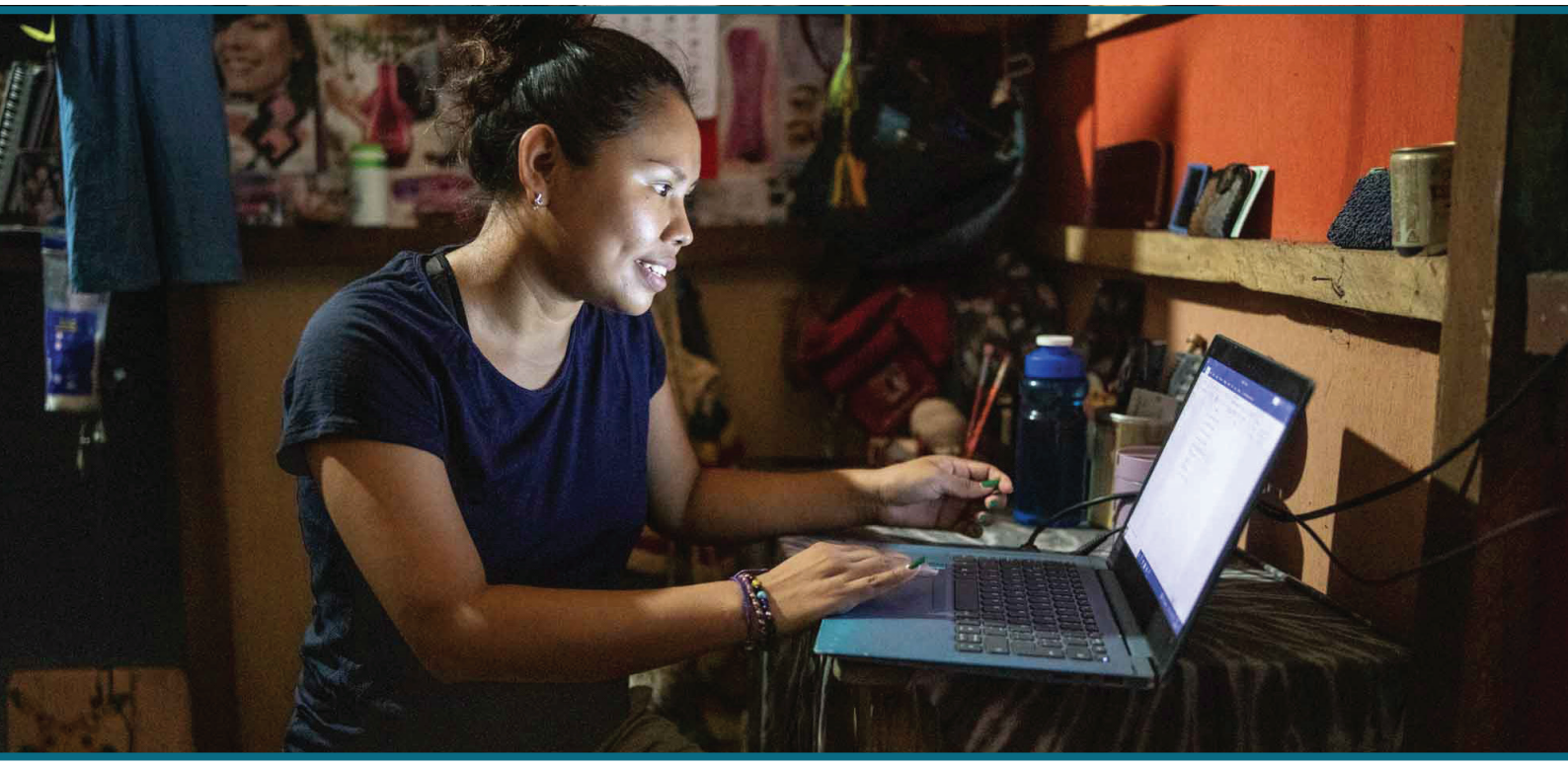


Education and Learning:

Preliminary Findings from the 2023–24 Young Lives Survey (Round 7): Peru

Introduction

For more than 20 years, Young Lives has followed two cohorts, born seven years apart from infancy to adulthood in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam[1]. This factsheet presents preliminary findings from Round 7 of the Young Lives survey conducted in Peru in 2023–24, when the Younger Cohort was 22 years old and the Older Cohort was 29, following the reopening of educational institutions, which were closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. It aims to provide an overview of the key educational and learning indicators highlighting changes over time by comparing the Younger Cohort at age 22 with the Older Cohort at the same age in 2016, and documenting the Younger Cohort's progression from age 15 to 22. The factsheet also reflects on the implications of the findings for achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'.

