



Cecilia's story

A profile from
Young Lives in Peru

*"I'd like to finish school. I want to be a doctor.
I'd like to cure those who are sick."*

Cecilia's story

Cecilia is 9, and the youngest of seven children. She is closest to her 15-year-old sister, who looks after her. Four of her siblings no longer live with the family. Cecilia is already an aunt, as two of her sisters have babies themselves. She is now in 4th grade at school. Although she is an active child, and enjoys games like volleyball, she says she is teased at school and this makes her sad.

Cecilia's family moved house last year. They now live in a rented house with a tin roof. She says she likes the current house best because it has plants. They share the house with the owner and another family. Her mother says they may have to move again because the owner may ask them to leave. This is not the first time the family has had to move.

"Who did you like better? Your neighbours there or here?"

There.

There? Why?

Because they were good.

And how were they good? What did they do?

They gave us biscuits."

Cecilia's father does not have a steady job. Sometimes he works as a shoemaker and sometimes he drives a tricycle taxi. Cecilia's mother is a housewife.

Her father was educated up to 7th grade and her mother to 2nd grade. Her brothers and sisters have all been to government schools. Cecilia has no identity documents because she was not registered at birth.

Cecilia still sleeps in the same room as her parents. Three of her sisters sleep with her older sister's son, who is 2, in the next room, and her grandfather sleeps in another room. She says sometimes she has bad dreams.

"Sometimes I pray to God that I won't dream about anything.

What scares you about your dreams?

Sometimes I dream about monsters that eat people. Sometimes I dream about an earthquake. Sometimes I dream that a crazy person comes to me. Sometimes I dream that my dolls walk and I'm afraid."

Cecilia usually bathes in a bathtub in the backyard of her house with hot water, and her sister helps her. At home she cleans her room, sweeps and helps her mother to cook by peeling potatoes, beans, carrots, and other vegetables. It was her mother who taught her how to do these things. She says that she likes

Cecilia did not feature in the first book about the Young Lives children, although we have been following her, like the other children, since 2002.

helping, and when her mother tells her to do something, she does it immediately. She knows how to turn on the gas stove and light the mud oven.

At school, Cecilia says she likes her classmates apart from two who tease her by calling her fat. She has not told her teacher because he has told them he does not want to know anything about their fights, but she has told her mother and said she wants to change her teacher. She does not like going to school when she has gym class.

“Have they done anything to you? Do they do things, do they tease you?”

Yes.

What do they say? When do they tease you? At break or in class?

In class and at break.

And how do you feel?

Bad.

And have you told your teacher?

He doesn't want to know.”

Otherwise she thinks she is an average student. She does her homework by herself and sometimes her sisters help her. Her father helps her with maths. She says that in 1st grade she had a teacher who did not let them out during breaks and who hit them on their legs with a whip.

At weekends she goes to the field with her older sisters and they roll in the grass. Sometimes in the evenings they fly kites. She also plays volleyball with her sisters, and sometimes with her father.

“He plays sometimes; when he doesn't go to work.

And do you like playing with him?

Yes.

When he plays, does he play just with you, or with your sister as well?

With my sister. I'm with her, he's alone.

And who wins?

My father [laughs].”

Apart from volleyball and flying kites, she says she likes to play shop.

“And what do you sell when you play?”

Rice, noodles, sugar, sweets, everything.

And, do you use real rice or not?

No, a bit of dirt.

Who taught you how to play?

My sister.”

Cecilia remembers that when she was 6, she used to go to the local market when there was no school and sell jelly in a bag. Each bag was sold for 50 Peruvian cents (about 20 US cents) and usually they sold about 20 jellies. They gave the money to their mother and she used it to go to the market and to buy things for the house. She gave them 10 cents and with that they bought sweets.

Cecilia says her father sometimes comes home drunk. “Sometimes my father works, sometimes he doesn’t. When he gets tired, sometimes he comes home drunk.” She says she does not like this because her mother becomes sad and cries. She says that although they argue, her dad does not hit her mum.

She also complains about her little nephew, who hits her and throws water and stones at her. Her sister defends her.

Asked what she would like to be when she grows up, she says she wants to go to secondary school and then become a doctor.

“And would you like to leave school, or to finish it?”

I’d like to finish.

What do you think secondary school will be like?

Difficult.

What would you like to be when you grow up?

A doctor.

And who would you like to cure?

Those who are sick.”

The importance of birth registration

Not being registered at birth, like Cecilia, has important consequences in later life. Without a birth certificate, you cannot get the National Identity Document (NID) that needed for any civil, commercial, administrative or legal transaction. You need it to vote, and to access government health insurance, healthcare and education – although because primary education is a constitutional right, schools will often accept children and then pressure them to get an identity card.

