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**The voices of pregnant young women
and mothers in vulnerable situations:**
a study and suggestions for public policies

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**The voices of pregnant young women and mothers in vulnerable situations:
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Renata Mena Brasil do Couto; Juliana Maria Batistuta Vale; Irene Rizzini

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The International Center for Research and Policy on Childhood (CIESPI) is both a research and a reference center operating in conjunction with the Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio). It is dedicated to the development of studies and social projects about children, young people, their families and their communities. Its goal is to inform policies and social practices for these populations thus contributing to children's full development and for the promotion of their rights.



Rio de Janeiro, December 2019

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Introduction

This bulletin describes the results of a CIESPI study conducted with the Beneficent Association of Sao Martinho of Rio de Janeiro together with a group of young pregnant women and mothers who live in contexts of vulnerability. Throughout the text we stress the importance of creating networks of help for these young women to assure their families of basic protections and opportunities. Such networks can help the young women overcome their difficulties and confront the obstacles in their lives such as: lack of education; employment instability; family conflicts; maternal isolation; the impact of the drug trade; poverty; and unplanned pregnancies.

In April, 2019, the United Nations Population Fund sent out an alert about the high rate of adolescent pregnancy in Brazil. It reported a rate of 62 teen pregnancies for every 1,000 young women between the ages of 15 and 19. This rate was equal to that of Latin America and the Caribbean and greater than the world average of 44 per 1,000. In the world's most developed regions the rate of adolescent female fertility is 14 per 1,000 while in less developed nations the rate averages 91 per 1,000. In addition to the health problems faced by such women and their children, teenage pregnancy also has important social consequences.

When such pregnancy occurs to young wom-

en in vulnerable contexts such as living on the streets, pregnancy and maternity become more challenging and raise important questions of public policy. With these concerns in mind in the second half of 2016 we began the project "I am pregnant so what now? - the voices of young people in vulnerable contexts". This project was and is a partnership between the International Center for Research and Policy on Childhood at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro and the Beneficent Association of Sao Martinho¹.

The goal of the project was to bring together pregnant young people or young mothers in vulnerable situations such as living on the streets or in occupations (a squat in the UK and USA) in low-income favelas or slums, to converse with them about their experiences of pregnancy and

¹ The Beneficent Association of Sao Martinho, active in the city of Rio de Janeiro since 1984, is a non-profit organization linked to the Carmelite Province of St. Elijah. Its mission is to contribute to the full development and the guarantee of the rights of children and youth in contexts of social vulnerability by means of professional, cultural, and sport inclusion and the strengthening of family and community ties and the spiritual life. Sao Martinho staff that participated in the study included: Lucimar Correa (Coordinator), Diego de Bem, Valdinei Martins, Luiz Carlos M. de Oliveira, Raphael V. Abbade, Caroline P. Bezerra, Priscila Pires, Myllena Cris A. Silva and Kelly Daiane S. L. S. Pedrosa. CIESPI staff in addition to the authors who contributed to the project included: Maria Cristina Bó, Mônica Regina A. Figueiredo and Hanna A. Coelho. Support from: Caritas Switzerland and FAPERJ (Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro/Rio de Janeiro State Research Council).

motherhood; to give them useful information and to think about strategies for getting them access to rights and health care. Note that in Brazil, social challenges are often referred to as problems of access to rights.

The project is currently in its third phase. In the first phase, we organized meetings with pregnant youth or young mothers and produced a short documentary film "I am pregnant, so now what?" which won first prize in the audiovisual competition "May I Speak?" organized by the Rio Children's Network in conjunction with the non-profit Kyio and the Point of Culture Madame Satã.

In the second phase of the project in the second half of 2017, we brought together a group of young pregnant women and mothers who had a history of living in the streets to talk about their experience of pregnancy and motherhood. During workshops held over a period of three months we discussed such themes as gender and affection, education without violence, the exercise of motherhood and fatherhood, conflicts with the law, exercising rights, women's health, breast feeding, initial baby care, and sex and drugs. The discussions were organized in a way to stimulate the participation of the young people through teamwork and short videos. For the discussions about health, we invited several health care professionals who were part of a network that served this population.

