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A profile of children and adolescents in the situation of the streets and in institutional care in Brazil

Irene Rizzini; Juliana Batistuta Vale; Renata Mena Brasil do Couto

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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, April 2021

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1. Introduction

This publication is part of the project To Know is to Care conducted by CIESPI together with the Beneficent Association of the Infant Nazarene (OPN).¹ The study analyses a sample of young people aged seven to eighteen living on the streets and in institutions in protective custody from the streets. It was conducted in the seventeen largest cities in Brazil, those with more than one million inhabitants, and involved the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data.

The effective construction and implementation of public policies for vulnerable populations such as street youth require clear information about how they live, how their rights are violated and what resources they can access. Brazil lacks good information about what strategies are needed to assist the young street population. This study attempts to provide these data. We hope that this study will contribute to the formation of services for this population according to the provisions of the National Guidelines for the Care of Children and Adolescents in the Situation of the Streets (CONANDA; SND-CA/MDH; CNER), which were approved in 2017.

The study contains three parts: a review of the public and private services that are provided for street youth²; a sample study of children and adolescents living on the streets; and a sample study of young people in institutional care who

have a history of living on the streets. This publication emphasizes the last two parts in which data was collected directly from the young people themselves and involved 554 youth.

2. The context of the study

Brazil has been dealing with the issue of young people living on the streets in large urban centers for more than forty years. But the roots of the problem go back to historical social patterns in the country (Arantes, 2015, Rizzini, 2011, Santos, 2004). It was only at the end of the twentieth century that the term street children began to be used to characterize this group which was growing and gaining in visibility. In the same period, social movements and studies began to emerge on the issue of which the National Movement of Boys and Girls on the Streets (MNMMR) between 1982 and 1985 and the publication of the book "The Generation of the Streets - A study of marginalized children in the city of Rio de Janeiro" were key (Rizzini, 1986) is considered one of the pioneer texts on this topic. Since then, there have been numerous studies about children and youth on the streets causing changes in the understanding of the phenomenon.

These studies have also changed the nomenclature of the phenomenon. The expression children "in the situation of the streets" is

now in common usage to indicate the transitory and ephemeral nature of the lives of these young people. In an attempt to avoid the stigma embedded in such phrases as street children, abandoned minors, and dangerous children, we note the development of efforts to understand the phenomenon as part of the social situation, analyzing those factors which impel young people to the streets and the dynamics and permanence of that condition. A recent academic review of the literature shows that the phrase children and adolescents in the situation of the streets in addition to children who live on the streets for twenty-four hours a day also refers to individuals who, while they have some family ties and/or a place they call home, spend a good part of their time during the day on the streets unaccompanied by a responsible adult referring to the streets as a place to live or gain a living. A majority of these studies recognizing the extreme poverty and vulnerability of these young people acknowledge the importance of public policies to guarantee this population their fundamental rights (Rizzini and Couto, 2018).

While there have been a series of studies over the past few decades, the absence of a national methodology makes the planning, implementation and monitoring of policies geared to street children difficult. The Brazilian Institute on Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the principal provider of population data in the country, does not produce census data on street children. The reason IBGE gives for this absence is the complexity of collecting data on people without a

reference home which data would require the development of new sampling techniques, field operations and special approaches (Natalino, 2016). The absence of clear parameters about the population of street children contributes to the invisibility of this population in political debates and demands clear official data on the scope and character of the problem.³

The working group of the National Council on the Rights of the Child and the Adolescent (CONANDA) which has been discussing the issue since 2015 made an important contribution to the understanding of street children. With the collaboration of specialists, street educators and activists who work daily with this population the Joint Resolution #1 of CNAS and CONANDA (December 15, 2016) affirmed that children and adolescents in the situation of the streets are:

Growing children with their rights violated who use public streets, abandoned areas as places to live and survive either permanently or intermittently, in situations of vulnerability and personal and social risk through the breakdown or fragility of care and family and community ties, primarily in situations of poverty or extreme poverty, with difficult to access or remain in public services, being characterized by heterogeneity in regard to gender, sexual identity, ethnicity and race, religion, generation, geography, nationality,

political identity, and handicap among others. (CONANDA; SNDAC/MDH; CNER, p.27, 2017).

