

# Narrative Study of Sexual Violence Impacts on Indigenous Girls in Peru

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**Abstract** This article presents a qualitative narrative analysis of the mental health of girls and adolescents who are survivors of sexual violence in Peru, based on academic literature and policy documents reviewed between 2019 and 2024. The objective is to identify the main psychological consequences, barriers to accessing care services, and sociocultural determinants that influence institutional revictimization. Fifteen academic and institutional sources were reviewed and organized thematically for analysis. The findings reveal severe trauma such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, along with fragmented care pathways that perpetuate revictimization. Factors such as poverty, rural environments, cultural practices, and institutional weakness limit the effective protection of girls' rights. In Amazonian indigenous communities, such as Awajún and Wampís, territorial inequality, language barriers, and the absence of the state exacerbate vulnerability and hinder access to mental health care and justice. The study is based on a human rights and trauma-sensitive approach that recognizes girls as subjects of law and promotes coordinated and culturally relevant institutional responses. From feminist perspectives, sexual violence is understood as a mechanism of patriarchal and macho control (Kelly, 1988; Herman, 1992), reinforced by rape culture, which normalizes these attacks and reinforces impunity (Buchwald, Fletcher & Roth, 1993). Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) allows us to analyze how gender, age, ethnicity and territory intersect in the experience of survivors, showing that sexual violence cannot be addressed solely from universal frameworks. This work provides narrative and analytical inputs for the formulation of public policies centred on human rights, sensitive to trauma and respectful of cultural diversity. It highlights the urgent need to strengthen intersectoral coordination, design culturally relevant interventions and promote a research agenda that evaluates existing practices and reduces institutional revictimization.

**Keywords:** Child sexual violence, Mental health, Trauma, Gender, Intersectionality, Peru

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## 1. Introduction

Sexual violence against children and adolescents (NNA) represents a serious violation of human rights. Globally, more than 370 million girls and women have been victims of sexual abuse before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2024). In Peru, the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIIMP, 2024) reported 32,900 cases of NNA attended at the Women's Emergency Center during 2024, with higher incidence in rural areas of the Amazon. In indigenous communities such as the Wampís and Awajún, some cases were categorized by authorities as "cultural practices," revealing a troubling institutional normalization.

The psychological consequences of abuse include anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, yet there remains a scarcity of studies analyzing these outcomes from qualitative and narrative approaches. Care pathways are often fragmented, with limited intersectoral coordination and insufficient trauma sensitivity.

Sexual violence against NNA cannot be understood merely as isolated incidents, but rather as part of patriarchal structures and sexist practices that reproduce the subordination of female childhood. From a gender perspective, it is essential to apply the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) to analyze how age, gender, ethnicity, and territory intersect in the experiences of indigenous girls, who face a double vulnerability marked by poverty and discrimination. This phenomenon directly affects the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights, limiting autonomy and perpetuating cycles of inequality (UNICEF, 2023; WHO, 2021). Situating the Peruvian case within this framework allows dialogue with global debates on child sexual violence and gender, highlighting the need for trauma-sensitive and culturally relevant public policies.

This article proposes a qualitative narrative analysis of the mental health of NNA survivors of sexual violence in Peru, based on eighteen academic, normative, and institutional sources reviewed between 2019 and 2024. The objective is to understand the psychological sequelae, barriers to accessing services, and sociocultural determinants that perpetuate institutional revictimization, providing inputs for human rights-centered public policies.

## 2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is based on a human rights approach, recognizing girls as subjects of law and promoting person-centered language, avoiding stigmatizing expressions and using ‘girls who are survivors of sexual violence’, according to UNICEF.

Child sexual violence causes consequences such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), influenced by family, institutional and socio-cultural factors. From a trauma-sensitive approach, which recognizes the impact of harm and seeks emotional safety by avoiding revictimization (SAMHSA, 2014), the need for coordinated, sustained and culturally relevant responses is emphasized.