With the direct involvement of the participants we produced an exhibition of photos

called "backstage", and a folder of educational material to circulate what we had learned during this phase of the project. In addition, we made short videos in which the young participants responded to the central question "what is it to be a mother" and also to particular themes chosen the young people. All of these were combined in a video "what the mothers say"².

After this phase, we perceived the need to understand more deeply the day to day reality of these young people. Accordingly, in the second half of 2018 as the third phase of the project we undertook a field study with the participants of the earlier phases and with new participants. In this study we included young pregnant women and mothers living in the streets or in squats who either directly or indirectly were served by the Sao Martinho in the center of Rio. The results of this study are reported in this bulletin.

² The two videos produced during this phase of the project can be accessed at: <http://www.ciespi.org.br/Publicacoes/Videos-17?from%5Finfo%5Findex=6>

2. The Context of the study

Despite advances in the international debates on the human rights of street populations, there are reports of growing punitive and repressive practices directed against street youth (CRC, 2015). The weakening of family and community bonds, inadequate state protection, absence from school, child labor, involvement with the drug trade and violence among other things make this population particularly susceptible to structural violations of their rights (UNICEF, 2011). Most at risk are such groups as young pregnant women and young mothers on the streets.

Lack of information, exposure to violence and sexual exploitation, drug abuse, and limited access to family planning services make this group of young women susceptible to unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Pregnancy and motherhood on the streets are associated with low levels of schooling, low incomes and intergenerational cycles of poverty, which make the phenomena a critical human and social challenge.

Despite the importance of these questions, we found only a limited number of studies on pregnancy and motherhood on the streets published between the years 2000 and 2015³.

3 See the following publications: “População infantil e adolescente em situação de rua no Brasil: análises recentes” (RIZZINI; COUTO, 2018A), “Maternidade adolescente no contexto das ruas” (RIZZINI; COUTO, 2018B) and “Gravidez na adolescência e maternidade no contexto das ruas” (RIZZINI; COUTO, 2016). These came from the projects “Políticas Públicas e os Desafios da Implementação: Aná-

The greater part of these studies aims to explore the contradictions between the positive and negative aspects of adolescent pregnancies. Adolescents seem to interpret pregnancy as a natural stage in development, which can become a platform for changes in their lives. Once pregnant, many of the young people choose to leave the streets and seek various forms of help including from their families and residential institutions. In these cases, the young people see the pregnancy as an opportunity for transformation, for strengthening plans for schooling and work and for improving their life conditions (FERNANDES, 2012; SANTOS; MOTTA, 2014). In this way, childbearing and motherhood can become strategies for breaking the invisibility of the young women and allow them take up again former social roles, establishing love and affectionate relationships on a much stronger basis and even developing new relationships. (GONTIJO, 2007; PENNA ET AL, 2012).

While negative factors are usually attributed to the social reality of these young mothers, many times adolescent pregnancy and motherhood can be the result of the absence of opportunities for the young women so that the young women see their situation as giving them a different future. The difficulties in accessing

lise do Caso da Política de Atendimento a Crianças e Adolescentes em Situação de Rua no Rio de Janeiro”(CNE, Cientista do Nosso Estado, 2014-2017; FAPERJ Ref. n° E-26/201.274/2014) e “Entre a casa, as ruas e as instituições: crianças e adolescentes em situação de rua e as instituições de acolhimento no estado do Rio de Janeiro” (CNE, Cientista do Nosso Estado, 2017-2020,CNE, 2017-2020; FAPERJ Ref. n° E-26/202.812/2017).

education and the lack of a professional pathway give way to the desire to create a family (SCAPPATICCI, 2006; FERNANDES, 2008).

