

# *UNESCO Representative Says Women Face Stereotypes in Latin American Media*

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Quito, May 28 (teleSUR-rhc)-- The media has an important responsibility for confronting and transforming gender stereotypes in Latin America but has failed to do so, a UNESCO official stated on Tuesday.

“Highly stereotyped images of women remain a serious issue,” said Saadia Sánchez Vegas, the Latin America representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Although she acknowledged advances in gender equality in the region, she called for a “more systematic and more consistent” work to put an end to a pernicious media representation of women. On numerous TV shows, women are expected to be good-looking, a standard men are not held to, while men are typically portrayed more intelligent than women. Programs also foster family violence, with women the victims, in many countries, it is claimed.

The UN official also noted that the representation of women, both in front of and behind the camera was still very low. One 2010 survey showed just 24 percent of those in front of the camera are women with females making up a similar proportion of total journalists. Women were still paid 25 percent less than their male counterparts. She also encouraged media not to simply reduce the role of women working as

journalists to coverage of lifestyle, entertainment or family issues but to include them as producers, executives, and editors.

Yina Quintana, from the National Council for Gender Equality in Ecuador, said that diversity of interests and political ideas held by women is omitted in coverage, with media treating women homogeneously.

Telenovelas or soap operas are extremely popular in Latin America across all age groups and thus have had a tremendous influence in fomenting perspectives on gender values and roles. Carolina Agoff, a professor of sociology at the UNAM university, said they project women as the responsible family leader and when impossibly high standards projected are not met in real life, women “accept male violence as punishment for not playing their role as expected.”

Gender violence is a particularly sensitive issue on the continent, as 14 Latin American countries are among the top 25 countries worldwide in femicides – El Salvador, Jamaica and Guatemala having the highest rates in the world. In contrast, several Latin American countries, including Ecuador and Bolivia have explicitly incorporated femicide as a crime in their penal codes.

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