

Covid-19: Public Policies and Society's Responses



Quality information for refining public policies and saving lives

Policy Briefing Note 24

Community leaders believe that increasing risk among elderly people, persistent hunger, children without classes, and parents concerned about the lack of structure in schools have heightened the tragedy in vulnerable communities. As a counterpoint, they hope for a lasting sense of solidarity sparked by pandemic.

- Food insecurity continues to be the main issue afflicting the most vulnerable communities in Brazil's metropolitan regions, as leaderships express concern with the large number of families experiencing hunger.
- Circa 67% of the leaders cited the elderly as the most affected group by the pandemic: risk of death from infection, loneliness, and lack of access to health services are among the main cited problems.
- Without school activities, internet, and basic resources such as computers and cellphones, children are unable to learn educational content remotely;
- Community leaders have expressed growing concern about children's education: psychological distress and cognitive setbacks add to the parents' insecurity about insufficient school structure to protect students.
- In contrast to the daily tragedy magnified by the pandemic, circa 40% of leaders believe that the sense of community and solidarity expressed during the crisis will remain as a legacy for the future.
- 16% of leaders stated that the negative experience and dissatisfaction with the performance of public authorities should translate into better choices in the upcoming elections, which will tend to penalize candidates less committed to these communities.

Introduction

This Bulletin presents the results of the fourth round of data collection of the *Monitoring Panel with community leaders about the impacts of the progress of the Covid-19 pandemic*, carried out by the Solidary Research Network. The consistent gathering of information regarding the main problems faced by the most vulnerable population amidst the pandemic allows public authorities and the communities themselves to anticipate crises and improve risk management.

The Solidarity Research Network listened, identified, and systematized critical problems reported by dozens of leaders from socially vulnerable communities, neighborhoods, and territories across different regions of the country. For this Bulletin, we contacted the same leaders from the previous three monitoring waves published in Bulletins #7, #12, and #17, as well as new representatives from the same regions. The survey, carried out between August 17 and 30, presents the results of 64 interviews with leaders from urban areas in the metropolitan regions of Manaus, Recife, Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Distrito Federal, Campinas, Salvador, Joinville, and Maringá.

Community leaders and representatives are strategic sources of information in our study, constantly engaged in the everyday life of the community as they tackle the most serious problems afflicting their locations. In constant dialogue with the population, they listen to demands, manage conflicts, and have a more integrated outlook of the territories in which they operate. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the importance of community engagement for the effective communication of risks as well as for the control of the pandemic in local contexts, especially in highly vulnerable communities. Due to their familiarity with the territory, their experience, and the capillarity of their personal networks, community leaders play a strategic role in promoting measures to prevent the spread of the virus and in building alternative solutions to the economic and social damages of the pandemic.

This Bulletin presents the results of our analysis of three open-ended questions asked to these leaders. Our methodology did not incentive specific issues or problems since one of our objectives was to capture unexpected situations and events engendered by the current crisis.

The first question, replicated from the three previous waves of our study, addressed the leaders' perceptions of the problems and difficulties faced by communities on account of the pandemic. The second question, applied for the first time in this Panel, focused on the leader's viewpoints about the most affected social groups amidst the pandemic. The third question, also asked for the first time, addressed the leaders' perception regarding the future effects of the pandemic on their communities¹.

¹ The survey questions were: "The questions below refer to the potential problems, conflicts, and hardships that emerged or were aggravated because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the containment policies, such as social distancing, for example. (i) *In the past week, what type of problems and situations has the population experienced in the community/territory where you operate? Please report the main reasons why people have been seeking you or the main problems that you have learned are occurring.*" (ii) *In your community, which social groups (for example: youth, women, the elderly, children, etc.) were most affected by the pandemic? How were they affected?* (iii) *In your opinion, what will be the lingering effects of the pandemic on your community in the future? Do you see positive and/or negative points for the community's situation in the future on account of the pandemic?."*

Results

The Panel's new data collection identified that material problems caused by the pandemic – such as hunger, income, and employment – are once again among the most cited issues by community leaders in ten metropolitan regions in the country. Among the leaders interviewed, 62% expressed concern with hunger and the persistent lack of food. Work and income remain among the most cited problems. This new survey brought a new concern to the fore: the education of children and youth. One in five community leaders stated that the lack of definition about the return to in-person school activities aggravates the critical situation in the communities, whether due to the fear of resuming without adequate conditions or the already felt consequences of having interrupted learning activities.

The perception that infections are rising alongside the lack of compliance to measures to combat the pandemic also feature among the most mentioned problems. According to the leaders, relaxation measures failed to follow an effective communication strategy about the current severity of the pandemic, which in turn led to a lack of compliance to preventive measures and increased the misguided feeling that the pandemic is over.

