Baseline of Research on Human Rights and Gender at the University: Recognizing Perspectives

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Abstract

Objective: To establish a baseline diagnosis of research on human rights and gender at the Pedagogical and Technological University of Colombia (UPTC) in order to identify thematic trends, institutional commitments, and emerging challenges. **Methodology:** A descriptive study was conducted through documentary analysis of institutional repositories and the GrupLac database. Publications after 2013 developed by researchers affiliated with UPTC were included. Fifty documents met the selection criteria and were systematized using a two-level Excel matrix for thematic categorization and characterization. **Results:** Three major analytical categories were identified: (1) Human rights-focused education, emphasizing inclusive education and peace education; (2) Visibility of human rights violations, particularly regarding gender, armed conflict, discrimination, and intersectionality; and (3) Human rights and social justice, highlighting dignity, legal frameworks, equity, and community participation. The findings reveal a predominantly qualitative orientation and a strong ethical and critical commitment within the university's research production. **Conclusions:** UPTC demonstrates a consolidated trajectory in research on human rights and gender, with significant contributions to education, social memory, and justice-oriented scholarship. However, challenges remain in strengthening interdisciplinary dialogue, institutional articulation, and structural transformations that ensure inclusive and rights-based practices within higher education.

Keywords

Human rights; Gender; Higher education; Inclusive education; Peace education; Social justice; Intersectionality; Colombia.

INTRODUCTION

Human rights are based on the idea that everyone deserves to be treated fairly and with dignity. Since they were first established, human rights have been seen as a legal concept that supports this idea. The university has a responsibility to promote human rights and encourage societies to support these values. As Arévalo Narváez says, the university is the best place for teaching and practicing human rights. This is because human rights are

"the most important part of what a university does, since they come from the university's main purpose: people" (2013).

The importance of university spaces in promoting, teaching, and practicing human rights is not new. But it is important to recognize that human rights are progressive, meaning they are always changing. Therefore, it is always important to talk about human rights. Human rights are at the core of what the university does, so it's natural that every part of the university should consider human rights. Because of this, there are more rules that require universities to think about how their processes and results affect human rights. In short, the idea that human rights should apply to higher education always challenges the university.

The ideas about human rights on college campuses are called "university rights" (Odio Benito, 1996). These rights are part of the rules at universities, so they are seen as part of what makes education possible (Yoma, 2025). According to this view, colleges and universities create groups that promote human rights. In Ibero-America, these groups are known as University Rights Defenders. The results of these groups are different, but they mainly point to problems with power relations on campus. These relations are often focused on gender, and there is a lot of discrimination (Montero et al., 2024).

The Pedagogical and Technological University of Colombia (UPTC) has a lot of experience. Since 2023, it has had the Observatory of Gender and Human Rights. This group looks at how these ideas are used in classrooms and other places on campus. He also has a master's degree in human rights and a specialization in teaching human rights. The country's human rights policy is inclusive and diverse. It has a resolution that regulates the prevention, detection, attention, and monitoring of gender-based violence and discrimination. The institutional commitment to human rights is clear in the "We Build the Future" pedagogical model and the institutional development plan. Even so, the beginning understanding and description of the experience of human rights on campus is recognized.

This document tries to give a basic overview of the current state of research on human rights and gender at the university. It's a starting point to create and follow up on plans to protect and promote human rights at the university in the long term.

Researchers at UPTC have studied how people's rights are related to external actors, meaning other people or groups. These studies have focused on people who are deprived of liberty, victims of the armed conflict in Colombia, women, people of diverse genders, schools, rural communities, and social movements. This study's content analysis found three categories that clearly show how the UPTC is working to support human rights and gender equality. It also shows the university's commitment to reflecting on its human rights experience. This is a big challenge for the university.

METHODOLOGY:

A descriptive study was carried out to establish a baseline on human rights research at the UPTC. Sampieri (2017) says that "descriptive studies try to explain the important features of people, groups, communities, or any other subject that is studied." In this sense, they try to analyze how research has approached the issue of human rights and gender at the UPTC.

