty interviewees indicated that the conceptions the parents have with respect to education and caring for their children come from what they learned from their parents in the interest of preserving family morals and values, passing on the role they themselves learned.

*“Many times, we have discussed with my wife and spoken loudly to the children, one thing is what they learn at school and another thing is what it should be” (man, 50 years old).*

For most of the respondents, it was important that girls eat little and engage in sensitive physical activity, that they express gentleness and behave like princesses. In addition, girls are educated to take care of their siblings and, in the future, their families. Boys should eat sufficiently to be strong and to support the physical wear and tear of constant movement.

*“But the fact that the girl has a much more delicate activity is because she has been growing up under the model of a princess, dress, and delicacy..., on the other hand, boys are stronger, more active, even ruder, they need to eat more, the sports they choose are aggressive or extreme” (woman, 45 years old).*

*“A girl must collaborate, while a man has to win, has to be ahead, but a woman has to always clean,*

*and help with the housework” (woman, 35 years old).*

Boys should not play sports assigned to girls, such as ballet, because they would be rejected or discriminated against.

*“I am honest with you, if my son told me that he was going to practice ballet, it would beat me up ... but I would try to be okay with it ... I am sure that his classmates would laugh at him or run away from him” (woman, 48 years old).*

Children are not told about sexuality until they are teenagers.

*“We have to be honest... the Cuencanos are curuchupas<sup>1</sup> ... no, no ... we never talk to our children about sexuality ... even when they start having a boyfriend or girlfriend ... we only warn them ... the daughters less ... they talk to their mothers ... they must behave like women” (man, 38 years old).*

### **Autonomy**

Interviews reveal that girls are not allowed to decide or choose because they are supposed to be submissive.

*“A woman must be passive, quiet, and submissive, and only if she sets her mind to something can she do it ... because perhaps uh, that is our quieter nature of being more patient” (woman, 35 years old).*

*“Because women are already formed since they are children. A woman waits for a man to manage the sexual thing in the marriage” (woman, 37 years old).*

### **Subalternity and motherhood**

Women are subjected to domestic tasks (children, cleaning, cooking), and excluded from public events (political, community, social participation). A mother dominates the children with the same pattern of subalternity, making the children reproduce learned roles and stereotypes that extend even to the area of sexuality.

*“Speaking of power, a woman knows that the man is the one who takes the initiative, as a protector of the relationship, the one who guides ... because a man is the one who organizes the economic part, he manages the economy better, since a woman is much more devoted to food, spends more time with the children, and is much more meticulous in her care of the home” (woman, 38 years old).*

*“The role of women is linked more at home, more to domestic tasks; obviously, there are exceptional cases of women who have gone out despite their multiple activities as mothers” (man, 37 years old).*

Women focus on morality and childcare at the cost of their own sacrifice. A mother exercises household management skills and emotional control. Being a mother is the main and inescapable destiny of a woman, around which life and time ought to be organized.

*“I give my life for my children ... no matter what may happen to me or what I may sacrifice ... the*

*most important thing is that they are happy” (woman, 37 years old).*

*“I think this has been historical since our mothers and grandfathers; the best meat is for the husband, the father, the children even if we don't eat” (woman, 38 years old).*

### **Body care and beauty standards**

A woman's body must be cared for so that she is beautiful and can attract the attention of a man who will offer her marriage and provide her with a family. Later, the care of the body is limited to the conception and raising of, children.

*“I don't know about the girls, but maybe their mothers are already taking care of them because now they have to take care of them so that they don't get fat” (woman, 38 years old).*

The market and the media rehearse ideal models of unattainable and changeable bodies, starting from a process of incorporating social pressures, the normalization of beauty, sexuality, and youth, which result in the objectification of the female body.

*“Women are always looking for thinness, and there have even been cases of anorexia. The media influence women to have a body of a certain size, a certain number of centimeters. Women practically forget to eat well” (man, 48 years old).*

### **Sexuality and marianism**

The responses from the interviewees in this study indicate that parents prepare adolescents for distinct roles in sexuality as men and women. Men are allowed great expression and enjoyment of their sexuality, free to begin sexual activity when they wish, and are informed about contraceptive use to avoid unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. There is social pressure for adolescent males to become 'men' through sex at an early age. Men are the conquerors; they can watch pornography and can have fun with women. Only one father indicated that men should remain abstinent.

*“For example, when you hear friends say: “you are already 15, 18 years old, you have already had your first sexual relationship, if not - you are not a man, - you are still a child” ... that is why men are more linked to internet pornography ... there are some cases that induce them to have sex with prostitutes” (man, 45 years old).*

*“The first sexual relation in the case of a man is rewarded ... a woman is condemned because she is going down a bad path” (man, 38 years old).*

Women must fall in love and get married to have their first sexual relationship. In sexual relationships, women are the ones who love the most and are the most faithful and unconditional. When women are unmarried, they should not have sex because they must be virgins at marriage, let alone use contraception.

*“My mother has always told us, advised us to be a one-man woman. We need to be virgins at marriage” (woman, 38 years old).*

<sup>1</sup> A word used by the people of Cuenca for a person who flaunts his religiosity and has, at the same time, a dubious private life.