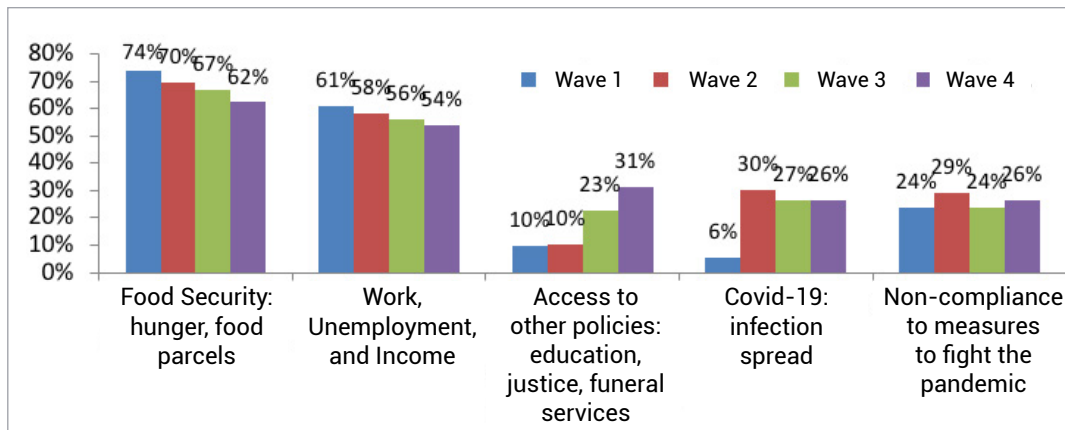
The Panel's fourth wave also collected the leaders' perceptions regarding the social groups that were most affected by the pandemic in their communities. One in three leaders understands that the elderly comprises the most affected group. The reasons for this are: higher risk of death from infection, social isolation, and lack of access to health care for the treatment non-COVID-19-related issues.

Lastly, we asked the respondents about the possible effects of the pandemic on the future of their communities. The survey reveals that the leaders' projections for the future are pessimistic, especially when it comes to the economic impact on families. The prevailing perception is that the enduring legacy of the economic crisis will heavily afflict the most vulnerable communities across multiple dimensions. Among the subjective impacts is the belief that the feeling of loss and grief and the psychological effects of the pandemic will linger. As for the positive effects, the respondents also emphasized stronger solidarity ties and community actions. There is also the expectation of incorporating hygiene and cleaning habits, which have since intensified during the pandemic. According to the leaders, the health crisis experience may leave a positive legacy in the lessons learned about the political performance of authorities and the voters' choices for future candidates in the next elections.

Main problems faced by communities

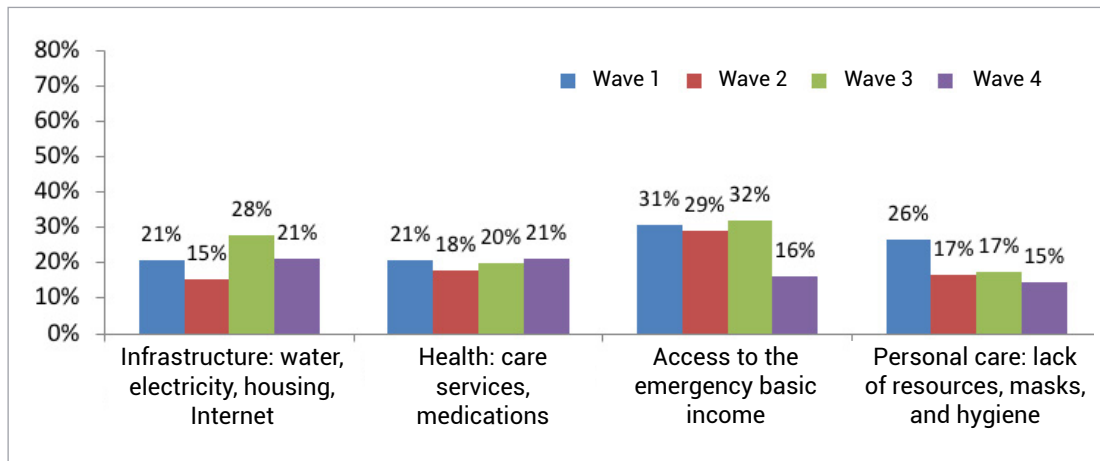
The graphs below display the problems mentioned in the four waves of the study and demonstrate the changes in the leaders' focus and the shifting concerns of the most vulnerable population in the locations contacted by the Solidarity Research Network. We divided the problems mentioned in the last wave of our study by recurrence as we captured the leaders' perceptions of the dilemmas experienced in the last half of August.