Headlines

- Secondary school completion has significantly improved over the last seven years.
- Early life inequalities predict educational outcomes 20 years later.
- Teenage pregnancy is strongly associated with lower secondary completion.
- University enrolment has increased, but early-life socio-economic inequalities predict who goes on to university after school.
- Internet access is high, but a digital divide persists.
- Higher reading test scores at age 12 are associated with completion of or current enrolment in university.
- Growing up in more advantageous socio-economic conditions is associated with higher reading scores.

1 Round 7 took place in the Young Lives study sites in Ethiopia, India and Peru. On this occasion, data was not collected in Vietnam due to a change in government procedures for the international transfer of personal data.

Key Findings

- **Secondary school completion has significantly improved over the last seven years**. By age 22, 90% of the Younger Cohort had completed secondary education, although only 82% did so at the expected age of 17–18; this is still a substantial increase compared to the Older Cohort, 63% of whom had finished secondary school at the expected age in 2016.
- **Early life inequalities predict educational outcomes 20 years later**. Participants born in poorer households, in rural areas, with less-educated mothers, or from an Indigenous background, showed lower educational outcomes by age 22.
- **Teenage pregnancy is strongly associated with lower secondary school completion**. The largest difference among the Younger Cohort was between women who were pregnant during their adolescence (only 66% completed secondary school) compared to those who were not (94% completed secondary school).
- **University enrolment has increased, but early-life socio-economic inequalities predict who goes on to university after school**. In 2023, 35% of the Younger Cohort had entered university, up from 27% of the Older Cohort in 2016. Early socio-economic inequalities persist, with household wealth at birth and maternal education being the most powerful predictors of enrolling in university.
- **Internet access is high, but a digital divide persists**. Internet access was high across both cohorts, at 90% among the Younger Cohort and 84% among the Older Cohort, mostly through mobile phones. Gaps in internet access and digital device use have decreased across groups in the Younger Cohort, but young adults from lower-income households continue to be disadvantaged.
- **Higher reading test scores at age 12 are associated with completion of or current enrolment in higher education**. Younger Cohort participants who scored highest in reading tests were more likely to be enrolled in or have completed university. In contrast those who did not complete secondary education showed a slight decrease in their percentage of correct answers in reading tests at age 22, compared to those who completed secondary school or went on to higher education.
- **Growing up in a wealthier or urban household is associated with higher reading scores**. There are large differences favouring participants born in urban areas (by 11 percentage points) and those born in wealthier households (by 13 percentage points).

The policy context for education in Peru

The pandemic drastically altered access to education in Peru, accelerating the shift to virtual classes across all schools in the country. To support educational continuity, the Peruvian government launched the *Aprendo en Casa* programme in 2020, which provided supplementary online lessons.[2] A significant increase in monetary poverty, from 20% in 2019 to 30% in 2020 (INEI 2024), together with the abrupt shift to digital learning, interrupted education for many students from vulnerable households, despite efforts to increase access to online lessons.

During the lockdown, only students with digital devices and stable internet connections could continue their studies. This deepened educational inequality, as only 10% of rural households had internet access and only 8% had a computer (INEI 2021). The pandemic also led many students to drop out of school due to the need to work. Among the Young Lives sample, 23% of the Younger Cohort who were enrolled in school in 2020 had left education by October–December 2021 (Sánchez et al. 2022), because multiple barriers made it too difficult to remain (Sánchez et al. 2020, 2021, 2022). Young Lives qualitative research revealed unequal access to virtual education, particularly affecting rural students and young women due to inflexible on-line schedules. Low-income families in rural areas were often forced to share devices, making it difficult for students to attend classes (Rojas 2021). This situation, combined with the perception of virtual education being of low quality, caused students to interrupt or abandon their higher education (Rojas et al. 2023).