The reaction of parents to an unwanted pregnancy is different. When a man gets a woman pregnant, parents think it is a mistake that leads to monetary responsibility. When the daughter gets pregnant, parents think it is tragic and the pregnancy will radically change their daughter's life plan, turning her into a woman sacrificed for the baby. In addition, a woman becomes socially discredited. Some interviewees thought that when a woman becomes pregnant it is because she provoked the man with inappropriate seductive attitudes.

*"If my daughter gets pregnant, she stays there, gets frustrated, ends her life ... but in men, nothing happens, well he is a macho man, a man gives the money, and nothing happens. Men go on with their studies; they go on with their lives" (man, 50 years old).*

*"From my point of view, women are more promiscuous than men, those who cause teenage pregnancy, especially in recent times. Women take the initiative and are always seducing a man ... with the clothes, with some movement" (man, 45 years old).*

Few parents talk about sexuality with their children, especially with their daughters. Most of them are afraid, so teenagers seek information outside the house.

*"It would be good if parents were the first sources of information because that would be correct information. There are parents who do it and do it very well and there are also parents who avoid it and send third parties to inform the children" (woman, 35 years old).*

*"There are parents who are shocked when their daughter asks them about sex. The parents think that the daughter has already started or wants to have a sex life" (woman, 48 years old).*

Parents mentioned that in the current era, the onset of sexual relations and drug use among adolescents is starting early. Parents said that women have lost the value of abstinence, self-care, fidelity and that these are the reasons why they get pregnant and have abortions. Parents said that women have "prostituted the word freedom" even though they are taught sex education in schools and that parents educate them with values. Parents felt that women who are libertines are those who do not have a father or are not well cared for by their mother. Finally, the parents admitted that to date, the culture of Cuenca is still macho.

*"The term 'freedom for women' has been prostituted, I believe in gender equality but nowadays girls have no respect for anything, they have no values, they change partners, they have relationships with their best friend, with someone else's boyfriend, they say harsh words, they drink liquor just like men ... then promiscuity is the order of the day" (woman, 39 years old).*

*"I've often seen in public schools that girls who start a sex life early are because they don't have a father and because the mother has a boyfriend, so the daughter learns" (male, 36 years old).*

Parents believe that sexuality should be developed within marriage and that the free union is not a socially accepted marital status. Women are exclusively responsible for maintaining the institutionalization of marriage.

*"Ehhh, I teach my children that ... yes, marriage is an institution that God created and that we must*

*continue to maintain it. I personally teach my children that free union is not good" (woman, 43 years old).*

### Changing gender roles and stereotypes

Two women and one man out of the thirty participants report that gender stereotypes and roles are changing due to women's involvement in the workplace, better education, economic independence, and participation in the political sphere and in jobs led by women. Parents admit that some girls are physically as active as men, eat equally or more, and participate in sports that a few years ago were assigned only to men. It is expressed that women are sometimes more autonomous than men and that they make better decisions because they think calmly.

*"Women have spent many years relegated by the male sex, and this time they are occupying a leadership position in administrative or executive positions. Women are much more competitive, they try to maintain their independence ... while still being good mothers and good wives" (man, 48 years old).*

*"We see different types of girls; some are very active who go out to play football with men" (woman, 42 years old).*

Some girls take the initiative in falling in love; they are not inhibited. Girls consider that getting married and starting a family is not the only way of self-fulfillment even when they became pregnant.

*"We see at school parties where the girls take the initiative and ask the boys to dance. The boys are still playing with robots, football, while the girls are flirting with them, they dare to invite them, to call them" (man, 38 years old).*

*"There are women who, despite becoming pregnant, no longer want to get married because they want to continue studying and be someone in life" (woman, 36 years old).*

## 4. DISCUSSION

The thirty parents interviewed in this research, twenty-three women and seven men, all with a university degree and some with a postgraduate diploma, expressed that they acquire from their families the gender roles and stereotypes they assign to their children. Women are educated not to be autonomous because their roles should be submissive and to care for others. Men are taught to be strong, to be protective, and make decisions. The interviews reflect that a woman must be beautiful and virtuous to win a man who will provide her with a family. Women must be pure, marry to be mothers, and sacrifice for the sake of the family. Men can express enjoyment and freedom in their sexuality while women are boxed into the pattern of abstinence and sexual submission in order not to be branded as a "bad women". Some interviewed women indicated that they would not like their sons to take on female roles because they are afraid of them being laughed at. Some fathers expressed that the new sexual roles women are taking on lead to premature pregnancies and immoral lives. A minority of participants hold new

concepts that break with the conventional gender roles and stereotypes for women.

Equivalent results are found in studies around the globe, such as with Israeli children (Goldner & Levi, 2014), Australian adolescents (Ferrar *et al.*, 2012), and children, and adolescents in the Philippines (Núñez *et al.*, 2015), which indicate that the way children and adolescents eat, do physical activity, perceive body beauty, relate to their partners, and exercise sexuality is developed according to gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. In Latin America, a study of women in Honduras reports that mothers educate their daughters to marry and have children and those parents follow the patriarchal-subaltern model and restrict women's autonomy in sexuality (Giordano *et al.*, 2009).

