Selected DHS data on 10–14-year-olds: Brazil

Population Council

Follow this and additional works at: https://knowledgecommons.popcouncil.org/departments_sbsr-pgy

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Recommended Citation


This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Population Council.
Preface

Several years ago the Population Council produced special tabulations for 47 countries that provided a broad map of the living circumstances, schooling, marital status, reproductive health knowledge and behavior, and work experiences of adolescent boys and girls 10-19 years old. These tables drew on three Demographic and Health Survey sources: the household survey, the survey of girls and women of reproductive age, and, where available, parallel studies of boys and men of reproductive age. In these reports (entitled “Facts About Adolescents from the Demographic and Health Survey”), data on 10-14-year-olds are arrayed alongside data on 15-19-year-olds, which we believe is the ideal presentation of such data.

More recently, there has been a demand by program and policy audiences to separate out the relatively scarce data which exists on 10-14-year-olds from the 15-19-year-old cohort in an effort to make them user-friendly for program planning exercises. We have responded to this request by preparing separate data sheets which include the variables of the original tables in addition to several new ones. For example, special effort has been expended to explore the presence of 10-14-year-olds in potentially protective structures — families and schools — by cross-tabulating the presence of 10-14-year-olds in different kinds of living arrangements with school enrollment.

While early adolescence, for many, may be marked by relative good health and stable family circumstances, it can also be a period of vulnerability and intense transition. 10-14-year-olds progress from being clearly “children” at age 10, through the onset of puberty, to being perceived in some societies — in the case of girls — as “young women” ready for sexual relations, marriage, and childbearing, and — in the case of boys — as “young men” ready to help support their families and even serve in the military. Young adolescents are more likely than older adolescents to be in residence with parents and in school; however, their absence from school or lack of parental support (e.g., a surprisingly high proportion of 10-14-year-olds live with one or neither parent in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa) may be cause for concern. While some of these young people not residing with parents may be with their extended family, or in positive fostering or protective living arrangements, it is plausible that many are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, unsafe work, and substance abuse.

A new generation of research and interventions directed at the 10-14-year-old age group is urgently needed. Diagnostic work must define the key transitions and specify capacities, risks, and opportunities by age, gender, schooling, and marital status at the very least. The five-year cohort of 10-14-year-olds homogenizes too much of early adolescence and its rapid transitions. As research progresses, a more detailed picture of thresholds of change will emerge — it is possible that the fortunes of adolescents are determined not in five-year blocks, but rather in six-month, one-year, or three-year blocks, depending on the context. Collecting reliable data on young adolescents,
either from them or from intermediaries, is a considerable challenge. Some question the quality of
data collected directly from very young adolescents, preferring to rely on retrospective reporting
from older age cohorts. Moreover, there are important ethical considerations surrounding consent
and parental permission to interview young people. Although we recognize and acknowledge
these dilemmas, we contend that new data-gathering approaches, tools, and methodologies are
warranted.

We must include questions concerning the social significance of puberty and how it shapes the
ways in which young boys and girls think about themselves and how they are perceived by families and
communities. Young people’s perceptions and experience of their sexuality and gender roles are also
key subjects to explore. Finally, we must include questions surrounding marriage, as a decreasing but
significant proportion of girls in some regions are married or are altering important life patterns —
schooling, types of work, mobility — on the premise that they will marry by age 18. An early transition to
marriage may make girls particularly vulnerable in settings where the HIV epidemic is underway and
spousal age difference is high. We must learn more about the marriage process, including mate
selection, extent of young people’s input, timing considerations, and the engagement period. Critical
gaps remain in our knowledge of sexual consummation and expectations within early marriage, and the
social and health impact of marriage on young people, particularly girls.\footnote{The forthcoming National
Academy of Sciences panel report on the transition to adulthood in developing countries explores
many of these issues with cross-cultural data; it will be available from the Academy by the end of
2003. Currently available is an article on some of the marital
dimensions of interest by Barbara Mensch, Susheela Singh, and John Casterline entitled “Trends in
the timing of first marriage among men and women in the developing world.” (This paper was presented
at the Population Association of America’s May 2003 meeting in Minneapolis.)}

The good news is that because of their age, young adolescents, even those in precarious
circumstances, are resilient and flexible. Much can be done to remedy their situations before the
architecture of their later life becomes set. Some of the young people we are most concerned about —
those without parental support and not in school — may need to have their living situations stabilized
before schooling, livelihoods or health interventions will be effective. To this end, creating safe spaces
such as girls’ clubs, boys’ clubs, and hostels for street children may prove to be a lifeline.