We should point out that the principles which underlay these National Guidelines for the Care of Children and Adolescents in the Situation of the Streets, took into account that the reality of the streets include child labor, begging, alcohol and drug use, violence in the family, on the streets and in institutions, death threats, mental health problems, LGBT discrimination, sexism and misogyny, and the incarceration of parents.

This project seeks to contribute to understanding the daily life of children and adolescents on the street from analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data. We hope that the information will contribute to knowledge of the variations in institutional care and the development of strategies by staff within the System of the Guarantee of Rights and the development, implementation and monitoring of public policies. The fact of constant changes in the context of living on the streets makes demands on the flexibility and rigor of the research, a fact which is evident in social crises such as the current crises caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.⁴ This profound crisis demands strong and expanded protection policies which today have been weakened by decades of neo-liberal policies.

3. Research methodology

We employed three questionnaires for our study: the first about the public and private services provided for children and adolescents on the streets; the second a sample survey of young people on the streets; and the third a sample survey of young people in institutional care who had a trajectory of being on the streets. The research was carried out in the seventeen Brazilian cities with populations of more than one million, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador, Brasília, Fortaleza, Belo Horizonte, Manaus, Curitiba, Recife, Porto Alegre, Belém, Goiânia, Guarulhos, Campinas, São Luís, São Gonçalo and Maceió. The field staff were selected on the basis of their prior experience working with street children. The field staff received training on the project, the questionnaires as well as the ethics of engaging the respondents.⁵

The field researchers, who were mainly street educators (people whose job is to engage with and help street children and youth) encountered a number of problems in applying the survey. Chief among these problems was getting permission to get public sector permission to enter certain institutions. Finding children and youth to interview on the streets involved going to places the street workers knew were typical gathering places and not necessarily involving children who do not use the typical gathering places. For both these reasons, the two samples cannot be considered random. The sample of

street children, however, was obtained at three different periods during the day, morning, afternoon and night, to obtain a more representative sample and the sample of children in institutions was stratified by age with an emphasis on young people whose street experience had been moderately recent. Both samples since they are large, are likely to be quite representative of their respective populations. There are no reliable national data that would permit an exploration of that question.

The data come from 283 children and adolescents who were on the streets when interviewed and 271 who were in institutions but who had a history of being on the streets.

4. Analysis of the results

Basic demographic data is useful in itself and for understanding the responses to other questions. Seventy percent of the respondents were male (75% of respondents from the streets and 70% of those in institutions). Twenty-four percent of the young people on the streets were between the ages of 7 and 11 compared to 17% of those in institutions. Eighteen percent of those on the streets were between the ages of 12 and 13 compared to 20% of those in institutions. In both groups, 28% were between the ages of 14 and 15. Finally, the oldest group (there were

very few people in the sample 18 years or older) aged 16-17 comprised 26% of those on the streets and 34% of those in institutions. We note the overrepresentation of the youngest group on the streets and the overrepresentation of the oldest group in institutions. The latter finding is not surprising. It clearly takes some time to graduate to an institution. The finding about the youngest group is disturbing with the presence of such young children on the streets.

Twenty five percent of the respondents on the streets were female compared to 30% of those in institutions and 75% and 70% respectively were male.

Eighty five percent of all the participants declared themselves black or brown (see Table 1). In Brazil race or ethnicity is indicated by self-declared color with a majority of non-whites in national censuses declaring themselves brown. This finding exposes one of the faces of racial discrimination in Brazil which with poverty and a number of social phenomena reveal the profound consequences of slavery (Arantes, 2015; Schwarcz, 2001; Chaui, 1998).

Table 1. Color of all respondents: N = 546

	Black	Brown	White	Yellow	Indigenous
No.	242	231	61	2	10
Percent	44%	41%	11%	0%	2%

A total of eight percent of respondents said they had children.

Of the young respondents on the streets 42% said they were no longer attending school. Rather fewer, 30% of those interviewed in institutions were not attending school. However, the vast majority of those attending school were in primary education and only 7% in secondary schools despite the fact that more than 50% of the total sample were 14 years of age or older.

While the vast majority of the young people had birth certificates, only 29% of those in institutions had a work card which guarantees access to work protections and benefits.

Seventy two percent of the young people on the streets said they were working at the time of their interview. Just 17% of those in institutions were working. The principal activity of those working on the streets (67%) was the sale of small items like candy and bottled water. Begging and street performances were engaged in each group by 12%. Nine percent of the respondents in institutions said that they engaged in prostitution. Thirty-five percent of those working in institutions were in the national public/private Youth Apprenticeship Program (Jovem Aprendiz).