Methods

This factsheet uses preliminary data from the Young Lives Round 7 survey, which in Peru was collected between June 2023 and January 2024. A total of 2,219 interviews were completed (1,702 from the Younger Cohort and 517 from the Older Cohort), which represents 80.2% of the original sample in Round 1 (Younger Cohort: 82.9%; Older Cohort: 72.4%) (Molina et al. 2025). The analysis uses the sampling weights to emulate the original sampling design of the study (Escobal and Flores 2008). Participants from previous rounds who were not interviewed in Round 7 were excluded from the analysis. Participants are classified by area of residence (urban or rural) at the time of the data collection, household wealth (top, middle or bottom tercile in 2002) (Briones 2017), gender, maternal tongue (Spanish or Indigenous languages), mother's education level, and whether they had children by age 19 or were married before age 18.

Education outcomes

Secondary education completion has significantly improved, becoming almost universal, when comparing 22-year-olds from the Older Cohort in 2016 with the Younger Cohort in 2023. Over 90% of the Younger Cohort had completed secondary education by 22 years old, up from 82% of the Older Cohort at the same age in 2016 (Annex 1).

Despite the gradual improvements over time, there are still significant educational inequalities across socio-economic groups, with participants born in urban areas, Spanish speakers, those born in the wealthiest households, and those whose mothers have higher education levels being more likely to complete secondary school. While 84% of Younger Cohort participants whose mothers only completed primary school finished secondary education, this increased to 99% of those whose mothers had completed higher education. Furthermore, of the Younger Cohort who have married, or became parents early, only 66% finished secondary school, compared to 94% of those who have not had children or married early.

Over the past seven years, the proportion of participants completing secondary education at the normative age has increased significantly.[3] Nearly 82% of the Younger Cohort completed secondary education at the normative age of 17–18, compared to 63% of the Older Cohort (Annex 1). However, persistent inequalities disproportionately affect young people from poor households, rural areas, Indigenous communities, and those with less-educated mothers, or who had a child by age 19 (Annex 1). There are no significant differences between young women and men.

The proportion of participants who have enrolled in or completed university has increased, despite the pandemic, which occurred at a time when many were transitioning from secondary to tertiary education. Around 70% of the Younger Cohort who completed secondary education moved on to higher education (technical institute or university), compared to 61% of the Older Cohort at the same age in 2016. This change has been driven by an increase in university enrolment rather than technical education: by 2023, approximately 35% of the Younger Cohort had been enrolled in a university, compared to 27% of the Older Cohort.

However, significant gaps in access to university persist and have not changed over time across socio-economic groups. Only 20% of 22-year-old Younger Cohort participants in 2023 and Older Cohort participants in 2016 whose mothers had only completed primary school made the transition to university, compared to 83% of the Younger Cohort and 66% of the Older Cohort whose mothers had been enrolled in higher education. Similarly, 58% of the Younger Cohort and 51% of the Older Cohort from the wealthiest households have accessed university education,

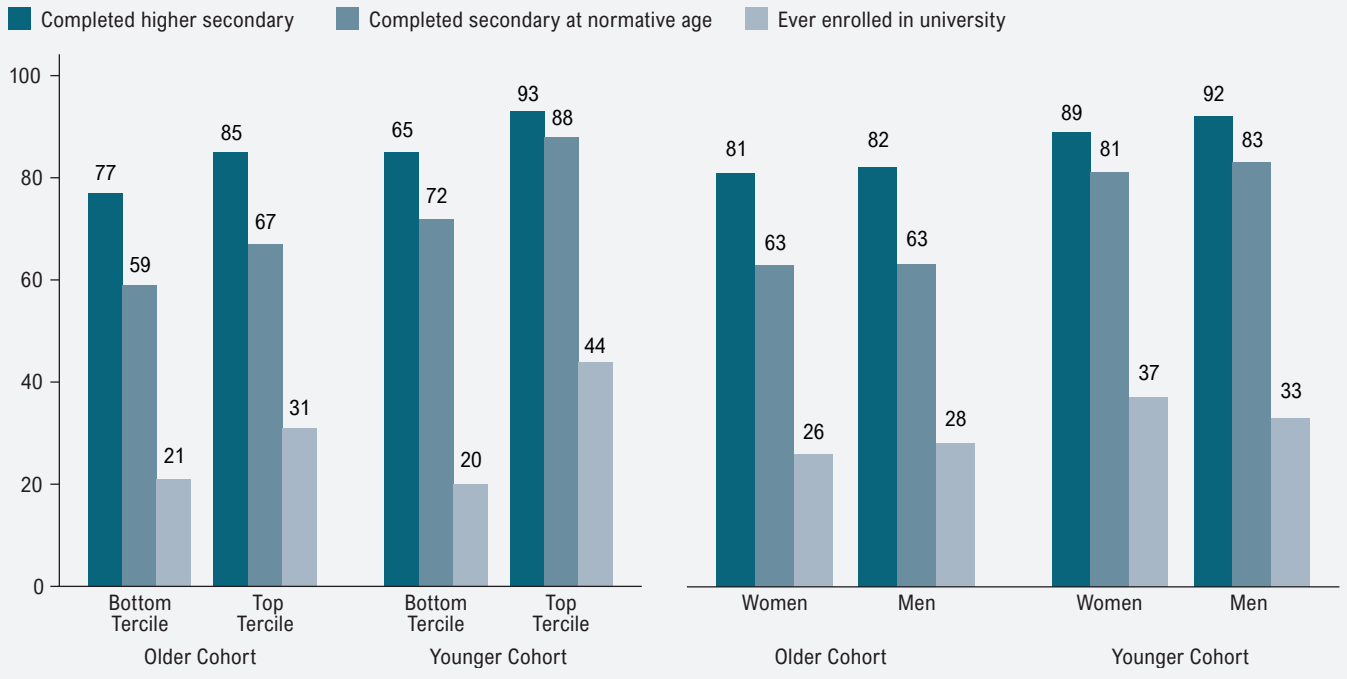
2 For more information, see: https://www.gob.pe/fi/8858-acceder-a-educacion-a-distancia-aprendo-en-casa

