

# Empowering Women for Household Economic Growth in Latin America: A Systematic Review

Melva Linares Guerrero, Rocío Arribasplata Albán, Stefanny Fiorella Bazán Arias and Katherine Lizzeth Vallejos Tantajulca

Accounting and Finance, Business, Universidad Privada del Norte, Cajamarca, Peru

[melva.linares@upn.edu.pe](mailto:melva.linares@upn.edu.pe)

[n00204651@upn.pe](mailto:n00204651@upn.pe)

[n00199653@upn.pe](mailto:n00199653@upn.pe)

[n00209463@upn.pe](mailto:n00209463@upn.pe)

**Abstract:** The proposed article describes the role played by women in the different strata of society and, above all, the benefits obtained from their participation in the labor market. The objective was to describe how the empowerment of Latin American women has contributed to the economic growth of families during 2011-2021. In terms of methodology, different methodological and theoretical positions from various researchers about women's empowerment were taken to achieve an integration that allows expressing the need to show the importance of women in economic growth to ensure that the research is valuable, transparent, complete, and accurate for the users. Detailed techniques were used within the Prisma 2020 model; 23 sources of information obtained from Scopus, Redalyc, Science Direct, Elibro, Scielo, and Google Scholar were detected, for which inclusion criteria were applied, selecting 11 information bases, as well as exclusion criteria, eliminating 12 articles that were not related and did not show coherence with the research question, were not within the space-time, did not belong to the Latin American continent or agree with the subject of the study. The analytical-synthetic method was used to the extent that it allowed analyzing empowerment with each of its own characteristics and those proposed by the different researchers to synthesize and describe how Latin American women have been empowering themselves and contributing to the economic growth of families during the last 10 years. It was concluded that Latin American women have been empowering themselves significantly, thereby contributing to the economic growth of their families, where their performance has become vitally important thanks to their actions that have strengthened their leadership and skills within their communities, promoting their active participation in conservation and sustainable development, and demonstrating that greater participation of women in economic activity contributes to increasing the Gross Domestic Product, raising growth and compensating for the fall of the working population.

**Keywords:** Empowering, Women, Latin America, Economic growth, Families

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## 1. Introduction

Different authors have made a revolution with their conception of empowerment, resulting in the emergence of social movements that are part of the liberating struggles and have attracted the interest of many researchers. However, the need to make the concept of empowerment clearer through the use of theoretical, empirical, and practical literature from the community field and the variety of ideas and proposals has led it to become a jack-of-all-trades that explains everything and justifies any action. The Dictionary of Humanitarian Action defines it as "the process by which people, organizations, and communities strengthen their capacities, confidence, vision, and protagonism as a social group to promote positive changes in the situations in which they live." In this way, they achieve absolute control over their decisions, allowing them to improve more and more.

This systematic review highlights the term empowerment but oriented to women, that being who has been identified over the years as the weakest and that, nevertheless, at present, has proven to be one of the basic pillars within families due to her strength and decision, and that, undoubtedly, has contributed to economic growth. For this reason, some transcendental phrases of great impact will be quoted, allowing us to look at women's empowerment.

"I envisioned a company where a woman could be as successful as she wanted to be," said the iconic founder of Mary Kay, who has empowered women around the world and changed lives. Having experienced inequality in the workplace firsthand, Mary Kay knew she had to do something about it, not only for herself but for all women. From there, empowerment, from a feminist perspective (Batliwala, as cited in Yiwady, D. et al., 2021), is defined as the process of challenging existing power relations and gaining greater control over the sources of power and becomes manifest as a redistribution of power, whether among nations, classes, races, castes, genders or individuals; it refers to concepts, such as power, rights, interests, choices, and control, that today have begun to form part of women's daily lives. All this is reflected in aspects such as reflexivity, self-concept, self-esteem, collective actions, and political participation of women, which, in turn, is reflected in changes in

the individual, family, and social life of women worldwide. This means that the concept of women's empowerment refers to the integration of women in the different important areas of society and to the value that they generate in the daily activities of global growth and development.