While we need more studies on this topic and a deepening of the debate about the young women, there are pathways for the implementation of multi-service⁴ public policies capable of responding better to this group. We recommend as priorities the creation of programs and services that are aimed at: (a) assuring conditions for the responsible exercise of maternity and paternity; and (b) assisting the young mothers and fathers find favorable conditions to reconnect with community, education and work thus granting them greater autonomy. It is of fundamental importance to improve the capacity of the social service system so that it is capable of assuring access for the young mothers, fathers and their children to the relevant services and to their rights. Another priority is the construction of facilities capable of accommodating effectively mothers and their babies together guaranteeing above all the right to living in a family and community setting. (RNPI; IFAN, 2014; CIESPI/PUC-Rio, 2016).

⁴ In Brazilian Portuguese, the common term used is *intersectorial* meaning the involvement of different departments or whatever public service departments can contribute to solving a social problem.

3. Field work and methodology

The main objective of this study was to understand and analyze the profile of young pregnant women and mothers aged 12-24 living on the streets in areas served by the Beneficent Association of São Martinho in the central area of Rio de Janeiro.

The detailed objectives were:

- 1) Describe the profile of the squats and the service centers covered by São Martinho⁵;
- 2) Describe the profile of young pregnant women and mothers aged 12-24 who are residents of these places and on the streets;
- 3) Analyze the needs of this group of women.

Initially the study universe was limited to 15 service centers and squats listed by São Martinho where their social educators⁶ had work

5 The squats that currently exist in the city of Rio de Janeiro have diverse characteristics. In the majority of them groups, organize to live in an abandoned building. The majority of squatters in the absence of the homeowner organize themselves to live in a building and may give the owner favors or even money. In other cases, the squatters are helped by social movements who are contesting speculation in real estate, which raises prices and prevents the most poor from access to the fundamental right of housing. The shortage of information about these spontaneous and independent social movements only allows us to speculate about the internal dynamics of these living situations on the basis of observation and the accounts of the inhabitants.

6 Social educators in Brazil assist people who are outside of mainstream society including those who live on the streets. As their name suggests, social educators try to link people to educational opportunities but also to solution for their most pressing problems and to the resources they need.

connections. The plan was that two pairs of professionals would collect data in October and November 2018 in two questionnaires.

In the description of the squats or service centers attended to by São Martinho (questionnaire 1) we obtained from reference people the number of families and residents or clients, as well as information about the general situation of the squat or service center. From this information we found young pregnant women and mothers to interview who either lived in the squats or on the streets close to the São Martinho service centers.

For this study we used the definition of street children, which is used in the widely circulated document *Diretrizes Nacionais para o Atendimento a Crianças e Adolescentes em Situação de Rua* - National Guidelines for the treatment of children and youth in the situation of the streets (CONANDA⁷; SNDCA/MDH; CNER, 2017). The document provides a valuable contribution for standardizing the understanding this population for public policy especially through the Joint Resolution of CNAS and CONDANDA no. 01/2016. The Resolution affirms that children and adolescents in the situation of the streets are:

Subject in development to rights violations and who use public places and degraded areas as places to live and survive, in a permanent or intermittent manner in situations of vulnerability and personal

7 CONANDA is the acronym for the National Council for the Rights of the Child and the Adolescent created in 1991 as a joint government-civil society body to protect the rights of children.

and social risk with fragility of care and connections to families, and communities, primarily in situations of poverty or extreme poverty, with difficult or no access to public policies and characterized by heterogeneity in regards to gender, sexual orientation, ethnic and racial diversity, generational status, religion, nationality, political position, and handicap among other things (CONANDA; SNDCA/MDH; CNER, p. 27, 2017).

This resolution also notes that:

There can also exist other circumstances that take the children and adolescents to the street, either accompanied or not by their families, in diverse regions, such as itinerant people, wanderers, people made homeless by disasters, living in squats, or made unemployed by construction or special events (CONANDA; SNDCA/MDH; CNER, p. 28, 2017).

While noting that in Rio squats in public and private buildings are part of the historical dynamic of the city, we seek to understand the contemporary reality of the streets and the squats. This question is more urgent considering the process of militarizing⁸ the streets and the displacement of residents due to the mega events of the past few years.⁹

⁸ This term refers to heavy-handed action by police forces including shootings, and of the occasional entry of the armed forces into the favelas.

⁹ These events include the football World Cup in 2014 and the summer Olympic Games in 2016.