The findings of this research are also consistent with that of other Ecuadorian research on gender roles and sexuality. These studies indicate that adolescent girls are controlled by their parents to obey them, not to go out at night, not drink alcohol and not be "easy" with men. Women who do not fulfill this role are called a slut. In educational institutions, adolescent girls are ridiculed for early pregnancies, for being single mothers. The use of contraceptives by women is not socially approved because it might promote casual sex. In the family, adolescent girls who have sex are often victims of violence. Women mention that when they were in love, sex happened without thinking, spontaneously, and without the use of contraceptives because they could have "ruined the moment" (De Meyer *et al.*, 2014; Boira *et al.*, 2017; Blum *et al.*, 2019). These factors influence the high prevalence of adolescent pregnancy (Goicolea *et al.*, 2010; De Meyer *et al.*, 2017). In Ecuador, most pregnant adolescent women are abandoned by their partners and are forced to face motherhood alone (Goicolea *et al.*, 2010).

Goicolea's Ecuadorian study found four types of stereotypes and roles about girls' sexuality. The first sex is not for fun, a moralistic thought that assumes that women should be abstinent and that it is, therefore, wrong to use contraceptives (health professionals, including gynecologists, shared this view). A second group, "gender sexuality and parenthood", repeats parenting roles handed down by parents. The third, "professionalizing adolescent pregnancy", approaches the prevention of pregnancy from a biological approach rather than from a broader psychosocial prevention perspective. Finally, the "idealization of the traditional family", is that the best way to protect adolescents from sex is by teaching traditional family values (Goicolea *et al.*, 2010).

The study conducted by Boira (2017) with Ecuadorian university students of medicine and psychology indicated that the gender roles and stereotypes caused hostile sexism (antipathetic attitude towards women because they are in an inferior position to men) and benevolent (overprotective) sexism generating psychological and physical violence against the partner (Boira *et al.*, 2017). This is a worrying situation because they are the future professionals in areas that will provide care in cases of violence.

The results of this research adhere to the gender roles and stereotypes within the patriarchal model, which includes the themes of subaltern care, motherhood, marianism, body care, and beauty norms. The beliefs and behaviors of Cuenca's society did not change despite the active participation of feminist groups, the new Ecuadorian law on gender equality, and the enactment of sexual and

reproductive rights (Vásconez Rodríguez, 2016). This persistence of traditional gender roles and stereotypes may be due to the following causes: a) the overvaluation of the Christian principles of the Ecuadorian Cuencano family centered on religion (Martínez Borrero, 2017; Goicolea *et al.*, 2010); b) the resurgence in Ecuador, and Latin America of extremely conservative movements such as the so-called "con mis hijos no te metas" ("don't mess with my children") (Meneses, 2019) that condemn gender diversity and sexual orientation; groups that find support for this condemnation in the news media and government authorities (De Franco, 2020; Berni, 2018; Diario El Comercio, 2017); and c) advertising that stereotypical images of beauty, directing the population to seek perfect bodies, causing those who do not meet these criteria to be discriminated (Bueno, 2017; Muñoz Morillo, 2015). A qualitative study that analyzed advertising spots on Ecuadorian television revealed that women are presented as the expert protagonist of household chores, as invisible in the public sphere, as aesthetic and/or sexual symbols; and that these messages reach children and adolescents (Elizundia & Yaulema, 2021).

The persistence of these roles and stereotypes mark the subalternity not only of the relationships between men and women in the family, at school and amongst close circles of friends, but also mark the subalternity in society of categories of domination and submission such as: heterosexuality and homosexuality, beauty and ugliness, gender that corresponds to biological sex and gender diversity; for this reason, there has been a continuation of femicides in Ecuador. The Ecumenical Human Rights Commission (CEDH) registered 80 cases of femicide from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2017 (Berni, 2018).

The expressions of the interviewees about the change of stereotypes and gender roles towards diversity and gender equality are in line with the results of similar research conducted in Latin America and Spain, which indicate that roles are changing; there are more women in the public workspace and there are more men taking on housework (del Río-Lozano *et al.*, 2013; Torres *et al.*, 2002).

A limitation of the study was the low participation of men in the interviews and focus groups. Similarly, the research group consisted only of women. Other factors hindering the generalization of findings are the overall small size of the interviewed group of parents and the fact that this group consisted only of highly educated mothers and fathers. In addition, the study failed to consider the effect of modern communication and media on the way parents, children and adolescents think and behave on the gender roles and stereotypes in sexuality. Despite those limitations, the exploratory study provided the building blocks for further research that shall focus on the effect of the modernization of society on the parental perceptions of gender roles in the sexuality of children and adolescents.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Parents reproduce the stereotypes and gender roles of the patriarchal model. However, gender stereotypes and roles are changing due to the education of women and the incorporation of women into the labor market, making them more autonomous in the selection of life projects and in their sexuality. Programs for parents on autonomy in gender identity and sexuality are needed to change

stereotypes and roles that impede the optimal development of children and adolescents' sexuality.

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