3 Following SDG Indicator 4.1.5, the intended age for a given grade is the age at which pupils would enter the grade if they had started school at the official primary entrance age, had studied full-time and had progressed without repeating or skipping a grade. In Peru, the official theoretical entrance age is 6 years old. By 17–18 years old, students are expected to have completed Grade 11.

compared to only 17% and 14%, respectively, of those from the poorest households. There are no significant gender differences in access to university (Figure 1).

The proportion of students enrolling in STEM subjects has increased over time and at faster pace for women than men. For decades there has been concern about women's lower participation in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) careers. The percentage of students enrolled in these subjects by the age of 22 has increased from 15% (Older Cohort in 2016) to 26% (Younger Cohort in 2023). Importantly, the participation of women has increased from 11% for the Older Cohort to 25% for the Younger Cohort at the same age. The proportion of students enrolled in STEM is significantly higher among participants whose mothers' completed more formal education and those who were born into wealthier families.

Figure 1. *Education attainment of 22-year-olds (%)*



Notes: Completion rate refers to participants who had completed secondary education by the time they were interviewed. The normative age to complete secondary education in Peru is by the age of 17–18. Ever enrolled in university includes those who have ever been enrolled or completed university by the time of the interview. Area of residence is taken from Round 1.

Access to digital devices and internet

Internet access has become almost universal across both cohorts. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated Peru's digital transformation, making access to digital devices and the internet an integral part of daily life. In 2023, 90% of the Younger Cohort and 84% of the Older Cohort reported that they have used the internet frequently during their life, while 60% and 47%, respectively, indicated having used either a computer or a laptop frequently during their life (Table 1). At the same time, only 19% the Younger Cohort and 14% of the Older Cohort reported having frequently used a tablet during their life.

Table 1. *Usage of digital devices over the life-course, by cohort*

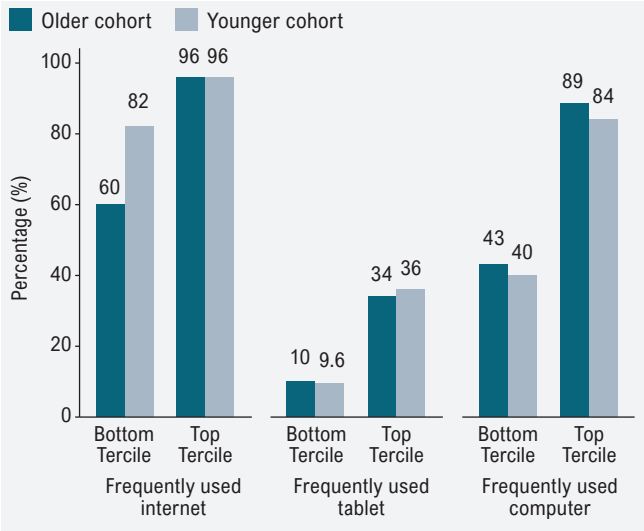
	Older Cohort 2023 (age 29)	Younger Cohort 2023 (age 22)
Frequently used internet	84.4%	89.5%
Frequently used tablet	13.7%	18.5%
Frequently used computer/laptop	47.4%	59.8%

Notes: Table 1 displays the percentage of participants who have used each of the digital devices frequently over their life (i.e. "'many times in their lives'").