The group of 15 squats and service centers originally chosen for the data collection underwent some change during the research. During the initial research, the field workers identified a total of 22 squats or service centers where the data could be collected. However, mainly due to the open drug trade and absence of people who corresponded to sample profile in both the squats and the service centers, data was finally collected in just 8 squats and 4 service centers.

The work of mapping the spaces and identifying the young people with the right profile was challenging. This work was done by experienced professionals working with social work interns. Young people on the streets experience from an early age sad and violent conditions and massive violations of their rights. Therefore, this type of research has to be based on an ethic of caring and respect for their rights. For this reason, irrespective of their training, all the field workers took part in a special training including how to ensure compliance with The Terms of Free and Clear Consent (for young people at or over the age of 18) and The Terms of Assent (for young people younger than 18) in accordance with Resolution of the National Council on Health n^o 466, December 12, 2012.

The field team finally attempted 43 interviews with young pregnant women and mothers of which 37 complied with the study criteria.

4. Description and analysis of data

The study as indicated earlier included a description of the squats and the service centers but this report focuses on the young people.

4.1 – Profile of young pregnant women and mothers (12-24 years old)

The majority of the study's 37 participants (81%) were between the ages of 18 and 24 and 92% of them declared themselves black or brown.¹⁰

In a disturbing result, 92% said that they were not studying anywhere. Of these, 21 (62%) exited school before completing elementary school, and 6 (18%) before completing high school. Only 3 (9%) completed high school. Of the remaining 4, 2 had been in and out of educational programs for youth and adults, one had never been in school and one left the answer blank.

Table 1 - Youth by frequency of attending school

	Total	Percent
Attending school	3	8
Not attending school	34	92
total	37	100

Work: Table 2 shows that 51% of the young people said they were working. Thirteen (68%) of these said they hustled in the central city.¹¹

10 In Brazil, the Census asks people to declare themselves by color: black, brown, white or yellow. In the 2010 Census 47.7% classified themselves as white, 43.1% as brown or mixed race and 7.6% as black.

11 In Brazil, this includes cleaning the windows of cars stopped at stop signs.

Table 2 - Youth by whether working

	Total	Percent
working	19	51
not working	18	49
total	37	100

When we asked those who were not working how they survived (Table 3), 13 (72%) said they received support from family, friends or responsible adults of whom 8 were partners. Thirteen said they received some form of subsistence support and all of these cited the federal Bolsa Familia or family support program.

Table 3 - Youth by strategies for survival

What do you do to survive?	Total	Percent
receive financial support from relatives	13	28
receive public support	13	28
go to institutions	8	17
perform small informal tasks	6	13
ask for money or food	5	11
work with relatives	1	2
the drug trade	1	2
total	47	100

Total exceeds sample size because some chose several options.

Table 4 shows that 6 of the young people or 16% lived under the line of extreme poverty calculated by the United Nations as less than US\$ 1.90 a day and 14 (38%) under the poverty line defined for middle and high income countries as less than US\$5.50 a day. Thirteen or 35% said they received more than US\$12 a day.

These income data should be received with caution because of the difficulty of estimating the actual incomes of these young people. Most of

them did not have stable work or a stable source of income. On some days “if the street was good”, they were able to earn some money, but if the circumstances were not so good, they could return to their locality with nothing. Those who were helped by their families could not count on a stable amount of support. Probably the most reliable source of support was state assistance such as Bolsa Familia. We should keep in mind the likely daily impact of such conditions for the young people.

Table 4 - Adolescents and youth by daily income

Income level	Total	Percent
up to R\$7.01	6	16
between R\$7.01 and R\$20	8	22
between R\$20.1 and R\$50	10	27
more than R\$50	13	35
total	37	100

At the time of publication, the exchange rate was R\$4.1 to \$1 US.

Just about half of the respondents said they had four or more of the official documents required in Brazil. These include a birth certificate and a tax ID number and are necessary for e.g. obtaining benefits.

Forty-nine percent lived in nuclear family arrangements with their partners and children. Eighty-one percent were the children of parents who had separated. Fifty-four percent said they had a good or very good relationship with their mothers while only 30% said this about their relationship with their fathers. These last figures speak to the importance of trying to strengthen those relationships.