The distinction is made by those who study street children between those who live and sleep on the streets and those who spend their days on the street but who sleep elsewhere. In our survey, 64% of those children who lived on the

streets had at one time or other slept there too while 78% of those in institutions had slept on the streets. One-third of the young people on the streets had been sleeping on the streets for more than two years. One third of the respondents in institutions had only been sleeping on the streets for a short period of time, less than one month. This difference reflects the fact that the longer a young person spends on the streets the more difficult it is to enter an institution or indeed the family or community or origin. This fact is a challenge for social policies and for the effectiveness of institutions for those children and adolescents who have spent a long time on the streets.⁶

The main reasons for not being at home (Table 2) cited by those on the streets were being exposed to child labor exploitation, the drug trade and or forced to beg (28%), the search for freedom or diversions (24%), and family conflicts (20%). The picture was different for those interviewed in institutions. Forty-four percent of these respondents cited family conflicts as the main reason for not living at home followed by 27% who named negligence meaning the absence of basic care such as food, health care and education. Another 21% named the search for freedom and amusement. We note that the prime motivation given by young people in institutions to family conflicts raises the challenge of helping them mitigate that situation during the period in the institution and figuring out how to help the youth reconnect with family and community.

Table 2. Reasons for not living at home: N = 539

(More than one response permitted)

Reason	No./% on the streets (N = 269)	No./% in institutions (N = 270)	No./% total N = 539
Sexual abuse	1/0%	12/4%	13/2%
Absence of parent or responsible adult for reasons of death or illness	17/6%	28/10%	45/8%
Parent or responsible adult in prison	5/2%	11/4%	16/3%
Seeking freedom or fun	64/24%	58/21%	122/23%
Family conflict	54/20%	119/44%	173/32%
Neighborhood conflict (e.g. gangs)	23/9%	11/4%	34/6%
Negligence	46/17%	73/27%	119/22%
Loss of family home	29/11%	20/7%	49/9%
Work exploitation, drug trade or begging	76/28%	51/19%	127/24%
Sexual exploitation	2/0%	6/2%	8/1%
Drug use	17/6%	40/15%	57/11%

In a follow-up question to why they left home, we asked the respondents why they did not return home. Thirty-two percent of the young people on the streets said that they do return home.

They work on the streets and return home at night when they have sold everything they have to sell saying “it is difficult to sleep on the streets”. Reasons for not returning home include the lack of material necessities (9% of respondents): “we cannot get housing aid” and “because we are running out of money. My family is very poor and at times does not have money for bread”. Family conflict was another reason: “because I do not want to witness my grandfather beat my grandmother” and “because my brothers treat me badly...my mother tells them to beat me” (8% of respondents).

Twenty-five percent of the young people in the institutions cited family conflict and violence as the reason they did not return home. One young person said, “because my parents don’t like me and we fight a lot” and another, “because I feel safer in a crack house that I do in my own home because my mother is drugged up and beats me all the time”. Another 10% mentioned risks and threats and 9% said they simply did not want to return home. One group of respondents said their parents could not care for them and had parents who were on the streets: “because my family was evicted for non-payment of rent and were without a place to stay”.

There was a big difference between the two groups of young people in how much contact they had with their families. Sixty-six percent of the youth on the streets maintained daily contact with their families but that included people who actually slept at home. That percenta-

ge fell, however, to 12% for those living in institutions. This difference became much smaller with the question of whether the young people had a good relationship with their parents. Sixty-seven percent of those on the streets replied yes to this question as did 42% of those who lived in institutions. But 33% of the group in institutions stated that they did not maintain any source of relationship with their parents. In spite of all the difficulties of living on the streets, family ties persist. Data regarding institutional care make us consider whether despite national guidelines, such as the National Plan for Promotion, Protection and Defense of the Right of Children and Adolescents to Family and Community Life (CONANDA; CNAS, 2006), institutional care can generate and/or deepen the distance between children and youth and their parents and family. Therefore, we reinforce the importance of individual service in contrast to the standardization of service, in order to avoid a further distancing or weakening of family ties.

