



# Lupe's story

A profile from  
Young Lives in Peru

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# Lupe's story

**Lupe has recently had her 10th birthday. The main change in her life since we last visited has been that her mother moved out of the family home because of fights with her father. Although Lupe says it is better now because the violence has stopped, she misses her mother, who only visits at weekends.**

Lupe lives in Lima with her father, older sister, who is 15, and maternal grandparents. Her aunt, who used to live with them, has got married and moved into a new room they built in the courtyard with her husband and their baby, aged 2. Lupe's grandmother says that at first it was not easy for Lupe to get used to her aunt's husband.

Lupe shares her room with her older sister. Each has her own bed, although during the winter they sleep together because they feel cold. Lupe has a little dog that she loves very much.

Her father and her grandmother look after her, she says, but her father is out a lot. He delivers propane gas tanks and earns 700 soles (263 dollars) a month. Her grandmother, who is 58, used to look after them but broke her hip. It is taking a long time to heal. Her grandfather is also unwell. He has pancreatic cancer and is having chemotherapy. So Lupe and her sister now look after her grandparents and do many of the household chores as well.

Lupe thinks she has changed a lot in the last four years. She says she had to grow up when her mother left home.

*"I wasn't so – how can I say it – I wasn't so obedient. But when my mother left, I started feeling that I should ... that I have to continue ... as there had been so much violence [...]. With the trauma of all this, I began to educate myself, to listen, to have a little more respect."*

Lupe's grandmother, interviewed without Lupe present, tells a different story. She says that since her mother left, Lupe has become irritable and bitter. In a whisper, she says that she would like Lupe to be a happy child, but feels that her parents' separation has affected her a lot. Lupe is very quiet, and her grandmother wishes she would talk a bit more, like other girls do. But Lupe seems quite chatty with the Young Lives interviewer.

**"How else have you changed?**

*I'm no longer shy.*

**Before, were you shy?**

*I didn't have many friends.*

**And how many friends do you have now?**

*Almost the whole class!"*

Lupe tells us she enjoys school and has friends of both genders. But she feels a distance from them because, "since the majority of their parents haven't

When she was 6, Lupe was quite shy. She lived with her family in Lima. Her grandmother looked after her and her sister while her parents were at work. She had just started primary school after going to kindergarten.

separated, they don't understand. In my class there are only three children whose parents have separated."

She says the other children see her as a leader and she has been made "brigadier" of her class. The teacher is thinking of putting her forward to be brigadier of the whole primary school. She says she enjoys being brigadier, "although sometimes it's very tiring, very demanding. There are many problems."

"What subject do you like best?"

*Science*

And which do you like least?"

*Mathematics. I hate numbers. They hurt my head.*

And who helps you when you don't understand?"

*My uncle used to help me, but not any more. If I did something wrong, he used to hit me. My grandmother also beats me, so I said ... 'Better if I don't ask.' Now I do it alone, but sometimes I ask my sister."*

Lupe says that because her grandmother has been recuperating from her broken hip, she and her sister do a lot around the house.

"What things do you do? You said you wash your clothes.

*Yes. Since my mother left, I've been taught to do things on my own.*

What other things do you do here at home?"

*Before, with my grandmother, I used to sweep the stairs. Now I have to mop and wash.*

How often do you clean the house?"

*I don't know. Before, when my grandmother was healthy, we'd clean every week, but now it hurts her. And we have school and a lot of homework."*

Lupe says the housework leaves her little time for leisure. And there is so much housework to do at the weekend that sometimes she finds it hard to wake up for school on Monday mornings. On Sundays, she says, "brothers from Jehovah's Witnesses come to the house". Her family are not Jehovah's Witnesses, but she is interested because: "They teach me about the religion that they know, the one they believe in." She says she also enjoys playing with her dog. And when her father can afford it, she goes with her sister to an internet café where she can check her Facebook page.

"What do you do on the internet?"

*I play some games or I chat with my friends from school. They also have Facebook."*

Lupe says she will continue going to school in future, though she has yet to decide which secondary school to go to. There is one where she has heard there are a lot of gang members so she doesn't want to go there:

*"My sister's friend lives near there, but she doesn't like to go there often because there are a lot of gang members. They say there is graffiti all over the place; everything is ugly.*

What would happen if you stopped going to school?

*I wouldn't learn things, and in secondary school, I'd be zero.*

And how would your be life be if you never went to secondary school?

*It would be very hard because when you don't study, it's very difficult to find a job."*

Her grandmother agrees that it is important for Lupe to continue school as it is the beginning of the path that will lead to higher studies. She also points out that education in private schools is better than in government schools like Lupe and her sister attend. She believes: "a good girl should be studious, polite, listen to the advice of parents, and be respectful".

## Adolescence and growing up

The young people in our study see themselves in different ways – some as children (*niños/niñas*), others as young people (*jóvenes*) and others in more biological terms related to puberty (*púber*). As a group they are moving out of childhood and into early adulthood. This involves taking on more responsibility at home, moving from primary to secondary school, and in some cases dropping out of school altogether.

Some of the younger children, like Lupe, have to make that transition faster or earlier than their years might dictate. The departure of Lupe's mother, the absence of her father, and the illness of her grandparents have thrown her into responsibilities that would normally be beyond her actual age. As we can see, Lupe spends a lot of time doing housework and looking after her grandparents, which leaves her little time for leisure.

All children negotiate competing expectations and demands, but many, particularly those like Lupe from poorer families, face major pressures on their time. This affects not only their space for leisure but their expectations for the future. But many young people and their families see education as essential for a better future and their key to 'becoming somebody'.

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**Sources:** Gina Crivello (2009) *'Becoming Somebody': Youth Transitions Through Education and Migration. Evidence from Young Lives, Peru*, Young Lives Working Paper 43; Gina Crivello and Jo Boyden (2011) *Situating Risk in Young People's Social and Moral Relationships: Young Lives Research in Peru*, Young Lives Working Paper 66

*"[if I stopped going to school] I wouldn't learn things, and in secondary school, I'd be zero ... when you don't study, it's very difficult to find a job."*

## Child's play

We found that rural children's leisure activities were playing football, climbing trees, riding bikes, making and playing with handmade kites or going out with friends for a walk. In the Andean community we visited, some children had very few toys. They used bottle tops, trolleys and empty cans. A few had DVD players at home and watched videos (films, TV series, music clips, soap operas, etc.). In the Amazonian villages, children said more families owned and watched TV than the previous year because most households now had electricity. Some children also had access to mobile phones because there were more networks in the community.

Children in urban areas said most of their activities occurred within the home: watching TV, listening to music, doing homework, and playing (with friends or alone; some boys mentioned using a PlayStation at home). They had more access to technology, such as computers, the internet and video games, than rural children, although sometimes, like Lupe, they had to go to an internet café. There were more marked gender differences: boys went out and played with friends (football or basketball) in the park or even in another neighbourhood. Girls, on the other hand, played at home with their siblings. They were not allowed to 'hang around' in the streets because parents feared they could be attacked or robbed.

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

*“A good girl should be studious, polite, listen to the advice of parents, and be respectful.”*

Lupe's grandmother



## 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](http://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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An International Study of Childhood Poverty