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Safe places for children

Expanding and improving safe places for young children
in the low-income community of Rocinha, Rio de Janeiro.

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The International Center for Research and Policy on Childhood at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (CIESPI/PUC-Rio), is dedicated to engaging in research studies on, and social projects for, children, young people and their families and communities. Its purpose is to support the development and implementation of policies and practices for children and young people that contribute to their full development and the promotion and defense of their rights. CIESPI is particularly concerned with children growing up in contexts of vulnerability including poverty.



Rio de Janeiro, december 2017

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this study is to describe the safe places children aged 0-8 inhabit outside of their homes in the low-income Rio community of Rocinha, and to report how key actors in that community think the number and quality of safe places for children can be improved. The study has implications for young children throughout urban Brazil.

The expression safe places is a something of a misnomer in a very dangerous community but the study examines comparatively safe places designed for young children. They are also places that have a child development mission.

THE STUDY

The data for this study come from a variety of sources. CIESPI has been collecting data about Rocinha for many years and created in its offices a cultural and historical library about the community.

Specifically for this study, CIESPI created a census of safe places for children from printed lists and from a deep knowledge of the community. We then created a purposive sample from the census to be representative of the census by type of organization and geographical distribution in the community. Key management from each of the sample institutions were interviewed on a wide variety of topics about their organizations and the characteristics of the community for young children.

THE PROBLEM

Decades of international research have demonstrated the impact young children's environment plays in their development. In particular, poverty, stress, poor physical conditions, violence and other forms of tension adversely affect many aspects of development including even the physical structure of the brain. Many low-income urban communities in Brazil, including Rocinha, display these stress fac-

tors to an extraordinary degree. This study explores the places in Rocinha where some of these stresses are reduced for young children, and how the quality and number of such places might be improved.

ROCINHA

Rocinha, a mountain side community in the southern zone of the city of Rio de Janeiro has approximately 100,000 inhabitants. According to the community's family health clinics this number includes some 17,000 children aged 0-8. Rocinha is a low-income community and 70% of residents live in households with per capita wages of up to one minimum wage which is at current exchange rates US\$ 244 a month.

The population figure represents an increase of 44% between the 2000 and 2010 census in a community which from its inception was unplanned and where growth has been chaotic. The population is very dense, and most residents access their homes through alleys or concrete steps.

Over 90% of residents get to public transportation via those narrow passageways. These pathways are often full of garbage and flooded when it rains. Many houses have very tiny small plans as small two square meters, with three or four levels. One part of the community has an open sewer despite the constant complaints of residents.

The density severely curtails the circulation of air and sunlight and the resulting unhealthy conditions produce high levels of sickness and disease. The rate of tuberculosis infection in the community is 380 per 100,000 over ten times the national rate. Brazil has higher rates of leprosy than any country outside India, averaging 19 new cases per 100,000 for the years between 2009 and 2011. Rocinha has one of the highest rates in the country. Added to these diseases are long-time problem of dengue infection and the recent infection of the Zika virus.

Overlaying these problems is the constant presence of violence.

ce in the streets caused by the presence of heavily armed drug traffickers whose shoot outs with each other and with various police forces contribute to constant fear, and death and injury from stray bullets. A new policing strategy introduced in Rocinha in November 2012 has had only limited success.

EXISTING PLACES FOR CHILDREN IN ROCINHA

CIESPI conducted both a census of all the safe places for children in Rocinha with a developmental component and a purposive sample of that census to understand the organizations in more detail. The list of organizations in the census derived from written reports, staff knowledge, and community input. The census is incomplete partly because some programs and services for children are provided in private homes but the census gives an idea of what exists in more formal organizations. The census counted the following places:

Table 1: Safe places for children in Rocinha

Type of organization	N ₁	Sub-type	N ₂
Education	34*	Creche	21
		Child development space	1
		Pre-school	16
		School	4
Sport	8	Group or school	7
		Sport complex	1
Art and culture	8	Dance, music and art groups	7
		Public library	1
Religious organizations	5	Various initiatives directed at children 0-8	5
Health	5	Public health clinics	4
		Health promotion group	1

*Some organizations have more than one type of program. For this reason, the totals in the Education sub-type column in N₂ add up to more than the number of organizations described in N₁.