Graph 1 (1/3). Critical problems experienced by communities during the pandemic – higher recurrence (%)



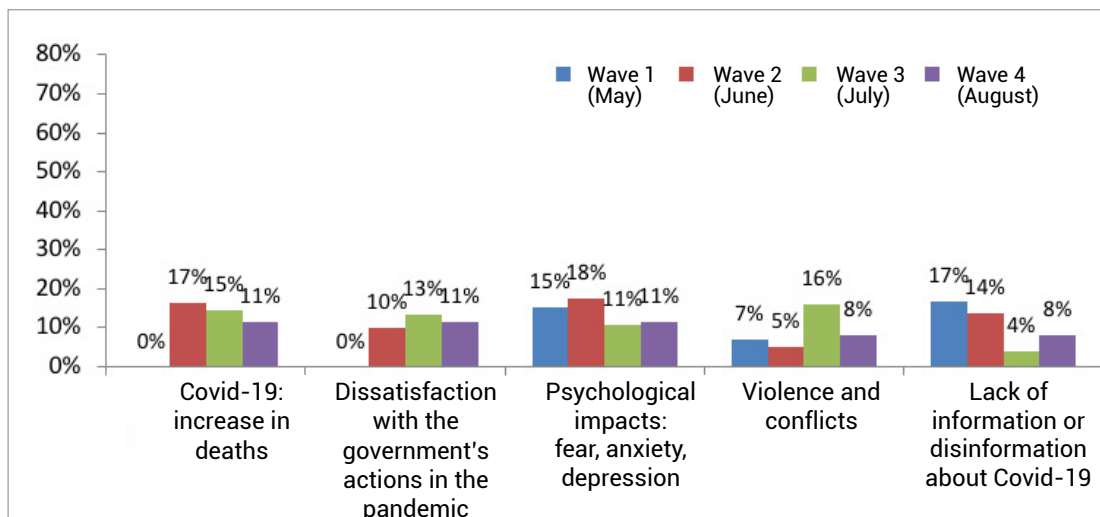
Source: Monitoring Panel with Community Leaders Amidst the Covid-19 Scenario. Multiple answers in %
 Wave 1: May 5 to May 11. N = 72. Wave 2: May 25 to June 6. N = 79. Wave 3: July 6 to July 16. N = 75
 Wave 4: August 17 to August 30. N = 64

Graph 1 (2/3). Critical problems experienced by communities during the pandemic – intermediate recurrence (%)



Source: Monitoring Panel with Community Leaders Amidst the Covid-19 Scenario. Multiple answers in %
 Wave 1: May 5 to May 11. N = 72. Wave 2: May 25 to June 6. N = 79. Wave 3: July 6 to July 16. N = 75
 Wave 4: August 17 to August 30. N = 64

Graph 1 (3/3). Critical problems experienced by communities during the pandemic – lowest recurrence (%)



Source: Monitoring Panel with Community Leaders Amidst the Covid-19 Scenario. Multiple answers in %
 Wave 1: May 5 to May 11. N = 72. Wave 2: May 25 to June 6. N = 79. Wave 3: July 6 to July 16. N = 75
 Wave 4: August 17 to August 30. N = 64

Most recurring problems

The fourth wave of the survey revealed that tackling the material needs caused by the pandemic remains a major dilemma afflicting the communities. Issues related to food security (such as hunger) and access to work and income continue to be the most cited difficulties by the leaders (62%) comprising the Panel. While mentions to food insecurity decreased over the four months of the study, its magnitude and persistence denotes the seriousness of a highly socially vulnerable situation, which has become permanent, and the shortfall of public policies to circumvent this situation.

Following the same trend, the lack of income and work remain among the most listed problems by the leaders (54%), although slightly reduced when compared against the frequencies throughout the months of the study.

The leaders' references to the most intense problems (food security, work, and income) are generally followed by feelings of hopelessness against an unchanging perverse reality. In fact, the perseverance of the same problems revealed widespread dismay and no prospects of improvement in the future.

"We still lack food parcels. Plenty of unemployed people. And the communities are the same as ever: suffering a lot."

(Community leader at Parada de Taipas – São Paulo, SP)

"Everything's the same: no jobs, no food parcel donations, the emergency income assistance is still a problem (some are receiving it, while others aren't; those who are eligible don't receive it, and those who aren't eligible end up receiving it)..."

(Community leader at Jardim das Palmas – São Paulo, SP)

"Well, what you see most around here, pretty much reiterating my answer from last time, is the question of food, right? Food parcels. People approach me and ask "so, where's the parcel, when will there be more food parcels?" And we're trying our best to do it. So, basic food parcels as well as employment. Many people have lost their jobs. I even started to make CVs for people, but I'd ask myself "Damn, I'll write someone's CVs and where will they even look for a job amidst a pandemic?"