The data sources were from documents. The university's online database and the GrupLac database were both checked. GrupLac is a database of research groups that is recognized by MinCiencias. The following equations were used to perform the searches.

• Research OR Studies OR Analysis
• Human Rights OR Violation of Rights OR Protection of Rights
• UPTC OR Pedagogical and Technological University of Colombia
• Research Lines OR Groups

For the selection of relevant documents and sources of information, the following criteria were established:
• Date of publication after 2013
• Any language
• Products developed by groups or researchers affiliated with UPTC
• Documents or products that address issues related to human rights and gender.
• Virtually Recoverable Documents

A spreadsheet was created in Excel to organize and analyze the information. The spreadsheet had two levels. The first level sorted the findings by source. The second level looked at the information in more detail.
In the course of the analysis, documents or sources that did not contribute to the objective of the research were excluded from the selection. The extraction of information was facilitated by the construction of a matrix in the Excel program, which featured a preliminary tier that enabled the systematization of findings with respect to sources. The matrix's constituent categories are delineated as follows:
• Source
• Title
• Author
• Year
• Type of font or document
• Availability link or reference
A second level of analysis was established to facilitate the characterization of the information, with consideration given to the following dimensions:

• Topics addressed and aspects discussed on Human Rights: Civil and Political Rights; Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Vulnerable Groups and Discrimination; Human Rights Violations; Legal Framework and Public Policies.
• Faculty or School
• Research group to which the product or source is attached
• Focus of research or publication.
• Outreach and Community Engagement Activities
• Continuing Education Experience Reports
• Objective
• Conclusions
• Existence of internal or external allied centres or institutes

- Line of action
- Current challenges and emerging trends

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following a thorough review of the pertinent documentation housed in the University's repository and the GrupLac database of the SCienTI platform, operated by the Ministry of Science, the following criteria will be met.

A total of 68 documents were identified, and 50 of these met the inclusion criteria. These documents were then selected, analyzed through thematic synthesis, and classified into categories.

The following characteristics of the texts are noteworthy: The year with the highest number of publications was 2018, with 12 documents; it was followed by 2020, with 9 documents. The primary approach is qualitative, employing methodologies such as documentary review, grounded theory, and participatory action, among others. Tables 1 and 2 present a comprehensive overview of the most salient results characterizing the documents.

Table 1. Subjects addressed by the studies

Subject addressed	Number of documents found
Actions in favor of human rights	17
Economic and labor rights	5
Social and cultural rights	6
Vulnerable groups	6
Legal framework and public policies	4
Human rights violations	5
Gender-based violation	7
Total	50

Conversely, the UPTC presently boasts 22 research groups that delineate lines related to the subjects:

Table 2. List of results obtained from the search on the SGI and MinCiencias platforms of research groups that declare lines of research on gender and human rights, diversity, or related approaches.

1	History and Prospects of the Latin American University. SWAIN.
2	Reconciliation with justice and human dignity - RED HUMANA
3	Neighbourhood associations and democracy
4	Inter-institutional research group "The independence of justice in Tunja"
5	Spaces for development
6	Reflecting on labor law
7	Primo Levi Social Justice
8	Study Group on Feminisms, Gender and Human Rights - GIEPEG
9	Human rights and the environment
10	Researchers for Sustainable Business and Agro-industrial Development-IDEAS

11	Exclusions and Resistances in Health Care - GERCUS
12	Building educational community
13	ACEMED-UPTC Research Group
14	Biomedical and pathology research group
15	Social conflicts in the twentieth century
16	Organizational synergy
17	Regional studies Julio Flórez
18	Research Group on Sustainable Administrative and Business Management-GIGAS
19	Healthy municipality for peace
20	Clinical and Health Psychology
21	Education, health and rural development
22	Languages in Education (LEEN)

The productivity of the research groups is heterogeneous, and while some groups have produced significant results, others have not yet demonstrated a similar level of impact. A thorough analysis of the documents yielded the identification of three categories: education focused on human rights, visibility of human rights violations, and human rights and social justice. These categories enabled us to identify an epistemic, ethical, and critical orientation among the researchers at the university in regard to human rights.