Poverty and its consequences are one cause of family breakup so we asked our respondents whether they received social benefits. Fifty percent of the young people on the streets and 32% of those in institutions said their families received some type of social benefit with the Family Benefit program (Bolsa Familia) being cited by 91% of those on the streets whose families received benefits and 71% of those in institutions. It is noteworthy that the num-

ber of those receiving social benefits declines among institutionalized children and youth and not having access to those benefits can generate or aggravate contexts of vulnerability. On the other hand, accessing those programs can contribute to family stability which in turn might promote stronger relationships between the young people and their families.

The surveys also examined health issues. Seventy-five percent of the youth on the streets said they had no health issues as did 71% of those in institutions. Were they to have health issues, 58% of those on the streets said they would go to their parents for help and 59% of those in institutions said they would go to professionals in their own institutions. We know that public health clinics and services are reluctant to serve children and youth unaccompanied by a responsible adult especially when the youth do not have any documentation. Such youth will often not be seen or need to find a responsible adult to get care.⁷

As for physical activities, on the streets and in institutional care, responses were divided between those who practiced them or not at the time of research. On the streets, between 50% who answered yes, soccer was the predominant response (73%). This was also the case for those in institutional care, where 46% said they practice physical activities, especially soccer (59%). This is surprising data, considering the importance of sport for personal and social development of children and adolescents, indi-

cating the need for elaboration and/or implementation of specific public policies.

We also asked from what other services the young people had sought help (Table 3). Forty percent of those on the streets said they had never asked for any help. Among those who had asked for help, the largest number (27%) mentioned nonprofits, churches, pastoral care with, followed by 26% who searched for assistance in shelters or institutions which suggests that some on the streets are seeking such care. The fact that the “shelter or host institution” was the second response most cited by this group demonstrates that it is necessary to pay attention to the demand for specialized assistance in these institutions, as it appears in the Resolution 001/2016 by CNAS/CONANDA. Furthermore, if there was a demand for care, the concern remains as to why many children and youth remain on the streets. Also, there is a need for better coordination between social work professionals and institutional staff for delivering more adequate services.

Thirty-six percent of those in institutions said they had never asked anyone for help in the institution. Among those who responded that had already sought care in any of these institutions, the most highlighted option was “another institution” (37%), followed by CREAS (20%), the Special Center for Social Assistance, which assists people who are at risk or where their rights are being violated. In the case of both groups of young people, public services were not their first choice for receiving help.

Table 3. From which of the following services have you asked help?
(More than one response permitted)

Service	No./percent on the street N = 269	No./percent in institutions N = 264	No./percent total N = 533
Residential institution	69/26%	0/0%	69/13%
Help centers	23/9%	10/4%	33/6%
Special reference centers (CREAS)	43/16%	54/20%	97/18%
Street workers	31/12%	9/3%	40/7%
Other organizations (nonprofits, churches, pastoral ministries)	72/27%	97/37%	169/32%
Others	29/11%	53/20%	82/15%
None	108/40%	96/36%	204/38%
No response	9/3%	9/3%	18/3%

We also asked our respondents about any violence they might have suffered. The young people reported many different kinds of violence. Only 12% of the youth on the streets said they had never suffered any form of violence and only 3% of those in institutions said the same. Forty-two percent of those on the streets said they had been physically assaulted and 41% said they had been screamed at with respectively 67% and 36% of those in institutions reporting the same (Table 4). Over half of the total sample report being physically assaulted, a frighteningly

high percent showing that experiencing violence is part of the reality of being on the streets.

Table 4. Violence suffered
(More than one response permitted)

Type of violence	No./percent on the street N = 266	No./percent in institutions N = 269	No./ percent total N = 535
Abandonment or lack of basic care	12/4%	35/13%	47/9%
Sexual abuse, harassment, prostitution	19/7%	41/15%	60/11%
Threats	62/23%	92/34%	154/29%
Work exploitation, drug trade, begging	33/12%	72/27%	105/19%
Treated badly in an institution	13/5%	20/7%	33/6%
Discrimination	67/25%	87/32%	154/29%
Robbed	35/13%	40/15%	75/14%
Screamed at	109/41%	98/36%	207/39%
Forceable institutionalization from the streets	13/5%	17/6%	30/6%
Seizure of belongings	32/12%	11/4%	43/8%
Insulted	63/24%	71/26%	134/25%
Physically assaulted or battered	112/42%	179/67%	291/54%
Other	7/3%	8/3%	15/3%
Did not suffer any	32/12%	9/3%	41/8%
No response	19/7%	17/6%	36/7%

When the young people were asked who most violated their rights, 50% of those on the streets said agents of public safety (such as the police), whi-

le 61% of those in institutions said family members or responsible adults (Table 5). We must take into consideration that on the streets police and social violence takes place on a daily basis and the return home to parents and/or family members is not discarded. In institutional care, children and adolescents cannot return to their families without a legal procedure and the feeling of abandonment may be more intense.

