

SIPP in Brazil: Rocinha and Jardim Catarina

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UKRI GCRF: Safe, Inclusive Participative Pedagogy (SIPP): Improving Early Childhood Education is a partnership research project based at University of Edinburgh and undertaken with partners in Brazil, Eswatini, Palestine, South Africa. We are working with communities, local and national partners to promote change, for young children before school age.

The Communities

In Brazil the project exists in two communities, our main community Rocinha in the city of Rio de Janeiro and Jardim Catarina which is a comparison community in the city of São Gonçalo both in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Both of them suffer from severe poverty.

Rocinha is in the southern zone of the city of Rio. It is considered the largest favela in the country with an official population of 69,000 inhabitants though this is considered a substantial undercount. Residents place the figure higher pointing to the considerable transient population. The official number of children 0-6 is 8,026. The lack of basic sanitation in some homes, the poor garbage pick-up, open sewers in some streets, and the huge problem of ventilation in narrow alleys and passages create a dangerous environment for the spread of infectious diseases. In January 2021, this community had the third highest number of COVID cases in the city. It also suffers from high levels of violence caused by drug traffickers, vigilante militias and the police.

Jardim Catarina is located in the municipality of São Gonçalo on the other side of Guanabara Bay from the city of Rio. It has 73,000 inhabitants of whom about 4,000 are children 0-4. Like Rocinha, the community suffers problems with infrastructure especially an insufficient coverage of water and sewage systems. Other problems include inadequate education, health, and transit services and armed violence.. It is, however, less dense than Rocinha and children play in side streets.

Early childhood centers are crucial in both communities for the young children's well-being and development and so that parents can go to work. They provide decent care, a variety of developmentally appropriate activities, and several meals for either the half-day or full day sessions. There are public creches and preschools and well as those called 'conveniadas' which are private but receive per diem payments from the municipalities. From earlier research CIESPI learned that in Rocinha early childhood centers suffer from insufficient and slow payments from the municipality, crumbling infrastructure including non-functioning toilets, shortage of appropriately qualified staff, and a too high density of young children for their cramped quarters.

The action research

CIESPI chose Rocinha as the main community because it has been a reference community for the research center for many years. Two of the research group members live in the community and a third has worked in it. This makes it possible to contact parents, early childhood staff, and key community members despite the epidemic although much of the contact has been necessarily online. CIESPI decided as a first project step to conduct a context setting survey of a few community residents. Given the current unique context, this survey focused on experiences related to Covid-19.

My godson is three and a half and has a very inquiring mind asking everyone questions. He was terrified. He cannot go out without a mask. He remembers better than the responsible adults. I reckon that this kid is already growing with the word fear, death, distance, no hugs, don't get close, don't get near your mother ¹

The main concerns of the adults about themselves had to do with the loss of income consequent to unemployment. Many families have seen their incomes diminish or disappear. In addition, many adults mentioned the difficulty of accessing such benefits as unemployment payments. In consequence, food insecurity and hunger have increased. In low-income areas, social distance and limited access to reliable internet, computers and cell phones have made young children's access to education difficult at a time when all public creches and pre-schools and many private ones are closed. Mothers and other women child carers are under particular strain coping with food shortages, educating their children at home, and an increase in mental health stresses.

Residents report little assistance from the public sector to help with the consequences of the pandemic. Family incomes have diminished considerably especially in families with children. On the other hand, we became aware of community resistance. We saw local movements and organizations embrace the banner of "ourselves for ourselves" to help families, friends and neighbors. Such efforts helped in the distribution of protective materials, basic food baskets and the dissemination of vital information. We noted that the community activists we spoke with said they felt isolated and lonely and welcomed the conversations with us.

More details about CIESPI can be found at www.ciespi.org.br which is both a Portuguese and English language site and which contains CIESPI's first project newsletter.

Footnote:

[1] The quotations in this text come from people who either live and/or work in one of the two communities. We omit their names to safeguard their privacy.

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