Living place - Twenty-eight participants (76%) lived in a squat. Of these, 64% liked those places and 82% believed that living in a squat helped them in some way especially in cases where they did not pay rent and were near the center of the city where “it is better for work”.

Table 5 - Youth by living situation

Living situation	Total	Percent
Squat or "invasion"	28	76
The street	6	16
Rental apartment	2	5
Donated apartment	1	3
total	37	100

Some 50% of those in squats said there were rules especially paying costs for an attorney to regularize the living situation. Among the reasons, the young people gave for living in the squats were family conflicts (14%) and “leaving to live with my partner”. The lack of other housing and difficulty in paying rent were also mentioned. The young women said a major part of their day was spent in domestic chores (53%) and caring for children (50%).

Among the 6 young people who said they lived on the streets (16%), 4 said they had been on the streets for less than one year, 5 had lived on the same street, a half of them attended to their personal hygiene in commercial establishments, and 4 spent most of their time hanging out and talking in the company of friends. Five of this group cited family problems when asked about why they were not living in their homes with 4 citing problems with step-fathers.

Daily life - Twenty-seven or 73% said they did

not have health problems. Thirty-four (92%) had already used cigarettes, alcohol, and/or other drugs. Thirty (81%) continued to use such products as seen in Table 6. Cigarettes, marijuana and alcohol appeared to be the drugs of choice.

Tabela 6 - Youth by drug use

	Total	Percent
use drugs	30	81
do not use drugs	6	16
left blank or refused to respond	1	3
total	37	100

Twelve of the 37 participants said they had been the victims of some kind of violence especially physical violence. This number could well be an underestimate since in conversations with the field workers the young women mentioned incidents which could be categorized as violence as in Table 7. People are often embarrassed to answer questions about being victims of violence.

Tabela 7 - Youth by type of violence experienced

Type of violence	Total	Percent
was hurt physically	9	29
was shouted at	6	19
was victim of prejudice	4	13
sexual abuse of exploitation	4	13
was threatened	3	10
was insulted	1	3
exploitation at work or begging	2	6
belongings taken	1	3
submitted to the drug tr	1	3
total	47	100

Total exceeded the 12 yes respondents because some chose several options.

Among the main agents of violence mentioned by our sample were stepfathers, ex-husbands, and ex-boyfriends. Violence perpetrated by men is part of the daily lives of our respondents and points to the importance of developing interventions for men on sexuality and reproduction.

When asked whether they had ever been in an institution which restricted or deprived them of liberty, 23 of the young women or 62% said yes with shelters or institutions most cited (40%).

Table 8 - Youth by institution attended

Type of institution attended	Total	Percent
Shelter or care institution	20	40
Social-educational institution facility	12	24
Correctional facility	7	14
Institution for chemical dependency	6	12
Psychiatric hospital	5	10
total	50	100

Total more than 23 responding yes because some chose several options.

Sexuality - Thirty women in our sample (81%) said they had sexual relations with persons of the opposite sex. Twenty-six (70%) said they periodically had appointments with gynecologists and preventive exams. Thirty-three mentioned the use of contraceptives with a contraceptive injection or a condom being most frequently mentioned (see Table 9).

Table 9 - Youth by preferred contraceptive method

Type of contraceptive	Total	Percent
Birth control injection	19	41
Condom	15	33
Birth control pill	7	15
Rhythm method	2	4
Diaphragm	1	2
Inter-uterine device	1	2
Other method	1	2
total	50	100

The total exceeded the 33 who said yes because some used several methods

Most of our correspondents said they used more than one type of contraceptive. This suggests that while they did not necessarily use them regularly they knew about them and had access to them both to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Twelve young women said they had at least one termination of pregnancy. We did not determine whether these terminations were spontaneous or the result of abortions. But given that abortion is illegal in Brazil it is possible that abortions are underreported in this study.