Table 5. Main agents violating respondents' rights
(More than one response permitted)

Agent	No./percent on the street N = 235	No./percent in institutions N = 265	No./percent total N = 500
Agents of public security: police, municipal guard etc.	118/50%	100/38%	218/44%
Drunks re illicit drug and sex activities	32/14%	55/21%	87/17%
Family or responsible adults	72/31%	162/61%	234/47%
Other people or groups on the street	46/20%	51/19%	97/19%
Other agents of public services, e.g. health, social assistance, judiciary	14/6%	14/5%	28/6%
Passers-by on the street	78/33%	66/25%	144/29%
Others	17/7%	31/12%	48/10%
Did not suffer violations	1	0	0
No response	22/9%	19/7%	41/8%

A further question asked whether when violence occurred the young people reported the incidents. Only 10% of those on the streets said they had. In the institutions, a higher number, 26% said they had reported such incidents. In both groups, the most common agent reported to was the police. The response from the youth on the streets is extremely frightening because with corrupt police forces there is no recourse for those whose rights are being violated by agents of public safety.

We turn now to the use of alcohol and drugs. Fifty percent of the young people on the streets and 74% of those in institutions said they had used alcohol, tobacco or drugs. Thirty six percent of the former group and 42% of the latter group said they still make use of drugs. The most common form of substances used in both groups were marijuana, tobacco and alcohol. The use of drugs is a major public health crisis in Brazil with profound repercussions on children and young people on the streets. They seldom have access to such recourses as the Network of Psychosocial Services (RAPS) because of the sparse distribution of Centers for Psychosocial Services (CAPS) and under current policies the number of such centers is being reduced. Indeed, the most common interventions for young people on the streets are criminalization and prohibition.⁸ This particular data is relevant because public policies for people in street situation tend to be associated with interventions related to the use of drugs in public spaces, in its most prohibitionist and criminalizing format.

Although it is noteworthy that not everyone in street situation makes abusive use of drugs.

We were interested in the prior histories of our samples. The graph below shows that 59% of the young people on the streets said they had never spent time in an institution. Of the group already in institutions, 67% said they had never been in another institution except for a shelter. Seventy percent of those who had been in an institution said that the institution was a social-educative center (commitment to such centers are one option a judge has for a young person aged 12-18 who has broken the law.)

Table 6. Which institutions have you been in?

(The replies did not include the institutions in which the institutionalized group were interviewed)

Type of institution	No./percent on the streets N = 256	No./in institutions N = 258	No./percent total N = 514
Shelter or group home	74/29%	0/0%	74/14%
Institution for the treatment of chemical dependency	12/5%	15/6%	27/5%
Psychiatric hospital	7/3%	21/8%	28/5%
Institution for socio-educational treatment	34/13%	51/20%	85/17%
Have not been in one	152/59%	173/67%	325/63%
No response	10/4%	12/5%	22/4%

Gender and Sexuality

The research also had the opportunity to address issues related to gender and sexuality, with questions directed to participants with 12 or more years of age. In this case, our universe was restricted to 180 teenagers on street situation and 225 in institutional care. With regard to gender identity, in streets, most participants identified themselves as male, equivalent to 75% of the data. The same occurred in institutional care, where 67% identified themselves as male. In both scenarios, in the "other" field, responses such as: transvestite, trans woman, transgender, androgenous and gender neutral and for sexual identity, homosexual, bisexual, and gay. Such responses indicate that the related categories of gender identity and sexuality still cause confusion and young people had little comprehension of this range of terms. Although these issues are very much present for adolescents and young people in general, they are still poorly understood. This theme certainly needs to be further investigated. Seventy percent of the young people on the streets said that had heterosexual

On a more general topic, we asked respondents what could produce significant improvement in their lives. The young people responded that they were looking forward to the future with the most common responses being opportunities to work and to study. The young people also emphasized access to housing and a family life. The youth were interested in the conditions of work saying for example, "to work with a work card [i.e. in the formal economy] and to receive a worthy wage". On education one said, "to work in a better school with free school meals" and another "to return to school, to have a second chance to get my documents and to participate in the youth apprenticeship program". Others said, "to do a professional course", and "to enter higher education".