Source: CIESPI census of safe places for children 0-8 in Rocinha, 2015-2016. Available at: <http://ciespi.org.br/en/news/592-new-ciespi-study-shows-opportunities-and-difficulties>

The creches and pre-schools include public and private organizations and some that operate in partnership (em convenio) with the city meaning they are privately run but receive per-capita payments from the city. The school figure is misleading because especially older children go to school in neighboring communities. Eighty-five percent of the students in public schools in the neighboring upper-income community of Gavea, for example, come from Rocinha. (Most upper and middle-income families in Brazil send their children to private schools). There are many more churches in Rocinha including small storefront churches but the census found 5 with specific programs for young children. The large number of public health clinics is the result of Rocinha being the site of a comparatively new model public health program that provides teams of doctors, nurses and medical personnel for a given number of families. The research team created a purposive sample from the census to represent type of organization and geographical spread. There were 17 organizations in the sample and staff interviewed coordinators in each organization. The range of programs described below show that at least for some children there are rich options available for children in Rocinha.

Table 2: Activities offered by specific types of organization

Type of organization	Activities provided in one or more of the type
Crèches and pre-schools	Music classes, body and movement exercises, history stories occupational therapy, <i>capoeira</i> (a Brazilian martial art), trips, parent meetings, theatre and games
Sports center	<i>Capoeira</i> , musical instrument instruction, and singing
Religious institutions	Theatre, percussion classes, recreational play, religious classes
Schools	Theatre, <i>capoeira</i> , gardens, extra tuition, cultural fairs, family days in on the beach, beach, Olympics, end of year presentations, psychological therapy.
Art groups	Ballet, jazz, percussion, afro programs, theatre, hip hop, plastic arts, extra tuition
Library	DVD tech, free internet, toy library, how to access the collection

ROCINHA EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS' RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

The richness and importance of the offerings described above for children who live in tiny, unhealthy, and noisy houses, in a dangerous, massively overcrowded community cannot be exaggerated. But the vast majority of the organizations struggled daily with fragile finances, decaying infrastructure, difficulties recruiting and keeping appropriately qualified staff, and other problems. The struggles are so great that the majority of senior staff we interviewed could not imagine adding places in their institutions or how new ones could be built. The urgent problems staff face are listed in the table below:

Table 3: Summary of difficulties early childhood organizations in Rocinha face from organization staff interviews

Type of problem	Nº of orgs. citing	Details
Finances	17	Crèches in partnership (em convenio) with the city lack money for maintenance, repairs, staff benefits, contracts with needed professionals, cleaning material, and food. By their agreement with the city, they cannot charge parent fees.
Structural	11	Bathrooms without light and doors, uneven floors, electric installations give off shocks, poor accessibility, lack of fences between crèche and neighboring homes, cannot repairs particularly difficult to get repairs done when more than one city department involved.
Lack professional staff	8	Lack properly trained early childhood staff that the city demands but which crèches and pre-schools cannot afford, lack trained staff for children with special needs, lack cleaning staff. Lack of inclusion mediators demanded by law.
Space	6	"Classrooms so crowded its immoral". "Same entrance to crèche is entry to neighbor's house.

In addition to the practical concerns listed in Table 3, the program coordinators cited the constant threat of violence from heavily armed drug traffickers, a violence that has worsened in the past several years. Rivalry between gangs and the presence of gangs from outside the community contribute to this worsening. This violence affects children whenever they are on the streets including the journey to and from school. Police are seen as having no respect for residents. One coordinator said:

"The child is a prisoner. She cannot go out into the street because of armed conflicts".