Eight of the young women or 22% said they were pregnant and 32 (86%) were already mothers. Forty percent of the mothers had one child and 44% had two. Fourteen or 44% already had custody of at least one child the major reason given being family conflicts.

The vast majority of the young women said they had access to one or more of the service or-

ganization that make up the network of protection. This take-up rate points to the importance of the network. Twenty-seven of the young women or 73% used the public health service and 14 women (38%) used nonprofits. Only two women had not sought help from the service system (Table 10).

Table 10 - Youth by services used

Type of organization	Total	Percent
Public health services	27	52
Non-profit organizations	14	27
CRAS*	5	10
Public health street services	2	4
Other	2	4
None	2	4
total	52	100

The total exceeds 37 because some chose several options
 *CRAS is a state level social assistance program for people living in areas of vulnerability.

When asked what would most help them raise their children, 61% of the answers were related to work and employment reaffirming the key issue of financial survival. Twenty seven percent of the answers were related to a place to live.

Many of the responses related to public policy issues were about basic survival. The young women said such things as the basic food basket and the per diem, social benefits, a project that could truly accompany us, a place where we could play, and activities for the children. In one reply about education, a young woman said, it is better to have books rather than guns in the hands of children.

When asked about why they had children, half of the women said they wanted to have children. These answers were replete with such sentiments as I dream of being a mother, I want to have children, and most simply, because I do. Eight participants said their pregnancy was not wanted and 7 of these mentioned some form of abortion in their responses and talked about their fears and the lack of the possibility of ending the pregnancy.

The children - Seventy-two percent of the 57 children our respondents had were between the ages of 0 and 3 at the time of the interviews. In the case of 39 or 68 percent of the births the pregnancy was unplanned (Table 11).

Table 11 - Children planned or not

	Total	Percent
yes	18	32
no	39	68
total	57	100

All of the children except two were registered at the Civil Registry Office (Cartorio) by the mother after birth. Of the two exceptions, the question of who registered the child was left blank and the other child had not been registered. Thirty-six of the children (63%) were also registered in the name of the father. The young women individually thought that in the case of 32 of the children, the biological fathers' role in raising the children was non-existent but for 21 of the children, or 37% the fathers participated financially and emotionally.

Despite this last response, twenty-two of the young women or 59% felt that they did not count on the help of anyone to raise their children. The child's maternal grandmother was most mentioned for giving help to the mothers. Nineteen of the young women mentioned their mothers as the major source of support but only 11 mentioned the children's father (Table 12).


Tabela 12 - Sources of support for child raising

Who helps you most with child raising?	Total	Percent
No one	22	31
Maternal grandmother	19	27
Child's father	11	15
Paternal grandfather	8	11
Other relatives	6	8
Boyfriend or partner	3	4
Left blank	2	3
total	71	100

The total is more than the 57 children because of choice of more than one option.

The young women often said that they felt overwhelmed in fulfilling their roles as mothers and wished for significant support from the fathers and from their domestic partners in raising the children and in domestic chores.

Fifty-one percent of the children did not attend an educational or childcare institution. Seventy-seven percent of them did not have a health problem. Eighty-six percent had a health care center and all of them had a vaccination card. Eighty-nine percent of the mothers had some degree of pre-natal care and 75% of the children were bre-



ast-fed for some period. Nineteen or 44% of these babies were breast fed up to six months of age.

5. Discussion and final reflections

The results presented in this bulletin are the fruit of a long partnership between CIESPI and the Beneficent Association of São Martinho. In the last several years, this partnership has been focused on studies and action to shape the care provided to young pregnant women and mothers living on the streets according to the philosophy adopted by the Joint Resolution of CNAS and CONNANDA (001/2016).

We have not included data about the living situation in the eight squats and four street sites because of their diversity. We know, however, that it is important to conduct such a study especially in a city marked by forced urban removal and intensifying gentrification. The bulletin points out the positive aspects of being located in the center of the city where opportunities for work and income generation and access to goods and services are greater than elsewhere.