In Latin America, women's participation in the labor market is limited. The female participation rate went from around 20% in the 1960s to more than 60% in the early 2010s; the growth rate slowed down from 2000 onwards (Bustelo et al., 2020, p1). By 2017, the scenario changed; it was evident a higher rate of labor participation, reaching 50.2% exactly, and by 2018, there are about 117 million women who are part of the labor force as a result of an "unstoppable phenomenon" of persistent increase in participation rates in a labor market, in which, however, "we are still far from the goal of gender equality" (International Labor Organization, 2018, para. 4). The so-called "glass ceilings" refer to the barriers that limit women's access to hierarchical positions and hinder women's career progression. In Latin America, women are not highly valued in senior executive positions. Based on the information corresponding to more than 1,200 publicly traded companies, it was observed that women occupy only 8.5% of the boards of directors, 9.2% are executives, and the number of executive directors amounted to 4.2%. In turn, companies led by women are smaller than those led by men because of the greater barriers women face (Bustelo et al., 2020, p3).

Peru, being one of the countries of the Latin American conglomerate, through the INEI (National Institute of Statistics and Informatics), shows some statistics regarding the presence of women within the executive branch, indicating that it has not remained constant. It shows that their participation in high-level positions represents 26.3% compared to 73.7% of the positions occupied by men. This shows that there is a labor gap in the participation of women in high-level positions.

Arthur Lewis and his book "Theory of Economic Growth" points out that there are four forms of economic growth: the first is simple growth, where new sources of production are added but without changing the organization or enterprises; the second is capital accumulation, as more technique is applied, more capital is invested, and there is a natural increase in enterprises and, thus, growth; the third form concerns change in the structure and organization of production but keeping the same capital and technology; the fourth reports on the progress and regional challenges of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, which proposes to build a better future through the implementation of actions that will strengthen the country by achieving sustainable development, where working women are at the forefront of attention. It is also mentioned that, in 2015, 193 countries all over the world, including Latin American countries, adopted the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and established seventeen goals (SDGs) with a gender focus as a necessary condition for the progress of nations, whose main objective is gender equality. Targets on gender equality are integrated into 11 of the 17 goals (at different levels), and one of them explicitly addresses gender equality (SDG 5): to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. From there, the need for women to be taken into account and have access to decent work is emphasized, as it contributes to the reduction of inequalities that limit their empowerment and socioeconomic leadership and contributes to the country's development.

The development framework also establishes in its objectives 5, 8, and 10 to analyze women's autonomy. This is understood as the capacity of women to generate income, as well as the conditions to perform in their area of work as a competent, capable, and professional person, and, in this way, generate income and personal finances from resources coming from their efforts, because both women and men have the right to paid work, as mentioned in the legal normative basis of high hierarchical rank that is the Political Constitution of each country (Medina and Fernandez, 2021).

On the other hand, a study conducted for the Journal *Economía y Sociología* on the female dimension of technology, labor, and economic markets, during the period 1990-2017 showed that increasing access to and use of ICTs was accompanied by a decreasing rate of women involved in activities that exposed them to high risk or that were characterized by low effective demand and low earnings. The declining rate of women in vulnerable jobs appears to be of critical importance (Lechman, 2019). It is worth noting that the study is based on a capitalist system that, compared to socialism, does allow equality or utopia and the relevance of democracy, which does not occur with capitalism, which denies the ideals above, and, focusing on women, many obstacles do not allow gender equality, since they have been burdened with work at home (housewives) and in a job with a meager remuneration due to underestimation of functions. All this ignores the possibility of differences between men and women. If there is one, it is perhaps due to a matter of preferences. Given this, the Society for Critical Economics (SEC) mentions that the existence of gender asymmetries in production

relations is one of the ways through which the system oppresses women and not men, and, therefore, it is essential to take them into account to transform the economy.

There is a wide gender gap, and according to the annual report of the World Economic Forum, the average participation in the labor market is 55% for women and 82% for men, which shows unequal intervention. This situation occurs in all countries in the world, even in the so-called "developed" countries. In the best-ranked countries (Iceland, Norway, and Finland), women earn 86% of men's earnings, although only 64% of female university graduates participate to a lesser extent in the labor market (82% versus 87% for men), and, again, only 37% of senior positions are held by women although representation in ministerial positions has improved (44%). This global study concludes that if improvements continue at this pace, the gender gap will not be closed until 2133 (Ferrero et al., 2016).