The study focuses on the role of human rights-focused education in the promotion of human rights. Human rights education is imperative for the fortification of democratic societies, as it fosters human dignity, equality, and the involvement of citizens in various domains of social life. Its pertinence lies in its capacity to facilitate an understanding of rights that transcends their abstract nature, embracing instead a conception of these principles as historical constructions inextricably linked to social movements advocating for justice and the transformation of structures of exclusion (Vilca Vilca & Caira Yucra, 2024). Furthermore, it fosters the development of critical capacities to identify and challenge discriminatory practices, in addition to cultivating more equitable relationships in educational and community contexts. From this perspective, human rights education enables the recognition and exercise of fundamental rights and constitutes a tool for cultural transformation aimed at coexistence, social justice, and peacebuilding (UNESCO, 2024).

Within the category, two subcategories were identified: the first pertains to the significance of inclusive education. The concept of inclusion in education is founded on the principles of non-discrimination and the right of all individuals to access educational opportunities. This commitment to diversity and equal opportunities within the educational sector is paramount. Inclusive education is imperative for ensuring equitable access to quality education for all individuals, irrespective of their abilities or backgrounds. This is particularly salient in the present context, which necessitates the implementation of government policies aimed at ensuring inclusive education.

Authors such as Reyes Alba (2019) and Cárdenas Niño (2021) have underscored the significance of eliminating physical barriers, deconstructing sociocultural imaginaries concerning disability, vulnerability, and displacement due to armed conflict, among other situations, and fostering an environment characterized by respect and appreciation for difference and diversity.

A salient issue that emerges from the reviewed documents is the necessity for the implementation of policies that encompass special educational needs and that promote inclusive learning environments. It is evident that, although institutions are willing to receive students in vulnerable situations, they do not have the necessary policies or programs to address strategies to qualify learning and the revision of curricula. Furthermore, these institutions lack specific research on issues related to attention to diversity or focus on training for the institution's staff (Cárdenas Niño, 2021).

The persistence of institutional barriers to educational inclusion indicates that a mere willingness to receive students with special needs—including disability, sex-gender dissidence, and poverty—is insufficient in the absence of policies that align with the realities of the people, adequate resources, and training processes for teachers. Various international organizations have noted that inclusive education necessitates structural transformations that incorporate reasonable accommodations (Ramírez Valbuena, 2018), a flexible curriculum, and continuous teacher training (Medina & Niño, 2015), thereby ensuring that diversity is recognized as a pedagogical value rather than an operational challenge (UNESCO, 2020). In this sense, the dearth of programs, commitment, and institutional wills that guide curricular adaptation, research on inclusion, and the strengthening of teaching capacities reproduces exclusionary practices and limits the right to quality education for all people (ONU, 2016).

As posited by Olga Lucía Cárdenas Niño (2021) in her work *Talking About Inclusive Education*, individuals with disabilities and their families encounter significant challenges in the educational sector.

"[…] there are no pedagogical adjustments or the necessary resources according to the individual needs and interests of students. Families do not have the necessary support at the institutional level, teachers do not have the necessary knowledge for the comprehensive care of students with disabilities and barriers to learning and participation. Therefore, the dearth of knowledge regarding disability and the existence of barriers to learning and participation among teachers in the regular classroom and the educational community in general have resulted in circumstances in which the participation of children and young people with disabilities and barriers to learning and participation is minimal and not valued.

A salient aspect of this subcategory pertains to the social imaginary concerning difference, which persists in centering its discourse on normality and homogeneity. This narrative perpetuates the invisibility and violation of the rights of individuals requiring accommodations to function optimally in all facets of life. Despite the advancements that have been made in incorporating human rights, differential, gender, and intersectional approaches into public policies, programs, projects, and other strategies, there remains a necessity to deconstruct this imaginary, to comprehend and materialize the requisite approaches and wills. It is imperative to acknowledge the intertwined nature of human rights and inclusion, as any discussion of the former is inextricably linked to the latter.