Feminist perspectives (Kelly, 1988; Herman, 1992) interpret sexual violence as a mechanism of patriarchal control over female bodies. Within this framework, rape culture emerges, understood as beliefs and practices that normalize violence and reinforce impunity and blame (Buchwald, Fletcher & Roth, 1993). According to ENDES 2024, 1.5% of abused women did not seek help because they felt guilty and 43.6% considered it unnecessary to report the abuse, highlighting cultural patterns that sustain violence and influence the institutional response.

The intersectionality approach (Crenshaw, 1989) allows us to analyze how gender, age, ethnicity and territory intersect in the experience of indigenous girls. In Amazonian communities such as Awajún and Wampís, these dimensions are reflected in territorial inequalities, language barriers and limited state presence, which hinder access to health and justice, favoring the normalization of abuse and deepening vulnerability. These conditions show how child sexual violence is not an isolated event, but part of a structural framework that requires comprehensive and context-sensitive responses.

To delimit the key concepts used in this analysis, the following glossary is presented:

- **NNA (children and adolescents):** Persons between 0 and 17 years of age, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Peruvian Code of Children and Adolescents.
- **Sexual violence:** Any act or attempted sexual act carried out through coercion, without consent, in any setting or relationship. Includes rape, unwanted touching, and other forms of sexual assault (WHO, 2021).
- **Child marriage:** A formal or informal union in which at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age, considered a form of structural violence that violates the rights of NNA (UNICEF, 2023).
- **Revictimization:** Additional psychological impact experienced by survivors when the justice, health, or education systems act with insensitivity, negligence, or lack of preparation, forcing them to relive the trauma (Save the Children, 2020).

## 3. Methodology

This study corresponds to a qualitative narrative review aimed at identifying structural barriers and psychological sequelae in children and adolescents (NNA) survivors of sexual violence in Peru. An interpretive approach was adopted, prioritizing academic, institutional, and normative sources that provide contextual and conceptual evidence.

### 3.1 Search Strategies

The time frame considered was 2019–2024, using academic databases such as Scopus, Alicia, SciELO, EBSCO, IDEHPUCP, and university repositories. Boolean operators were applied, combining keywords such as: “sexual violence in NNA,” “NNA mental health,” “institutional revictimization,” and “child marriage Peru.”

### 3.2 Selection Criteria

Inclusion criteria comprised studies and documents published in Spanish or English, focused on NNA, sexual violence, and mental health; institutional sources with official data; and current regulations. Exclusion criteria included articles without full access, duplicates, and those focused exclusively on adults or non-comparable contexts. The process was systematized in the following table:

Table 1: Information record of selected sources

| N° | Autor/es  | Año  | Tipo de documento                        | Hallazgo   |
|----|---|------|--|--|
| 1  | Murillo et al.  | 2019 | Artículo científico (SciELO)             | El abuso sexual temprano afecta el bienestar psicológico y social de NNA en la adultez.  |
| 2  | Elizabeth, C.V.J.   | 2019 | Tesis o artículo académico (Alicia)      | Aumento de casos y deficiencia legal en Lima.  |
| 3  | Franco-Jaen, S.; Rodríguez, J. y Javier del Río, F.                         | 2020 | Artículo científico (SciELO)             | El abuso sexual en NNA puede generar adicciones en la adultez.   |
| 4  | Arteta Maza, Bertha Andrea  | 2021 | Tesis o artículo académico (Alicia)      | Necesidad de terapias eficaces para NNA víctimas.  |
| 5  | Macedo et al.   | 2021 | Artículo académico (Alicia)              | Nuevos enfoques para tratar el TEPT infantil.  |
| 6  | Bárbara et al.  | 2022 | Artículo científico (Scopus)             | La detección temprana permite prevenir casos sin lesiones visibles.  |
| 7  | Tuya, G.  | 2022 | Artículo científico (SciELO)             | Perfil de agresores útil para la prevención.   |
| 8  | De la cruz et al.   | 2022 | Artículo académico (Biblioteca UPN)      | Competencias parentales ayudan a prevenir el abuso.  |
| 9  | Gasco A.; Lujan E.; Aldair F.   | 2022 | Artículo académico (EBSCO)               | Factores de riesgo vinculados a violencia doméstica y social.  |
| 10 | Perú. MINEDU, Lazo Landívar, R.J.; Arredondo Villar, C.; Atamain Uwarai, Y. | 2022 | Libro institucional (Repositorio MINEDU) | Relatos intergeneracionales de mujeres awajún evidencian patrones de violencia sexual normalizada y silenciamiento cultural en el corredor Chiriaco-Imacita. |
| 11 | Yáñez L.; García L.; Rey C.   | 2023 | Artículo científico (Scopus)             | La violencia en el noviazgo impacta negativamente la salud mental de los jóvenes.  |
| 12 | González, M. et al.   | 2023 | Artículo científico (Scopus)             | Propuesta de trabajo colaborativo y formación profesional en reparación psíquica.  |
| 13 | Farfan, M. de los M. and Quezada, A.R.                                      | 2024 | Tesis (Alicia)                           | Se analizan patrones relacionales entre NNA sobrevivientes y agresores desde la perspectiva adolescente.   |
| 14 | Serrano, A.   | 2024 | Artículo científico (Scopus)             | Las zonas rurales presentan desigualdad en el acceso a servicios de salud mental para NNA.   |
| 15 | IDEHPUCP  | 2024 | Boletín (IDEHPUCP)                       | Casos de violación sexual de NNA en los pueblos indígenas Wampís y Awajún.   |

Source: Own elaboration

### 3.3 Data Extration and narrative synthesis

The analysis was carried out in four stages:

- **Selection:** Sources published between 2019 and 2024 were included, mostly in Spanish, complemented by some articles in English that provided relevant perspectives. Thematic relevance was prioritized over language, as long as the documents offered useful evidence for interpretive analysis.
- **In-depth Reading:** Each source was analyzed through open coding, extracting categories related to psychological sequelae, access to services, structural barriers, and regulatory frameworks.
- **Narrative Synthesis:** The information was organized into five thematic axes: (i) traumatic sequelae and comorbidities, (ii) barriers to access and revictimization, (iii) sociocultural determinants, (iv) regulatory framework and gaps, and (v) interventions and lessons learned.
- **Interpretive Analysis:** An integrative narrative was developed that connects findings, tensions, and gaps, highlighting the relevance of an intercultural and trauma-sensitive approach.

**Table 2: Distribution of sources by database**

| Database     | Number of articles | Percentage  |
|--------------|--------------------|-------------|
| EBSCO        | 1                  | 7.1%        |
| IDEHPUCP     | 1                  | 7.1%        |
| Repositories | 2                  | 13.3%       |
| Scielo       | 3                  | 21.4%       |
| Scopus       | 4                  | 28.6%       |
| Alicia       | 4                  | 28.6%       |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>15</b>          | <b>100%</b> |

Source: Own elaboration

The table shows the distribution of the 14 selected articles. Most come from Scopus and Alicia (28.6% each), reflecting a balance between international scientific sources and national repositories. SciELO contributes 21.4%, reinforcing the regional focus. The other databases (EBSCO, IDEHPUCP, Repositories) have lower representation (7.1% each), but provide key normative and technical documents.

This distribution demonstrates a diverse and strategic search, consistent with a qualitative approach that combines academic literature with institutional sources relevant to the analysis of mental health in NNA survivors of sexual violence in Peru.

## 4. Findings: Narrative Analysis

### 4.1 Cultural Determinants and Gender Norms

Cultural practices continue to influence rural and Amazonian areas, where some girls are pressured to join or marry early. These gender norms, rooted in community structures, combine with poverty and territorial inequality, increasing the vulnerability of indigenous adolescents.

In 2024, 37.0% of girls between the ages of 0 and 17 live in poverty (INEI, 2024). The situation is more critical in indigenous communities: 55.0% of poor children and adolescents have an indigenous language as their mother tongue. This poverty is concentrated in the Sierra (40.0%) and the Selva (38.4%), regions with a high indigenous presence and limited state coverage, which reinforces exposure to early unions and sexual violence.

