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TACKLING COVID-19   INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION   INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

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Bossa Older: Trends and lessons from Brazil and its elderly for better social isolation policies

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TACKLING CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):
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Given the worldwide dimension of the new coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis and its diverse social and economic impacts, the challenge is to think globally in order to act locally. Brazil is a country of continental dimensions and its inequality levels make the country a sort of small world. The lessons taken here will be useful for both rich and poor countries.

According to the World Health Organisation, elderly people are more prone to develop severe clinical conditions related to COVID-19. In particular, the lethality rate for those aged 80 or more are 13 times higher than for people between 50 and 55 years old. Therefore, to understand where the elderly are located is of fundamental importance. The main goal here is to provide detailed information regarding the elderly in Brazil as the most vulnerable group to the virus' effects.

Who are the elderly in Brazil?

Ten-point-five percent of Brazil's population are aged 65 or above. The elderly represent 19.3% of the heads of the household, a rate above the national average (10.53%) and that supports the hypothesis of the elderly as the main provider of the household. On the other hand, households that include the elderly have 25.6% less people than the national average.

Regarding income distribution, the elderly represent 17.4% of the top 5% richest Brazilians and 1.67% of the poorest 5%. There is 10% less income inequality (Gini) among the elderly. This group is also less exposed to poverty: 2.4% against 11.5% for the national average, or 20.3% for children. The elderly who were above the poverty line had a probability of 1.58% to become poor in the following year, against 5.06% of the average Brazilian. These numbers are explained by the extensive social protection net offered to the elderly in Brazil, also a late comer in social security reforms.

Regarding education, the elderly represent almost a third of all illiterates in Brazil. Moreover, they have 3.3 fewer completed years of schooling than the average Brazilian. The rate of elderly people with no access to the internet is twice the national average.

> *"The biggest challenges are the low educational and digital connectivity levels. Simple messages through analogical means appear to best promote actions focused on the protection of older people in Brazil."*

To sum up, the elderly in Brazil are located in smaller households with relatively high, stable and homogeneous incomes besides being more visible to the eyes of the state. These factors help the implementation of social isolation actions to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic effects. The biggest challenges are the low educational and digital connectivity levels. Simple messages through analogical means appear to best promote actions focused on the protection of older people in Brazil.

Where do the elderly live?

The state with the highest rate of elderly individuals among its population is Rio de Janeiro (13.06%), a kind of "Brazilian Florida". Rio is not inhabited by tanned youngsters, but by equally tanned elderly individuals; Copacabana leads the ranking of the Rio's neighbourhoods with the highest share of elderly people – and would place second if compared globally. Rio also hosts a huge informal sector, almost reaching the level of cities in the poor Northeast region of the country. Thus, Rio de Janeiro is caught between a rock and a hard place: society is deeply affected by the social isolation policies needed to protect the huge number of elderly individuals in our population.

The country leading the aging process in the world is Japan, with 28.4% of its population aged 65 or above. Meanwhile, the African continent and the Middle-East present the lowest rates. The richest territories tend to present a higher share of elderly individuals because of the higher life expectancy and lower fertility rate. Brazil is placed in the middle of the distribution. However, this position changes according to the income criterion we pick. In a group of 98 countries, Brazil is ranked 80th among the bottom 20% poorest countries and 31st place among the top 20% richest countries, meaning the elderly are relatively well off in Brazil.

What's next?

We analyse individuals who live with an elderly person, so we can better design social isolation policies. Richer areas have more senior citizens, but these older individuals do not live with people from other age groups. One example is Finland, where 3% of the elderly individuals live with teenagers or children, contrasting with Afghanistan, where 96% of all elderly citizens live with children or adolescents. Brazil is also placed in the middle of the ranking, and this fact needs to be taken into account when designing social isolation policies. Lastly, we are also focusing on people with morbidities, including up-to-date estimates based on demographic projections, keeping the age factor constant.

The current pandemic has spread globally through international travel, initially between rich people in rich places. New York, Milan and São Paulo present the highest contagion levels in their respective countries. In this regard, the modest 6.4 million international tourists who annually come to Brazil (against 50 million in Italy, 70 million in Spain, 78 million in the US and 85 million in France) was an initial advantage. Touristic places are popular with elderly individuals, and this should have sounded an early warning.

I invite you to access the research website and use our interactive data sets to answer your questions of interest.

For further information, watch Marcelo Neri outline his research in the video below (Portuguese, with English subtitles)

https://cps.fgv.br/en/videos/marcelo-neri-director-fgv-social-where-are-elderly-knowledge-against-covid-19

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