Although the topic of women's empowerment has already been studied in general terms, there is still a limited number of studies on how women in Latin America have been empowering themselves and, thanks to this, they have contributed to the economic growth of their countries and, for this, it is necessary to understand how the variables Women's Empowerment and Economic Growth encompass the perspectives in the economic context at the Latin American level. Therefore, the main objective of this research is to describe how the empowerment of Latin American women has contributed to the economic growth of families during the years 2011-2021 through the review of the scientific literature published in those years.

This study was a literature review, whose representative variables are Women's Empowerment and Economic Growth, to observe whether they influence Latin American societies in the financial, political, and social spheres and to detect the impact they generate.

## **2. Methodology**

In this systematic review, the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) statement was used, which was published in 2009, allowing to document the transparency of the review and to answer the question: How have Latin American women been empowered and contributed to the economic growth of families during the years 2011-2021? With this, the different methodological and theoretical positions of various researchers about women's empowerment were analyzed to, in the end, achieve an integration that allows expressing the need to show the importance of empowered women in economic growth.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established using search engines, such as Scopus, Redalyc, Scielo, Science Direct, Elibro, and Google Scholar; in English, Spanish, or Portuguese; between 2011 and 2021; in the Latin American context. It was considered that the title, abstract, and introduction determine the influence of women's empowerment on the economic growth of families in Latin America from a gender perspective. The second criterion specifies those articles and research that are not related and do not show coherence with the research question, such as not being within the selected period, not belonging to the Latin American continent, and not matching the subject of the study.

To answer the proposed question, the analytical-synthetic method was used insofar as it allowed for the analysis of empowerment with each of its own characteristics and those suggested by different researchers to synthesize and describe how Latin American women have been empowered and contributed to the economic growth of their families during the last 10 years.

## **3. Results**

During the systematic review, 23 sources of information containing topics of interest for the selected research were identified. However, when the inclusion criteria were applied, 11 sources were selected because they met the above specifications; however, 12 sources were discarded.

According to the inclusion criteria, the following was obtained: 5 articles published in Science Direct, Google Scholar, and Redalyc; 3 journals published in Google Scholar and Scielo; 2 publications in Redalyc and Google Scholar; 1 thesis in Google Scholar. On the other hand, according to the exclusion criteria, the following were considered: 5 articles published in Scopus, Scielo, and Google Scholar; 3 journals published in Scopus and Google Scholar; 1 publication in Scopus; 1 thesis in Scopus; and finally, 2 books published in Elibro and Google Scholar.

Because of this, it was possible to perform an analysis of each of the different investigations and interpret the results referring to women's empowerment in the economic growth of families in Latin America from a gender perspective. The selection process is shown in the following figure:

To clarify the study, tables and figures will be made to organize the information found in the search engines according to the inclusion criteria.

**Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria Used**

<b>INCLUSION CRITERIA</b>	<b>EXCLUSION CRITERIA</b>
-Indicators: Research indicating women's empowerment in the economic growth of families in Latin America from a gender perspective. -Language: Spanish, English, and Portuguese. -Source: (Latin American countries). -Period: 2011 to 2021. -Type of publication: scientific articles. -Databases and search engines: Scopus, Redalyc, Science Direct, Elibro, Scielo, and Google Scholar.	-They do not show coherence with the research question. -It is not within the selected periods. -It does not agree with the subject of study. -It does not belong to the Latin American continent.

Note. Own Elaboration

As for the sources of information used to carry out this systematic review, the search engines already mentioned were considered, from which information records were obtained.

Subsequently, for the search for information and to ensure the process sensitivity, a detail of all the information about the systematic review was elaborated as follows:

**Table 2: Results of the Information Search**

<b>Sources obtained</b>	<b>Inclusion criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion criteria</b>	<b>Search engines</b>
<b>Article</b>	5	5	Scopus, Redalyc, Scielo, Science Direct, Elibro, and Google Scholar
<b>Magazine</b>	3	3	
<b>Publication</b>	2	1	
<b>Thesis</b>	1	1	
<b>Book</b>		2	
<b>Total</b>	11	12	