Each year, more than 56,000 girls see their life plans compromised by child marriages and unions, which reproduce cycles of inequality and violence (UNFPA, 2024). Although Law No. 31948 prohibited child marriage

in 2023, previous records show its persistence: between 2013 and 2022, RENIEC documented marriages from the age of 11, evidencing its normalization in certain contexts (La República, 2023).

This problem is not unique to Peru. In India, girls are forced to marry to preserve 'family honor', while in South Sudan the 'exchange of girls' persists as a practice linked to extreme poverty. The comparison places the Peruvian case in a global context where sexual violence against children and adolescents takes on cultural variations but shares structural roots.

From a feminist perspective, rape culture explains how these practices are socially sustained, placing responsibility on girls and making it difficult for them to report abuse. Analyzing the persistence of child marriages and unions from this perspective shows that gender, poverty, ethnicity and territory are part of a broader structural pattern connected to international debates on sexual violence and human rights.

#### **4.2 Psychological Sequelae**

Child sexual abuse in Peru generates profound sequelae in girls and adolescent women, such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, and dissociation, negatively impacting their emotional, social, and academic development (Murillo et al., 2019; Bárbara et al., 2022). These effects worsen in the absence of family support or when the environment reproduces dynamics of victim-blaming (Elizabeth, 2019).

From the trauma-informed care perspective, these sequelae should not be understood merely as clinical symptoms, but as responses to harm in unsafe contexts. Repeated exposure to recounting the abuse and lack of institutional support intensify PTSD, manifested in flashbacks, constant fear, and social withdrawal (Macedo et al., 2021). Connecting these findings with the theoretical framework highlights that recovery requires safety, psychosocial repair, and empowerment, especially for indigenous girls facing ethnic and territorial discrimination.

#### **4.3 Institutional Barriers and Revictimization**

Care pathways show fragmentation and revictimization, forcing victims to repeatedly recount events in slow and traumatic judicial processes (IDEHPUCP, 2024). In police and prosecutorial settings, adult-centered and sexist approaches persist, minimizing violence, especially when perpetrators are authority figures or family members. Institutional tolerance is greater when the victim is a girl than when it is a boy, reflecting a gender bias that perpetuates impunity.

In health services, psychological care is limited, uncoordinated, and lacking specialization in child trauma (Serrano, 2024). This lack of articulation between justice and health prolongs suffering and fosters impunity (Murillo et al., 2019; González et al., 2023). From trauma-informed care and restorative justice perspectives, these institutional practices not only reproduce the initial harm but also intensify psychological sequelae and limit comprehensive reparation for survivors, particularly in contexts of poverty and ethnic discrimination.

#### **4.4 Structural Determinants and Legal Framework**

This form of violence is linked to structural determinants such as poverty, territorial inequality, machismo, and cultural normalization of violence (Gasco et al., 2022; Defensoría del Pueblo, 2022). In rural and Amazonian areas, state absence and cultural patterns hinder reporting and foster silence (Tuya, 2022; Serrano, 2024). Indigenous girls, such as the Wampís and Awajún, also face ethnic and gender discrimination, aggravating their vulnerability (IDEHPUCP, 2024). These factors create an environment where sexual violence becomes part of everyday life, especially in school contexts without effective supervision.

#### **4.5 Normative Framework**

Although Peru has laws that criminalize sexual violence and prohibit child marriage (Law No. 31192), their implementation is deficient and lacks effective monitoring mechanisms (Congress of the Republic, 2021). Regulations are not applied with a gender or intercultural approach, limiting their effectiveness in rural and indigenous communities (IDEHPUCP, 2024). Victims are often blamed or left unprotected by the system, and weak oversight reinforces impunity (Murillo et al., 2019; Defensoría del Pueblo, 2022). Despite normative advances, institutional gaps and lack of training in justice and health persist.