The demands for regular living conditions and a minimum of respect are usually among the goals for social assistance, and health and education services. But from a comprehensive perspective such demands should also be part of housing policy. Most of the squats we researched have an irregular legal status and as such cannot count on help from the state. Since 2009, with the approval of the National Policy on People in the Situation of the Streets, the various levels of government have been encouraged to

link the networks for serving street people to their housing programs (Art. 8º, §4º, Decree 7053/2009).

The difficulties of living on the streets are highlighted by the fact that many young pregnant women and mothers return home or seek alternatives to living in shelters.

Our data permit some generalizations about the women in the sample. A majority were eighteen years of age or older. Half of them lived under the poverty line. A large majority identified themselves as black or brown and, for this reason, suffered from structural racism, which made access to help more difficult. In addition, the greater part of the sample was not studying at the time of the research. A majority had not finished elementary school, which made their path to autonomy and well-being even more difficult. Those who were working, worked in precarious employment that offered a low income. Some of those who were not working depended on the help of partners or families. These facts underline the importance of social assistance especially the Family Allowance or Bolsa Familia program and other income redistribution programs that are under threat from the current national government.

In family arrangements often marked by instability, separations and conflicts, the most permanent relationship is that between mother and child. Although a considerable percent of our respondents had a circle which included a man such as a father, step-father, grandfather,

or brother-in-law, the children usually remained in the care of their mothers. While a majority of the young women's parents had separated, a third maintained contact with their fathers. But there were frequent reports of family violence centered on the father or step-father. Any action to combat this violence should not just be focused on the women but also on the men as also should be the task of raising children.

The difficult task of raising children especially in the situation of the streets demands that we provide sufficient assistance to them to raise their children so they do not feel isolated during pregnancy, childbirth and early motherhood. The care network must consider and respect the views of our participants to increase the help they provide. While we should recognize the relevance of charitable assistance, projects, and creches, what points to the heart of the young women's dilemmas is the insistence on work, employment and a home of one's own.

Two of the women's concerns stand out. The first is falling behind in their schooling that threatens regular employment and entry into the labor market. The second is structural unemployment as economy changes isolating more people from the formal economy and exposing those people to criminalization by the state.

For these reasons, it is necessary to invest in initiatives for income generation and work cooperatives as the young people struggle for survival.

One aspect of the problem needs emphasis. This is the influence of the illegal drug trade on the work and living situations of the young people in our study. With few alternatives for obtaining a living, these young people are easy targets for the drug trade, becoming small-scale sellers that is precisely the activity most noticed and acted on by the police. The politics of "the war on drugs" has been denounced as a strategy for the selective criminalization of the poor without touching the most powerful actors in this lucrative international trade. The rate of the imprisonment of women relating to the drug trade is increasing rapidly in Brazil. Once arrested and imprisoned, a whole sequence of damage occurs to the women, their children, and their families. It is of the utmost importance to provide alternative means of income for these women to stop the process of criminalization.

Given the consequences of unwanted pregnancies especially for low-income young women, the provision of sex education in schools, the dissemination of information and access to regular methods of contraception, and the prevention of HIV/AIDS are crucial. We need to strengthen health care strategies, which invest in the idea of family planning including the provision of tubal ligations for young women who are already mothers. In Brazil these ideas are still demonized. The movement for the rights of women has adopted the goal of legal abortion and the right of women to choose. The criminalization of abortion has not stopped voluntary interruptions of pregnancy that especially put

at risk young women in situations of vulnerability who do not have access to adequate health and hospital care. We need to treat such phenomena as drug use as a public health issue not as a religious issue and respect the choices of individuals and assuring adequate care for those who want it.

We reaffirm our commitment with study and action to the defense of human rights particularly for those groups most exposed to vulnerability, which is the case for children and young people. The plethora of human rights violations against pregnant women on the streets, illustrated by taking newborn children away from them even in the maternity hospitals, demonstrates a huge absence of care. This conviction was the driving force behind our partnership with the Beneficent Association of São Martinho. The consideration of psychosocial and judicial theories is critical for this effort as they suggest strategies for relevant public actors. We hope the study contributes to the provision of the comprehensive assistance that these young women need and deserve and that the assistance will strengthen their caring and social capacities and develop their capacities to act as agents of social change.

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