The gap in internet access between wealthier and poorer households has decreased over the last seven years. Younger Cohort participants born in poorer households have significantly increased their internet use compared to the Older Cohort, with a 22-percentage-point increase (Figure 2). This indicates a reduction in the internet access gap between Younger Cohort participants born in low-income households and those from high-income households.

Significant income-based disparities in access to tablets and computers persist, with wealthier participants having much higher usage rates. Tablet usage among participants at the same age in both cohorts has remained relatively unchanged. However, the income-based gap in access to these devices persists, with a 26-percentage-point difference between those from the poorest and wealthiest households in the Younger Cohort and a 24-percentage-point difference in the Older Cohort. In addition, 84% of the Younger Cohort and 89% of the Older Cohort from the wealthiest households indicated they had ever used a computer, compared to only 40% in the Younger Cohort and 43% in the Older Cohort from the poorest households (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Digital divide among 22-year-olds (Younger Cohort and Older Cohort)*



Notes: Figure 2 shows the percentage of participants who have used each of the digital devices frequently over their life (i.e. "many times in their lives"). To be consistent with the Round 7 survey, the responses in Round 5 as to whether participants have ever used the internet or ever used a mobile phone with internet access were combined. Household wealth terciles were calculated using the 2002 wealth index (Round 1); see Briones (2017) for more details.

Further disadvantages in access to digital devices among the Younger Cohort include 15-percentage-points lower for those from rural backgrounds, 13-percentage-points lower for indigenous participants, 15-percentage-points lower for those with less-educated mothers, and 13-percentage-points lower for adolescents who have had a child. The latter also used the internet less frequently. There were no significant gender differences.

Previous Young Lives surveys have also shown that the Younger Cohort had earlier access to digital devices and the internet than the Older Cohort (Cueto et al. 2018).

Learning outcomes

Young Lives has administered a series of cognitive tests (Cueto et al. 2018), as well as executive function tests (Behrman et al. 2022), over the course of the study, with the aim of assessing the skills of study participants.[4] In Round 7, we used a simplified version of our previous reading comprehension test[5] for the Younger Cohort focusing on text comprehension, which allows us to track the learning progression of this cohort over ten years.

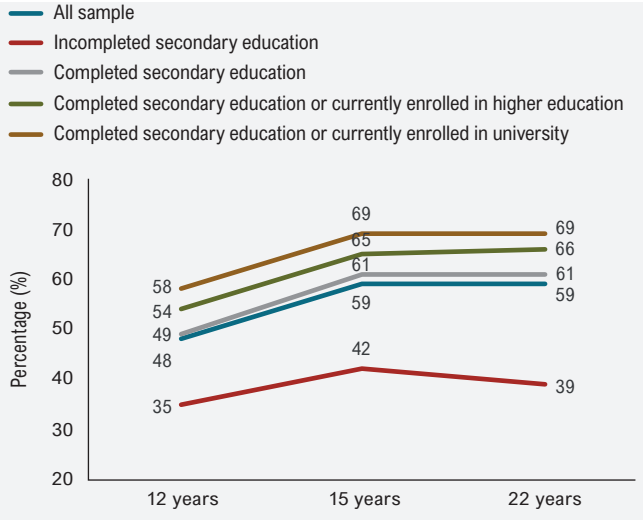
More schooling in adolescence translates into better reading skills. When comparing the percentage of correct answers for eight reading comprehension questions asked in Rounds 4, 5, and 7 ("common items"), we see an improvement from 43% at age 12 to 55% at age 15, followed by a further increase to 68% at age 22. This suggests that reading comprehension skills attained during adolescence among the Younger Cohort have been retained and further developed into young adulthood. When considering the full set of reading comprehension questions, we also see an improvement between age 12 and 15, with the percentage of correct answers rising from 48% to 59% (see Figure 3).

However, between ages 15 and 22, an improvement in reading comprehension is very closely related to education attainment during the same period. While reading comprehension remains at about the same percentage for those who finished secondary education or transitioned to higher education, it slightly declines among those who did not complete secondary education. This result suggests the importance of education for acquiring reading skills and the need for on-going practice. Overall, the highest reading scores are observed among those who have completed or are currently enrolled in university.