The second subcategory is *Peace Education*. In Colombia, the armed conflict has persisted for more than 70 years, with structural causes such as social injustice and land dispossession generating prolonged clashes between state military forces, illegal armed groups, and drug trafficking organizations. In 2012, the government of President Santos initiated negotiations for the Peace Agreement with the FARC-EP, a process that culminated in its formal ratification in 2016. In this context, the subcategory under

scrutiny places a particular emphasis on human rights education, with a specific focus on peacebuilding as a foundational approach to transforming social realities and confronting historical inequalities.

A review of the documents reveals a consensus on the importance of cultivating critical awareness among students concerning the social and political realities impacting their communities. This objective is pursued with the aim of equipping students with the capacity to discern how their actions contribute to collective benefit, thereby fostering the development of a cultural context that ensures participation, respects human rights, and fosters recognition of these rights (Restrepo, 2013; Agudelo & Chaparro, 2019; Mora, Agudelo & Estupiñán, 2015).

According to Professor Manuel Restrepo (2013, 223 p), "Human rights contribute to thinking differently and to finding the appropriate tools to act in accordance with that other way of thinking." It is imperative to educate and comprehend human rights from a historical and social perspective. It is essential to acknowledge that human rights are the outcome of social struggles for dignity and justice, they are derived from the tangible experiences of individuals, and they should not be perceived as "ideals" as this perpetuates inequality and exclusion. By acknowledging the significance of historical memory and the heterogeneity of experiences, a foundation is laid for the development of more equitable and just societies, where the universality and accessibility of human rights are paramount (Restrepo, 2013).

In relation to the aforementioned points, Agudelo and Chaparro (2019) and Mora, Agudelo, and Estupiñán (2015) posit that the establishment of educational environments conducive to critical and autonomous learning is imperative. This underscores the necessity of adopting participatory and reflective methodologies that integrate the community and facilitate the learning and practice of democracy, the recognition and value of differences, the promotion of values for the protection of human rights, and the cultivation of coexistence and social justice from an early age.

The university's function as a nexus for intellectual discourse on subjects such as peace and human rights is predicated on its role as a facilitating space for both dialogue and controversy. Within this milieu, debate serves as a catalyst for the generation of ideas aimed at managing socio-economic and political conflicts, which emerge for a variety of reasons among human beings, through peaceful means.

In this framework, academic institutions are obligated to reflect on these issues and incorporate them, with the assistance of alternative pedagogical approaches, into their curricula, research endeavors, publications, and, in general, into all their activities (Trimiño & Amézquita, 2018).

In this line of thinking, the significance of integrating the gender approach into human rights education is underscored. This approach is regarded as a fundamental component of the training of citizens (Trimiño, 2014).

b) Visibility of the violation of Human Rights

This category is defined by the exercise of memory and denunciation that is made in the documents consulted about the multiple ways in which rights are violated and on which people this violation specifically falls. The term "visibility" is defined as the power of documents to demonstrate the social, political, and legal realities of human rights in the Colombian territory.

It is imperative to emphasize that the domain of social and human sciences remains the primary producer of documents on this subject. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to acknowledge works from the health sciences that contribute to this examination of memory or denunciation. Illustrative examples include the following: The following papers were presented at the conference: "Moments of Recognition as Subjects of Rights of a Group of Young LGBT University Students in Tunja, Boyacá" and "Women's Bodies: Processes of Devictimization."

This presents a valuable opportunity to broaden the conversation on the subject from more interdisciplinary perspectives. Despite the confluence of various disciplines, each one contributes independently, without engaging in meaningful dialogue with other disciplines. Interdisciplinarity implies that the construction of knowledge is increasingly aligned with the recognition of agencies, and, above all, with the unveiling of the debts that society has incurred in the face of violations that are no longer anonymous and distant. These violations increasingly reflect society's own reflections.

The various perspectives from which human rights are studied at the University point to a common axis: denunciation. The potential for research in universities to contribute to social memory and political advocacy is embedded in a series of tensions, among the most salient of which are the shifts or transitions from researcher to activist. This premise, which since the 1950s in the country gained strength in the voice of Orlando Fals Borda, preceded and followed by other thinkers in the social and human sciences, seems to be a discussion of the past. Nonetheless, the call is considered permanent and is regarded as an imperative of research ethics, as evidenced by Hernández and Velásquez's (2024) assertions and the subsequent assimilation of this concept with the necessities for public universities.