In reviewing these data on very young adolescents, what we mainly know is that we don’t know
very much. We urge caution in attributing more significance to these data than is warranted at this time
and believe they are best understood in comparison to other age cohorts. Overall, we believe that
efforts to supplement the DHS with other data sources are needed to get a broader picture of the lives of
10-14-year-olds. We hope that researchers will foster a new wave of quantitative and qualitative inquiry
into the lives of this age group. And we further hope that their partners — policymakers and service
providers — will draw on this information to develop a new generation of programs designed to protect
and support adolescents, assisting them in making a safe and successful transition to adulthood.

Martha Brady, Judith Bruce, Erica Chong
1. Urban-rural residence and population distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent distribution</th>
<th>Age group as percent of total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>76.4</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Approximately three-fourths of adolescents 10-14 years old live in urban areas.
- 10-14-year-olds comprise 12% of Brazil’s total population.

2. Parental survival status

- More than nine out of ten young adolescents have both parents living.

3. Parents resident in household (hh) by place of residence and sex

- Roughly two-thirds of urban adolescents and three-fourths of rural adolescents live with both parents.
- Urban adolescents are more likely than rural adolescents to live with only their mother.
- Girls are slightly more likely than boys to live with neither parent. One out of eight urban girls lives with neither parent.
4. Characteristics of household head
Note that if an adolescent has a non-parent household head, it cannot be inferred that a parent is or is not residing in the household. Similarly, if a female is household head, there may or may not be an adult male present in the household.

- Around one-fifth of 10-14-year-olds live in households headed by someone other than a parent.
- Almost one-fifth of young adolescents live in female-headed households.

5. Educational enrollment

- The majority of 10-14-year-olds are enrolled in school.
- Urban adolescents are much more likely to be in school than rural adolescents.

6. Distribution of girls and boys by living arrangements and school enrollment (percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living arrangements</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>% of total</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not in school</td>
<td>In school</td>
<td>Not in school</td>
<td>In school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both parents in hh</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father only in hh</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother only in hh</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither parent in hh</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table maps the distribution of girls and boys by living arrangement and school enrollment, calculating what percentage of all girls or all boys each subgroup comprises.

- Roughly three out of five boys and girls are living with both parents and are enrolled in school.
- One-sixth of adolescents aged 10-14 are living with only their mother and are in school.
7. Girls and boys not enrolled in school, by living arrangements (percent not enrolled)

- 10-14-year-olds living with both parents are the most likely to be in school; those living with neither parent are the least likely to be in school.
- The largest gender gaps in school enrollment are in households where only the father is present; 13% of girls and 20% of boys in such households are not in school.

8. Girls’ retrospective reporting of age at first intercourse, marriage, and first birth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>% who had intercourse before age 15</th>
<th>% who married before age 15</th>
<th>% who gave birth before age 15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Premarital</td>
<td>Marital</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Twelve percent of 15-19-year-old girls reported having intercourse by their 15th birthday.
- The percentage of girls getting married before age 15 has remained relatively stable across the three age cohorts.

9. Media exposure, as measured by household ownership

- Sixty three percent of young adolescents live in a household that has a television, and 87% live in a household that has a radio.
- Urban adolescents are more than twice as likely as rural adolescents to live in a household that has a television.

**Technical notes:** All tables are calculated from data collected for the 1996 Brazil Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), conducted by Sociedade Civil Bem-Estar Familiar no Brasil (BEMFAM), Fundação Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), and Macro International, Inc. The Brazil DHS surveyed a nationally representative sample of 14,252 households. The statistics presented in Tables 1-7 and 9 are based on information provided by a senior household member on 3,198 boys and 3,244 girls between ages 10 and 14. The calculations for Table 8 are based on an individual questionnaire that was applied to 15-19-year-olds (N=2,464), 20-24-year-olds (N=1,893), and 25-29-year-olds (N=1,937).

© 2003 by The Population Council, Inc.