Reading skills at a younger age predict higher education attainment. Younger Cohort participants with the highest proportion of correct answers at age 12 or 15 were more likely to be enrolled in or have completed university.

Socio-economic gaps are also significant for learning. In 2023, participants from urban areas and wealthier households scored higher in reading comprehension tests than those from rural areas and poorer households, with differences of 11 and 13 percentage points, respectively.

Figure 3. *Percentage of correct answers in reading comprehension tests over time, Younger Cohort*



Notes: To enhance comparability across survey rounds, this analysis only includes text-related questions. The reading comprehension test included 18 text questions in Round 4, 24 in Round 5, and 12 in Round 7. There are eight common items between Rounds 4, 5 and 7. The sample is restricted to participants who were interviewed in all three rounds, excluding participants who did not complete the test because of a disability (19) or illiteracy (7).

4 See Espinoza-Revollo and Scott (2022) for an overview of all available information on cognitive and achievement competencies tests administered to participants at different ages.

5 In Round 7, the reading comprehension test included two texts with a total of 12 questions varying in difficulty, testing intermediate to advanced literacy skills. Out of the 12 questions, 8 have been previously asked, while 4 were introduced in Round 7 to increase difficulty.

Conclusions and looking forward

Peru has made great advances in access to education and secondary education completion rates over the past few years, and this is reflected in the Young Lives study. There are still significant educational inequalities, particularly in access to higher education, affecting young adults from poorer households, those born in rural areas, and those with less-educated mothers. More importantly, teenage pregnancy is associated with a decrease in the probability of finishing secondary education and accessing higher education. This is an important issue that needs to be tackled through public policies relating to both sexual and reproductive health education in schools and support systems for young mothers.

The persistent gaps in access to higher education highlight the crucial role of the National Superintendency of Higher University Education (SUNEDU), the Peruvian agency that oversees the quality of universities. In recent years, SUNEDU set minimum requirements for curricula, infrastructure, faculty and research, leading to the closure of several universities that did not meet these standards. However, in 2022, Congress passed a law restoring autonomy to universities, limiting SUNEDU's capacity to oversee educational quality. This legislative change has weakened universities' obligations to provide high-quality education. Young Lives plans to study the impact of the SUNEDU reforms over the next few years.

As SDG 4 highlights, access to education at all levels is not enough for the development of individuals, as citizens need to acquire and retain skills to actively participate in society throughout their lives, including reading skills. Young Lives has consistently found that the educational outcomes of the Younger Cohort are higher than those of the Older Cohort. This is encouraging, although persistent inequalities continue to disadvantage participants born in rural areas, those with lower levels of wealth early in life, and those with less-educated mothers. Young Lives has shown that educational inequalities appear before the age of 5. Early intervention programmes or recovery learning programmes are required to address this.

Young Lives' stark finding that a child's family wealth and place of residence at age 1 can predict their educational outcomes 22 years later is very concerning as it highlights a deeply unequal society. This is especially significant considering that nearly one-third of the population continues to live in poverty, even three years after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with potential impacts on future generations.

Annex 1. *Educational and learning outcomes for the Younger Cohort and Older Cohort at 22 years old*