One common theme among the young people in institutions was to get a job to help the family and "one that allows me to keep myself". There were some specific examples of work as in to enlist in the army, to become a judge, and to become a dance teacher. There were also responses about returning to the home they were in before leaving for the streets and "to have a house to be with my brothers and sisters and my father", and to become rich and to buy a house for my mother".

One last question asked whether the young people considered themselves homeless. Fifty-five percent of those on the streets and 71% of those in institutions said they did not consider themselves homeless. For those on the streets this response was due to some of the young people having a re-

ference home and maintaining relationships with their families. For those in institutions the young people saw themselves as having a shelter and not being on the streets. Forty-one percent of the responses among those who considered themselves homeless included: “Because I live and sleep on the street”; “If someone is living on the street, clearly he is of the street, he has not shelter to go to”; while for 24% of the young people in institutions said they considered themselves homeless some because they had already spent so much time on the streets, “because I spend time on the street looking for food, at home we have no food and we have to eat” and others because family problems prevented their return home.

4.1 – Specific data on street situation

The following data was collected from 283 children and adolescents who were homeless at the time of the survey. Regarding the time spent on the streets, 43% of the interviewees had been in this situation for more than 1 year. This long permanence leads us to the importance of assistance care strategies in addition to institutional care, with outreach services being a fundamental link with the overall service network. Regarding the place where they slept, 57% of the participants answered that they usually sleep on the streets, 17% claimed that they return to the home of family members and/or guardians and only 2% said they sleep in institutions. Regarding their personal hygiene, 27% of the participants said they did it on the street, while 6% mentio-

ned accessing an institution for this purpose. The responses that indicated the use of public restrooms corresponded to 18% and the use of commercial establishments represented 20% of the total. With regard to the types of danger found on the streets, 63% of the participants pointed out violence and 48% of them mentioned police action. We recall that 50% of those interviewed on the streets indicated “public security agents” as “the main rights-violating agent”. This information is fundamental for tackling violence against street children and adolescents, given that, due to their class, race, gender and age, they are the main targets of lethal violence in the country as demonstrated by research that map this phenomenon (CERQUEIRA; BUENO, 2020).

4.2 Specific data on institutional care

We interviewed a total of 271 children and adolescents living in institutions at the time of the study. The vast majority, 84%, had been in the institution for less than 18 and 12% had passed the limit for institutional stay laid down by the law n^o 13.509, of November 22, 2017.

Twenty eight percent of the institutional group said that they had been put in institutions because they were living on the streets. Some of these had sought help to be put in institutional placements seeking help from such organizations as the Guardianship Council, the Special Reference Center for Social Assistance (CREAS), a church or the police. These organizations need training in

sexual relationships and 7% said they had homosexual or bisexual relationships. In the institutions those percentages were 54 and 18 percent respectively. Given the high percent of respondents who were having sex, there is a need for public policies that offer information and guidance to adolescents and their families. Abortion is illegal in Brazil although since 1940 prosecutions ended when the pregnancy was the result of rape or when it was likely to cause the death of the mother. Seventeen percent of the young women on the streets and 22% of the young women interviewed in institutions said they had undergone an abortion, a very high number considering the general illegality of the procedure but about the same as general national estimates for abortions of women aged 18 to 39. About one half of the women receiving illegal abortions in Brazil are hospitalized as a result.⁹ Unwanted pregnancies and the need for contraceptives and contraceptive advice are clearly a major health issue for the young women in our samples.

responding to homeless youth. Family conflicts also figured in the reasons given for being in an institution (12%) and the risk of being in dangerous or threatening situations (11%). One said, "after the death of my mother, I went to live with an aunt, and I acted up a lot and so she took me to the Guardianship Council". Another said "I was living with my mother-in-law, but the father of her son was imprisoned and so she threw me out. My parents did not want me back home because I was pregnant". Two entered the institution after receiving death threats, one through the Program for the Protection of Children and Adolescents Threatened with Death (PPCM).

One of the key goals of institutional placement for street children is to use that time to reconnect the young people with their families. Seventy-three percent of the young respondents said, however, that no-one in their family had attended any activity in the institutions. Of those who said someone had visited, those visits were mainly family visits and celebrations. Connections go both ways but a majority of the young people said their families had not received any visits from social work professionals. The broad geographical distribution of the homes of the young people likely makes visiting them more difficult.