Of the Young Lives children in Peru, 54 per cent of the younger group and 40 per cent of the older group did not have a national identity document. The number of children with identity documents has increased in recent years, because of a Government campaign. But in April 2010, 15 per cent of Peruvian children under 18 were still without these documents.

Source: Santiago Cueto et al. (2012) *Tracking Disparities: Who Gets Left Behind? Initial Findings from Peru*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

Bullying and violence in schools

One of the issues that emerged most strongly from interviews with children and young people in Peru about their schooling was the frequent use of physical punishment by teachers. Many of them reported that their teacher punished them physically for not doing their homework, or for getting it wrong.

A number of children and teachers justified the use of violence as a normal part of school and said it was to encourage hard work. In Peru, negotiating is not part of school relationships; obeying is. School is understood as an institution that has the authority to discipline the students in its own way, even if this is unfair or arbitrary. And violence or name-calling can also extend to treatment by peers, as we have seen in Cecilia's case.

In our study, we found that older children received less physical punishment than younger ones, and girls received less intense and less frequent physical punishment than boys. Such practices reinforce gender stereotypes – a boy is supposed to be strong and accept and endure pain as he grows up.

UNICEF estimates that every day, hundreds of Peruvian children are physically punished by their parents, teachers or anyone who considers this conduct normal and necessary. This is despite the fact that Peru has a number of laws to prevent such violence against children. It would seem that the levels of violence found in many schools attended by Young Lives children is reflected in the Peruvian education system and in society as a whole.

Sources: Santiago Cueto et al. (2012) *Tracking Disparities: Who Gets Left Behind? Initial Findings from Peru*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; Vanessa Rojas Arangoitia (2011) *"I'd rather be hit with a stick... Grades are sacred": Students' Perceptions of Discipline and Authority in a Public High School in Peru*, Young Lives Working Paper 70.

“Sometimes I pray to God that I won’t dream about anything. ... Sometimes I dream about monsters that eat people. Sometimes I dream about an earthquake. Sometimes I dream that my dolls walk and I’m afraid.”



Country context: Peru

Peru is now considered a 'high human development' country, rich in natural resources. It currently ranks 80 out of 187 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index. It has a population of 29.4 million people. For the last decade, the economy has been growing at over 5 per cent each year. Even during 2009, when most of the world economy stagnated or deteriorated, growth continued in Peru, although at a lower rate.

But the country's strong economic performance has not been matched in terms of poverty reduction. There are widening gaps between different sectors of the population (especially between Spanish-speaking and indigenous populations and between people living in urban and rural areas). Social expenditure is low, although there are a number of government programmes targeted at the poor.

- The overall poverty rate decreased by 17 per cent between 2004 and 2010, but a third of the population still lives in poverty.
- While 19 per cent of people in towns are poor, this rises to 51 per cent of people in rural areas.
- Migration from rural to urban areas is common. About 30 per cent of the population lives in the capital city, Lima, and 55 per cent lives on the narrow coastline (including Lima).
- Levels of poverty, infant mortality, maternal mortality and malnourishment among indigenous groups are twice as high as national averages.

Children

- Of the 3.8 million Peruvians living in extreme poverty, 2.1 million are children.
- Children in the poorest areas – city slums, the Andean Highlands and the Amazon rainforest – are ten times more likely to die before the age of 5 than the children from the richest 20 per cent of families.
- Almost all children now go to primary school. Enrolment in secondary school is low compared to primary, but it is growing.
- But repetition of grades and temporary drop-out from school are common, leading to a high percentage of children who are 'over-age', or older than the norm for the grade they are in.
- The number of children who work is high. Boys are more likely to be employed in paid activities and girls more likely to work in the home.

Sources: www.younglives.org.uk; UNDP (2011) *Human Development Report*; Santiago Cueto et al. (2012) *Tracking Disparities: Who Gets Left Behind? Initial Findings from Peru*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

Young Lives is a unique international study investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. By following the lives of 12,000 children and young people over 15 years, we aim to improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and provide evidence to support effective policies for children.

The profile presented here is one of 24 taken from the interviews we did with the children individually and in groups. Each one is accompanied by a theme of some kind that emerged from the material and which illustrates the issues that children are having to contend with, but also gives a sense of the wider context of their lives. These range from education and schooling, to inequality, health and illness, violence in school and at home, early marriage, the effects of migration, families' experiences of crises, government schemes to help poor people, and children's views and experiences of what it is to be rich or poor.

The children and their families who are participating in the Young Lives study willingly share with us a great deal of detailed personal information about their daily lives, and we have a responsibility to protect their confidentiality and ensure their identities remain protected. For this reason, the children's names have been changed here. The accompanying photos are of children in similar situations to the children within our study sample.

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Young Lives 
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