#### **4.6 Trauma-Sensitive Interventions**

There are intervention experiences led by NGOs, community networks, and some public entities, focused on psychological repair and psychosocial support (González et al., 2023; Arteta Maza, 2021). These initiatives promote trauma-sensitive approaches but have limited coverage and lack systematic evaluation (Macedo et al.,

2021; Farfán & Quezada, 2024). The absence of sustained public policies and intersectoral coordination prevents scalability. In addition, gaps are identified in professional training for specialized care of NNA survivors (De la Cruz et al., 2022).

#### **4.7 Case of Sexual Violence Against NNA in Wampís and Awajún Communities**

In 2024, at least 524 cases of sexual violence against girls from the Wampís and Awajún indigenous peoples, perpetrated by teachers in Amazonian communities, were publicly reported. The magnitude of these events generated strong social reaction, revealing that this form of violence not only persists in urban settings but also reproduces in rural and indigenous school environments, where access to justice and protection is even more limited.

According to IDEHPUCP (2024), many of these cases remain unpunished due to lack of articulation between community justice and the ordinary judicial system, as well as the absence of effective mechanisms for psychosocial reparation. Affected girls face barriers to reporting, institutional revictimization, and structural silencing. This case exposes normative gaps, institutional weakness, and intercultural tensions that hinder effective sanctioning of perpetrators, even when they are public officials such as teachers

#### **4.8 Other Cases of Sexual Violence**

Two cases of child survivors of sexual abuse generated international concern. UNICEF (2023) classified the Peruvian State's responses as a violation of the rights of children and adolescents (NNA), noting that a pregnancy resulting from rape is not consensual and undermines integral, physical, and mental development.

Camila, a girl from Apurímac abused by her father since the age of 9, became pregnant at 13. She was denied medical care, worsening her condition and putting her life at risk. She expressed her desire to commit suicide to avoid continuing the pregnancy, but medical staff insisted on prenatal check-ups, harassing her at home and school, which led her to abandon her community. After a spontaneous abortion, she was accused and convicted of self-induced abortion without evidence, being held responsible for the event. The judicial and medical process revealed severe institutional revictimization and the State's failure to provide solutions.

Mila, an 11-year-old girl from Loreto, became pregnant by her stepfather, who had abused her since the age of 7. She also reported previous assaults by her uncle. Authorities released the stepfather due to alleged lack of evidence. At the Regional Hospital of Loreto, she was denied therapeutic abortion, arguing that rape cases are not included in the protocol. Tello (2023) warned that the risk of death in an 11-year-old girl due to pregnancy complications is even higher, rejecting the medical board's decision.

These cases highlight institutional negligence and a structural pattern of violence and abandonment toward NNA in Peru. Female victims are forced into motherhood without physical or emotional capacity and judged if they decide to terminate the pregnancy. This imposition generates extreme stress which, given the shortage of mental health professionals, further fragments the psychological well-being of minors.

### **5. Discussion**

#### **5.1 Contributions to Research on Gender and Trauma**

The findings of this narrative review allow for an understanding of the complexity of sexual violence against NNA in Peru, showing how psychological, institutional, structural, and normative dimensions interact. Consistent patterns of severe emotional impact, long-term sequelae in integral development, and persistent practices of revictimization were identified. These results align with Latin American and international literature on child trauma (Murillo et al., 2019; Bárbara et al., 2022), reaffirming that childhood sexual violence affects multiple spheres of life. However, it is evident that widely disseminated approaches such as trauma-informed care or survivor-centered justice (Macedo et al., 2021; González et al., 2023) have not yet been systematically integrated into national interventions, revealing a gap between theoretical frameworks and their real application in contexts of inequality and high vulnerability.