" The role of public servants as agents of social change. This concept entails not only the documentation and preservation of cultural diversity, but also the active contribution to strategic national agendas. Such contributions may include the design of public policies that serve the most vulnerable sectors and the implementation of interdisciplinary projects that promote social well-being and equity. The provision of accompaniment to those grappling with adversity has been our vocation; however, it is also imperative to establish our presence at the levels of incidence emanating from the State."

The application of qualitative research in the documents offers insights into the epistemology and political stance of research at the university. By documenting or narrating the experiences of the protagonists, the texts reveal the realities of violence, discrimination, and exclusion, as well as the transformative capacities of agencies that are typically unrecognized. This approach, exemplified in the revised text by Camacho León (2019), serves as a means of making these phenomena visible.

"Throughout the process of implementation and development of the diploma, we were able to evidence knowledge, daily practices, visions of the world, own languages, demands of women that do not exist as categories of analysis in the Western, Eurocentric, colonialist and patriarchal scientific paradigm, which has given rise to our reductionist and fragmented system of knowledge of social reality, that has permeated curricula and discourses circumscribed only to the academic field, which has prevented the democratization of knowledge in the field of Human Rights and therefore the practice of them."

This category is documented, and it includes cases of sexual violence, discrimination, social exclusion, and armed conflict. Sometimes, the intersection of these violences is

also documented, for example, in texts such as "Sexual Violence and Crime against Humanity in the Special Jurisdiction for Peace" and "Women and Forced Displacement." Violation of their Fundamental Rights" and "Disability and Gender: A Human Rights Perspective." Consequently, an intersectional approach is imperative for a comprehensive analysis of this category, underscoring gender as the constitutive axis.

The intersectional approach, also known as intersectionality, was first defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw. This concept enables the analysis of how various forms of inequality interact, exacerbate, and function to oppress people. It highlights the necessity to comprehend the interdependence of rights, the value of equality and difference, and the varying impacts of interactions between axes of oppression on individuals. Consequently, it acknowledges that no form of violation is straightforward but is structurally exacerbated (González Arnal, 2025). In terms of visibility, the reviewed studies aim to address this complexity. An exemplar of this phenomenon can be found in the work of Arenas, Disability and Gender: From the perspective of human rights, it is important to note that:

"In the face of policy analysis, it is very important to influence public policies, because there is no clear differentiation of policies with a gender perspective for women with disabilities, that is, the other intersections of women from ethnic peoples, peasant women, rural women are contemplated, but there is no perspective of women with disabilities. […]The first contribution made within the development of this research is to deconstruct that concept of disability as a homogeneous concept that aims to universalize..." (Arenas Castro, 2023).

(c) Human Rights and Social Justice

The category emerges from the recognition of the articulation between human rights and social justice, which compels a discussion of concepts such as equity, equality, inclusion, and community participation. The analysis of the reviewed works is predicated on structural conditions, which are conceptualized as elements conducive to the violation of rights, specifically the right to health, inclusive education, and citizen participation.

The concept of social justice is understood as a foundational principle that is indispensable for the realization of rights. The fundamental objective of this principle is the eradication of all forms of discrimination. The category encompasses studies that underscore two elements: the legal framework that is designed to promote inclusivity and eliminate barriers to equal access, and the guarantee of fundamental rights to all individuals. Furthermore, actions in favor of rights and struggles undertaken for the purpose of achieving equity and equality.

The approach to legal frameworks is made as axes of reflection on the guarantee of fundamental rights. These rights include, but are not limited to, the right to education (Reyes, 2016), the right to a dignified death (López Cifuentes, 2018), or the protection, reparation, and prevention of risks for victims of violence (Parra, 2023; Sánchez, 2018) or violence against women (Mendieta, Huertas, Garcés, Manrique, & López, 2020; Dorado & Mendieta, 2020).

The examination of the legal ramifications of rights and the conclusions of the studies underscores the significance of dignity in relation to the comprehension of human rights and the fundamental nature of academic reflection. This is particularly salient given its association with human dignity, as articulated by López Cifuentes (2018) and Sánchez Cubides (2018), respectively. The foundation of life as a right and the presupposition that sustains the Social Rule of Law are both predicated on this concept.