To make things worse, the narrow, overcrowded streets full of cars, motorbikes and buses, make walking outside the house a dangerous activity.

WHERE NEXT?

How in a country currently overcome with massive political, financial, and economic cri-

ses is there a way to mitigate these problems that threaten the full development of too many of the rising generation of young children? The first priority is to recognize in public debate and action the horrifying connections between harsh early childhood conditions and life-long threats to the children's development.

The second priority is to cherish the organizations in low-income communities that provide a refuge for young children. These organizations exist, albeit too few of them, but they should be a priority as fiscal problems reduce budgets at every level of government.

The third priority is to struggle with the large scale and long lasting daily threat of armed violence. The Rio program Unidades de Policia Pacificadora, Units of Pacifying Police begun in 2008, was a major attempt to bring a regular police presence to drug trade dominated low-income communities but the program has run into many difficulties. But the truth is that the various police forces that

operate in Rio are still stuck in the mode that their main responsibility regarding low-income communities is to keep the traffickers away from “the asphalt” or middle income communities. A new and thorough commitment to regular policing based on community input and supported by infrastructure reforms and critical social programs is a sine qua non of any improvement in places like Rocinha.

Finally, a broader agenda of change for young children has made its first steps in the city of Rio. On November 11, 2013, the General Assembly of the Children’s Rights Council of Rio approved the Municipal Plan for Early Childhood PMPI (Deliberacao No 1.042/2013). This effort was the culmination of the work of a broad coalition of public and nonprofit sector actors with major input from CIESPI as a facilitating resource. The agenda is crisp and concrete and disciplined in length so as to facilitate implementation. The implementation of PMPI will make a huge difference to the life chances of young children in Rio.

The Rocinha study suggests the following items in the PMPI priorities deserve immediate consideration:

Education:

- Guarantee access to children from six months to five years and eleven months in crèches and public preschools in accordance with the demand in the community with clear plans and actions spelt out;
- Guarantee that the infrastructure of these establishments is in accord with the Standards of Infrastructure and Indicators of Quality of the Minister of Education including the criteria for accessibility laid out in Law 5296;
- Assure that crèches that operate in association with the city have sufficient resources to guarantee the necessary quality for serving young children.

Culture and Sport/Leisure:

- Increase the number of safe and open spaces such as squares and gardens that are open to nature for all age groups.

Prevention of violence:

- Prioritize strategies to reduce violence against young children including providing safe passage to and from educational institutions.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

This publication is part of the study “Safe places for early childhood in Rocinha” (Espaços seguros para a primeira infância na Rocinha), CIESPI/PUC-Rio, October, 2016. Available at: http://www.ciespi.org.br/media/Pesquisas%20e%20Políticas%20Publicas/1ESPI_Relatorio.pdf

Part of the information from Rocinha comes from the report Relatório de diagnóstico urbano, ambiental e social. Rio de Janeiro, 2012. Available at <http://www.emop.rj.gov.br/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Diagnostico-Rocinha.pdf> Accessed on March 10, 2016.

A good English language account of daily life in Rocinha is provided in *Nemesis: One Man and the Battle for Rio*, Misha Glenny, London: The Bodley Head, 2015. The book is an account of the life of Antonio Francisco Bomfim Lopes or Nem da Rocinha, at one point the drug trafficker boss of the community.

Information on the health status on Rocinha residents can be found in *Rocinha Favela Weekly, Health Issues in Rocinha*, no date, downloaded at <http://rocinhafavela.weebly.com/health-issues.html>, on April 1, 2016.

The full text of the Municipal Plan for Early Childhood of Rio de Janeiro (PMPI - Plano Municipal pela Primeira Infância) can be found at CIESPI website at <http://www.ciespi.org.br/media/Livros%20e%20Periodicos/Livros%20e%20periodicos%20pg%201/3PMPI.pdf>





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