#### **5.2 Implications for Public Policy and Institutional Practice**

Despite normative advances by the Peruvian State, the reviewed evidence shows that institutional responses remain fragmented, reactive, and insufficiently sensitive to territorial and cultural specificities. The review confirms the urgency of strengthening articulation among the justice, health, and education sectors, and consolidating protocols with a gender approach, intercultural relevance, and effective rights protection. Cases such as those of Wampís and Awajún girls reveal gaps in coordination between community justice and the

ordinary judicial system, as well as the absence of psychosocial reparation mechanisms. The cases of Camila and Mila, in turn, expose institutional negligence and serious failures in health and judicial care, including denial of therapeutic abortion, undue judicialization, and revictimization. These findings underscore the need for sustained political will to monitor the implementation of existing laws and allocate structural resources that guarantee comprehensive, culturally appropriate interventions free from institutional violence.

### **5.3 Methodological Considerations**

This review presents limitations derived from the exclusive use of secondary sources, which prevents access to direct testimonies or exploration of subjective experiences of NNA survivors. Moreover, most reviewed studies focus on urban contexts or general analyses, with limited representation of rural, indigenous, and diverse identity populations. The inclusion of the Wampís and Awajún case sought to highlight this gap by incorporating an intersectional perspective that problematizes how gender, ethnicity, poverty, and rurality overlap in the production of and response to sexual violence.

### **5.4 Future Research Lines**

Several areas of necessary research are identified: qualitative studies with direct participation of NNA survivors under strict ethical standards; impact evaluations of trauma-sensitive interventions; comparative analyses between urban, rural, and indigenous contexts; and exploration of best practices in intersectoral and intercultural coordination. These lines would deepen available knowledge and contribute to more effective, inclusive, and sustainable public policies.

The evidence analyzed shows that child sexual violence in Peru acquires particular characteristics when observed from an intersectional perspective, where gender, territory, ethnicity, and structural inequality decisively intertwine. Documented cases in urban areas and, especially, in indigenous Amazonian communities reveal that girls' vulnerability intensifies in contexts where historical discrimination, institutional precariousness, and intercultural tensions converge. The magnitude of abuses committed against Wampís and Awajún girls, as well as Camila and Mila's experiences within the health and justice systems, identify a structural pattern in which revictimization, absence of trauma-informed approaches, and lack of cultural relevance severely weaken the State's response.

This panorama is particularly significant for international debates on child protection and gender-based violence, as it shows that such violence cannot be understood or addressed solely through universal frameworks. Instead, it requires considering how trauma, racism, territorial inequality, and institutional fragility operate simultaneously. The Peruvian case provides critical elements to rethink child protection systems in culturally diverse societies, highlighting the urgency of comprehensive responses that integrate justice, health, and reparation through approaches sensitive to context and the lived experiences of girl survivors.

## **6. Conclusions**

Sexual violence against children and adolescents (NNA) in Peru continues to be marked by structural gaps that limit access to protection and recovery. This demands public policies capable of strengthening care pathways, ensuring their enforcement throughout the territory, and guaranteeing mental health services that truly reach those in need, especially in rural and indigenous contexts where state responses are weaker. At the same time, working with NNA survivors requires professionals trained to intervene with trauma-informed, gender-sensitive, and intercultural approaches. Without training that incorporates these competencies transversally, practices that revictimize and weaken the possibility of comprehensive reparation persist.

It is also essential to promote a research agenda that collects the experiences of Amazonian communities, evaluates existing interventions, and enables a better understanding of how inequalities sustain this form of violence. The production of situated evidence is key to guiding policies that are more relevant and sensitive to diverse contexts.

Protecting NNA from these forms of violence is a public and ethical responsibility that will only be effective if sustained through coordinated actions, culturally respectful approaches, and measures aimed at restoring the dignity and well-being of affected girls and adolescents.

**Ethical Sensitivity:** Respectful and non-stigmatizing language was used, focusing on survivors. The limitations inherent in the exclusive use of secondary sources are acknowledged, and the reproduction of stereotypes or judgments about the communities analyzed was avoided. The report was written in a clear and accessible style, with a focus on the human dimension of the issue.

**AI Declaration:** No artificial intelligence tools were used in the development, analysis, or writing of this work.

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