	Completed upper education (Grade 11)		Complete upper secondary at normative age		Average years of schooling (grade)		Completed or ever in vocational /technical education		Completed or ever in university		Ever studied a STEM major	
	OC (2016)	YC (2023)	OC (2016)	YC (2023)	OC (2016)	YC (2023)	OC (2016)	YC (2023)	OC (2016)	YC (2023)	OC (2016)	YC (2023)
Average of full sample	81.61%	90.15%	63.28%	81.93%	10.49	10.70	33.99%	35.02%	26.87%	35.26%	15.21%	26.28%
Gender												
Women	80.85%	88.62%	63.22%	80.70%	10.43	10.69	34.59%	36.10%	26.02%	37.17%	11.06%	25.23%
Men	82.35%	91.81%	63.33%	83.28%	10.55	10.71	33.40%	33.83%	27.70%	33.18%	19.27%	27.43%
Difference (t-test)	1.50	3.20	0.11	2.58	0.12	0.02	-1.18	-2.27	1.68	-3.99	8.22	2.20
Area of residence (Round 1)												
Rural	76.97%	85.09%	58.65%	72.26%	10.28	10.53	29.11%	34.37%	20.77%	19.91%	11.76%	20.94%
Urban	85.04%	93.07%	66.69%	87.52%	10.65	10.79	37.59%	35.39%	31.38%	44.12%	17.76%	29.37%
Difference (t-test)	8.07	7.98***	8.04	15.26***	0.37	0.26***	8.48	1.02	10.61	24.21***	6.00	8.43***
Current area of residence												
Rural	71.17%	73.60%	55.72%	59.46%	10.23	10.15	20.82%	28.29%	16.16%	10.10%	8.46%	16.46%
Urban	84.54%	93.27%	65.40%	86.14%	10.56	10.80	37.68%	36.24%	29.88%	39.96%	17.11%	28.14%
Difference (t-test)	13.37	19.67***	9.68	26.67***	0.33	0.65***	16.86**	7.95	13.73	29.86***	8.65	11.67***
Wealth index (Round 1)												
Bottom tercile	69.16%	84.45%	49.73%	71.87%	10.08	10.50	29.85%	36.67%	14.23%	16.68%	9.63%	19.71%
Middle tercile	87.40%	92.72%	66.69%	86.35%	10.71	10.77	34.36%	35.09%	27.54%	39.66%	15.82%	26.38%
Top tercile	95.14%	95.66%	83.94%	91.79%	10.84	10.89	39.15%	32.35%	50.88%	58.08%	25.71%	36.09%
Difference (t-test)	25.98***	11.21***	34.21***	19.92***	0.77***	0.39***	9.30	-4.32	36.65***	41.39***	16.08***	16.37***
Maternal language												
Indigenous language	81.23%	86.31%	60.63%	73.70%	10.44	10.59	31.43%	35.44%	25.64%	23.09%	11.15%	20.25%
Spanish	82.22%	92.19%	65.89%	86.30%	10.53	10.75	36.24%	34.96%	27.70%	41.83%	18.22%	29.38%
Difference (t-test)	1.00	5.87**	5.26	12.60***	0.09	0.16	4.81	-0.48	2.06	18.75***	7.07	9.14***
Maternal education												
Incomplete primary or less	74.33%	83.57%	53.69%	69.83%	10.24	10.48	30.81%	33.42%	20.29%	19.72%	9.99%	17.81%
Complete primary or secondary	90.09%	93.63%	73.13%	88.62%	10.77	10.82	38.53%	39.86%	30.57%	36.70%	18.55%	28.47%
Higher education	97.10%	99.76%	88.59%	98.72%	10.87	10.99	40.04%	23.85%	66.49%	82.72%	39.86%	44.91%
Difference (t-test)	22.77***	16.19***	34.90***	28.89***	0.64***	0.50***	9.22	-9.57**	46.20***	63.00***	29.88***	27.10***
Early marriage/parenthood												
No early marriage/ parenthood	88.66%	94.30%	70.60%	86.62%	10.66	10.81	38.63%	37.48%	33.33%	39.50%	18.53%	28.51%
Early marriage/parenthood	56.34%	65.60%	37.03%	54.23%	9.84	10.02	17.34%	20.46%	3.72%	10.20%	3.34%	13.15%
Difference (t-test)	-32.33***	-28.70***	-33.57***	-32.40***	-0.82**	-0.79***	-21.30***	-17.02***	-29.62***	-29.30***	-15.19***	-15.36***
Number of participants	608	1702	608	1702	578	1698	608	1702	608	1702	608	1702

Notes: Differences are significant at ***1%, **5% and *10%. Differences are percentage points. The T-test for household wealth was estimated by comparing the bottom with the top tercile, while the t-test for mother's years of formal education was estimated by comparing incomplete primary or less with higher education. Information on maternal education and language were taken from 2006 (Round 2). Area of residence refers to the household location in 2002 (Round 1) as well as the current area of residence (either Round 5 or Round 7). Household wealth terciles were calculated separately for each cohort using the household wealth index of 2002 (Round 1). Early pregnancy or child marriage is defined as either having been pregnant before 20 (UNICEF definition) or having been married or cohabitating by the age of 18 for women and 21 for men. Ten participants have missing information on the wealth index in Round 1; two Older Cohort participants have missing information for the current area of residence; 38 participants have missing information on maternal language in Round 2; and 81 participants have missing information on mother's education in Round 2.

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