The concept of social justice is predicated on the foundation of dignity. To achieve social justice, it is imperative to transform the structural conditions that engender inequality. Citizen participation and community empowerment are indispensable components for achieving sustainable social justice.

The struggles of the collectives play a fundamental role in making visible the social injustices and vulnerabilities that communities are facing. From the University, social justice is accompanied by its *formative mission function*, from the *identification of elements or approaches* for the exercise of rights, and from the *recognition of the potential* for transformation, empowerment and agency of the subjects with whom it works. The works of Contreras and Cifuentes (2020); Camacho León (2019); Trimiño and Amézquita (2018); Ruiz, Martínez and Burgos (2017) are exemplary in the role of human rights educators.

The Works of Reyes Alba (2019); Salamanca Sánchez (2018); Mora Coconubo (2016); Estepa (2014); López (2013); Rojas Zorro (2015); Benavides Beccerra (2015) and Huertas, Gómez and Manosalva (2018) account for the potential for agency and transformation of people. And some of the works that provide perspectives for the exercise of rights are those of Restrepo Domínguez (2013); Ariza Barbosa (2019); Pinilla and Mendieta (2017); Cárdenas Niño (2021); Ramírez Malaver (2018) and González and Suarez (2014).

Understanding human dignity as part of higher education training leads us to think about the perspectives that the latest works reported in the previous paragraph offer us, feminism, critical theories, deconstruction, the pedagogy of dignity and peace. These perspectives detected in the production on the subject in the University provoke reflection on the centrality of people, in their own capacities, powers and freedoms for the exercise and defense of their rights, while at the same time highlighting the task of the University of generating the necessary spaces for thought so that, recognizing knowledge and practices, revealing the mandates that persist, are reproduced and updated to maintain excluded communities, thus, Higher Education has the duty to generate critical thinking in societies, because collecting the perspective of the Chilean academic José Joaquín Brunner, in a phrase attributed to him, *we cannot speak of successful universities in the midst of failed societies.*

The pedagogy of rights must adopt certain characteristics to be effective. It must be critical, embodied, situated, and subversive in its approach to pedagogy, research, and traditional academia. As Camacho León asserts, "Scientific hegemony has confined the issue of human rights to the theoretical domain, entirely divorced from the practical and social realities of the majority. This has led to the deferral of the pressing need to democratize knowledge, thereby hindering the effective implementation of rights" (2019).

The University's formative mission is evidenced in its ability to foster schools of critical thinking capable of reading the versions of the realities that are reported daily. This critical thinking is further exemplified by Restrepo's call in his text Human Rights, School and Pedagogy. A reexamination of the concept of rights, accompanied by a deconstruction of the notion of citizenship, is imperative.

Rights are a complex issue, the greatest human wealth in terms of value. They are for specific, contextualized human beings; they are neither abstract nor ideal. Liberal language is technical and pragmatic, destroying their content and making their value

purely operational. They must be taught and learned in their simplest form, supported by a structure that articulates freedom, equality, and solidarity, incorporating the desires and needs of the here and now, of human beings who fight for dignity (Restrepo, 2013).

Therefore, this category encompasses the inevitable task that researchers have undertaken at the university to assess, within the domain of knowledge, the way in which each pedagogical encounter fosters the empowerment of subjects of rights. This assessment emphasizes the epistemologies and didactics that enable the manifestation of this power, particularly in contexts where dignity and social justice represent a perpetual endeavor. According to the findings of this study, academia is, by its very nature, an advocate of justice. It is only through this role that academia can contribute to a more equitable world and to respectful, transformative societies of thought.

Human rights, therefore, are defined as the fundamental elements that facilitate optimal living conditions and are, consequently, held in high esteem by society. The cultivation of a culture of human rights, one that empowers and values the daily lives of students, is the central objective of education. To this end, educational practices must be imbued with the values and principles of human rights, thereby fostering attitudes that engender respect for human dignity (Salamanca, 2018).

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