In general, the young people liked being in an institution with 77% saying yes to this question. They made such comments as: "in general I like to live with other people", and "because of the learning opportunities and the activities offered by the institution". It is very likely that the young pe-

ople got opportunities inside the institutions they did not have outside. Ninety percent of the young people thought that the services they received in the institution helped them in some way. The main reasons given for this view were learning for life, access to school, courses, and opportunities for employment. The replies include, “they help you make better choices”, “they teach you to respect people”, “they help you get ready for life, to learn how to turn your life around and to take care of a home”, and “to turn your way of being into a positive form”. However, 55% of the young people said they had already absconded from their current institution or from another “to amuse themselves”, and to use alcohol and other drugs.

5. Final considerations

This sample of young people with experience on the streets and in institutions shows the diversity of the population it represents. The young people have different relationships with their families, different reasons for being on the streets, different institutional histories, and different strategies for obtaining help.

They are also similar in important respects. The vast majority of them self-define as black or brown. They report multiple incidents of the violence they have suffered and of the violation of rights they have experienced by exactly those public offi-

cialists who should have been protecting their rights.

They also share a vision for their future that includes ending their encounter with homelessness, pursuing education and finding decent work.

Their number, their suffering and their aspirations demand a more adequate response from all sectors of society. We recognize that Brazil is living through a very difficult time in its history as democratic victories achieved since the end of the dictatorship starting in the mid-1980s have been threatened by neo-liberal policies now aggravated by a far right, authoritarian, personality cult president, Jair Bolsonaro. These difficulties are massively aggravated by the public health challenge of Covid 19 and the consequent economic crisis. In this mix, social inequality is both intensified and becomes more apparent. Street children have always been invisible away from the streets and alleys where they live but it is important to shed light on their situation in the current crises. The pressure the contemporary situation places on low-income families is likely to increase the number of young people who flee to or are expelled to the streets. All the more reason why the data in this report be used to inform more appropriate and creative public policies to reduce their number and assist those in the situation of the streets to a better chance of living in the mainstream.

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Notes

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² This analysis was conducted jointly with the institutions, The Specialized Referral Centers for Social Services (CREAS), Staff of the Street Clinic, and community centers. The full report can be accessed at CIESPI's website: http://www.ciespi.org.br/media/Publicacoes/rel_Projeto_CPC.pdf.

³ Since 2005, various organizations have joined together to form the National Campaign for Children Do Not Belong on the Streets which works to mobilize society and the government for the counting and dissemination of official statistics on this population.

⁴ The World Health Organization made its first alert on Covid 19 in March 2020 calling it an international health emergency. Because of the nature of the current national government in Brazil, the country is recognized as having great difficulties coping with the epidemic because of reactionary and conservative in charge of notational and state policies.

⁵ The training followed the rules of the National Health Council including the Clear terms of free consent both to the respondents and to a responsible adult if three young people was under eighteen years of age. The project was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Pontifical Catholic University and its approval was issued on May 3, 2018.

⁶ We are not referring here to compulsory incarceration but to policies that can prevent long term living on the streets as well as the development of strategies to help young people leave the streets.

⁷ There are no government rules that unattended children and youth cannot be served by health clinics but in practice that is sometimes the case.

⁸ Indeed, the Government of Jair Bolsonaro the incarceration of adolescents with drug of alcohol abuse in "therapeutic communities". CONANDA objects to these policies on the grounds that

such communities are driven by the search for profits and have received many notices of human rights violations.

⁹ See for example the article on abortions in Brazil in Wikipedia. Accessible in: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion_in_Brazil; downloaded on November 9, 2020.

For more information contact the editors:

Irene Rizzini

Professor at PUC-Rio, Department of Social Work and President of the International Center for Research and Policy on Childhood (CIESPI/PUC-Rio)
(irizzinipucRio.ciespi@gmail.com)

Maria Cristina Bó

Executive Coordination, (CIESPI/PUC-Rio)
(mcrisbociespi@gmail.com)

Malcolm Bush

Senior advisor at CIESPI/PUC-Rio and visiting research scholar at the Center of Urban Research and Learning at Loyola University of Chicago
(mbuschciespi@gmail.com)



PARTNER

