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The concept of gender in government documents on health and nutrition in Mexico

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Objectives: This article has two central objectives; to review the inclusion of the term “gender” in seven government documents on health and nutrition in Mexico, and to interpret the rationale underlying their use.

Methodology: Bibliographic and document review. The authors reviewed seven Mexican government documents of the National Health Program (2001–2006), this being the guiding document for government health policy and containing the standards for the rest of the documents.

Results: The authors give a brief description of what they term “the historic path of feminism” and the use of the term/concept “gender.” To the authors, the term “sex” is a descriptive category which refers exclusively to biological differences, which they call measurable data. In contrast, “gender” is a relational analytical category which reflects subordination and differences in the exercise of power. The authors find that some texts do not use the word “gender.” They claim that this does not represent a problem if the characteristics of the population are sufficiently described through the term “sex.” “Gender” is used in programs focused on women and which predominantly concern women’s reproductive health. In some documents, it was found that “gender” was used as a synonym or simple substitute for the word “sex.” The underlying rationale in this type of document is that a simple change of wording serves to include “social” aspects.

Conclusions: The authors find it regrettable that a supposedly intellectual, but actually empty, modernity is used to dampen good conscience. They conclude by claiming that the real impact of health policies with gender perspectives would be reflected in the true improvement in quality of life, and above all, a decrease in the social inequalities that engender its absence.