Note. Own Elaboration

**Table 3: Studies found by Year of Publication**

<b>Type of document</b>	<b>Year of publication</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
	2011-2014	1	9%
<b>Scientific article</b>	2015-2017	1	9%
	2018-2021	9	82%
<b>TOTAL</b>		11	100%

Note. Own Elaboration

**Table 4: Studies Found by Country**

Countries	Frequency	Percentage %
Argentine	1	9%
Brazil	1	9%
Chile	1	9%
Colombia	4	36%
Mexico	2	18%
Peru	2	18%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note. Own Elaboration

**Table 5: Studies Found by Type of Bibliographic Source**

Countries	Frequency	Percentage %
Article	5	45%
Journal	3	27%
Publication	2	18%
Thesis	1	9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note. Own Elaboration

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

The literature review shows that women's empowerment in society has evolved gradually, evidencing major changes regarding the value of women in society. Such is the case that the International Labor Organization shows real data, where greater labor participation of women is registered, being that, at present, they are part of the workforce and integrate political participation and high positions within society. Therefore, it is considered that female empowerment has contributed to the growth and development of the economy in Latin America, with some variations over time.

Economic growth has undergone cyclical transformations; one of them has been the pandemic stage, which proved to be the most revolutionary as far as our years of study are concerned since it disrupted the economy, affecting mainly women and the activities carried out by them. To this end, governments took actions to ensure the recognition of women in the economic sphere, such as including them in decision-making in initiatives to revive the economy. However, a limiting factor for women's participation in the labor market is the overload of domestic work and care of their children from 0 to 5 years old due to the maternal responsibility they must assume. Another limitation is education since many of them do not have access to higher education, which limits their entrepreneurship. However, when they do have access, they receive better training in business creation.

As it is well known, women who work in rural areas are responsible for the harvest and production of their crops. Still, they do not have the necessary information to take advantage of the opportunities to generate value for their benefit and that of their families. On the other hand, for the indigenous women of the Amazon, who constantly live the inequality of their communities, being relegated to a position that does not allow them to develop their capacities, and even less to be considered for important activities or are just not listened to, The Leticia Pact emerged as an initiative of the Presidential Summit held by the government of Colombia to achieve a commitment of seven countries that share the Amazon biome (Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia,

Brazil, Suriname, and Guyana) for the preservation, conservation, and care of the Amazon territory and its sustainable development, considering the empowerment of indigenous women one of its principal axes.

The empowerment and positioning of women through their actions have made it possible to rescue the relevance of their participation, recognizing their incidence in Latin America and, thus, changing the perspective, culture, and thoughts chosen in various countries regarding the place that women deserve in the growth and economic development of a nation. Little by little, household chores and childcare division has been promoted, leaving aside excessive machismo.

Most of the studies highlight the efforts made by some Latin American countries, such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru, to implement strategies that contribute to reducing salary gaps and eradicating labor inequality between men and women, highlighting women's empowerment in society and their contribution to the growth and development of the economy in the various countries. Likewise, statistical data corroborate that women represent a key role in all areas, and the results are very evident where women's empowerment is given great importance: in Colombia, with 36%; in Peru and Mexico, 18%; and in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 9% of research is related to the topic under study. Therefore, there is evidence of favorable results in women's empowerment and, consequently, in the development of the economy.

Regarding the studies carried out according to the types of bibliographic sources, there was a high frequency of article publications. It represents 45% as opposed to the journal with 27%, publications with 18%, and thesis with 9%, showing that Latin America is more interested in writing articles. This provides further progress in the field of research and has been beneficial since it has contributed to the knowledge of the research focused on determining the influence of women's empowerment on the economic growth of families in Latin America from a gender perspective and taking the period between the years 2011-2021.

Based on the above, it is concluded:

- Women in Latin America have been empowered in such a significant way that they have contributed to their families' economic growth in the last 10 years. Their role over the years has become more important, thanks to their actions that have strengthened their leadership and skills within their communities, promoting their active participation in conservation and sustainable development and demonstrating that the higher participation of women in economic activity contributes to increasing the Gross Domestic Product, raising growth and counterbalancing the decline in the working population. Similarly, inclusive policies that foster the inclusion of women will ensure a more solid response to the Latin American community.
- The potential that women represent for the progress of the world economy must be capitalized on to increase the capacity for economic development and job creation in any country.

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