(Community leader at Morro do Macaco – Cotia, SP)

Access to other policies was the highest growing category mentioned by leaders in this last survey round: rising from 10% (in the first two waves of the study) to 23% in the third, and now reaching 31% in this edition. The expressive growth was mainly due to perceptions about access to education. In total, one in five leaders (20%) mentioned return to in-person school classes as one of the most critical problems at the moment.

Return to school emerges as a complex problem across different dimensions: (i) insecurity about the lack of adequate structure in schools in a scenario where infections rates are still at alarming levels; (ii) the fatigue of having children and teenagers at home and the losses caused by the lack of resources for distance learning; (iii) the lack of adequate care for children and adolescents while their parents and guardians return to work, which is further aggravated by the lack of options for tutoring children as other activities reopen.

The sometimes conflicting opinions on the matter reveal the fragility of the debate and the communication problems by public authorities. Nonetheless, the interviews clearly indicate that education is one of the most affected areas by the pandemic as it demands, and will continue to

demand for a long time, systematic and consistent actions to lessen inequalities which have since expanded during the recent period.

"Answering the first question, the main complaints I've heard are about the return to in-person school classes; most parents and students don't want the return the school, at least not right now, as there is still risk of infection in the pandemic, the increase of spread in our State of Pernambuco."

(Community leader at Iputinga – Recife, PE)

"What I discussed and debated with the community in the past few weeks (and which I keep talking about) was the return to school. The vast majority are against it because (...) children will come home and infect the elderly. (...) Therefore, family members are strongly against returning to school, especially since we have a government and a mayor who have not invested in health, have not invested in preparing a return to school, to classrooms. According to the government and the mayor, they'll have bottle of hand sanitizer and a fan to provide ventilation, and that's supposedly enough to ward off the virus. We know it demands a much larger investment. We leaders had many long virtual debates. We created a virtual campaign so that parents would not accept this return to school, recalling that the government and the mayor are so irresponsible that they went as far as trying to transfer their responsibility to the parents. The parents would have to sign a term of responsibility stating that, if the child becomes infected at school, the responsibility would fall under the parents."

(Community leader at Tucuruvi – São Paulo, SP)

"The greatest difficulties in the community are the lack of jobs. And public school students are unable to attend and keep up with classes due to lack of internet, computers and cellphones."

(Community leader at Coqueiral – Recife, PE)

"(...) children are facing difficulties to access the Internet. And it's particularly difficulty because many of our networks are modest or unable to stay connected. Another problem is that children don't have notebooks, many don't even have a cellphone."

(Community leader at Favela San Remo – São Paulo, SP)

"And the problems with children and school, right? Families don't have internet, phones, computers at home. And the children aren't studying... they're away from school. Because of this situation they stay at home doing nothing... we have illiterate mothers unable to explain and help with school activities, it has become very difficult in the communities..."

(Community leader at Brasilândia – São Paulo, SP)

"Problems regarding child education, as many don't have computers or Internet access."

(Community leader at Morro das Pedras – Belo Horizonte, MG)

Finally, the perception of rising infection rates and non-compliance to preventive measures also appear among the 5 most recurring problems mentioned by community leaders. Closely related, both problems are generally seen as fallouts of the relaxation of social distancing measures, which were not accompanied by effective communication guidelines and failed to inform the population of the real stage of the pandemic. The lack of clear and reliable information spurred a misguided

understanding that the situation is no longer serious, leading to reduced compliance to COVID-19 containment measures, which in the leaders' perceptions leads to increased infection rates.

"At the same time that the pandemic is getting worse in our city, with more deaths, people are more relaxed, as if the problem has been left in the past and can't affect them anymore."

(Community leader at Zona 2 – Maringá, PR)

"Here in Pina neighborhood, the biggest problem today is the reopening of the beach, as people are gathering and crowding, and even though the kiosks aren't open, there are many people gathering, many of whom without masks, which could lead to a new increase in the coronavirus, despite infections disease having stalled here in Pernambuco..."

(Community leader at Pina – Recife, PE)

"One thing we've noticed, very clearly, is the relaxation in social distancing, right? So, people now reckon that the disease is almost over and they don't really believe that the disease still exists. And now you see people walking around normally, as if there was no more pandemic. This is a worrying factor, right, because we know that this will not end here."

(Community leader at A. E. Carvalho – São Paulo, SP)

Intermediate or low recurring problems

In our fourth survey, problems concerning access to the emergency income assistance were less frequently reported. Until the third wave, circa 30% of the leaders mentioned access as one of the main challenges during the pandemic, and while the problem still persisted in our fourth inquiry, it was only reported by 16% of the respondents.

Infrastructure problems, such as access to water, electricity, and Internet remain critical for one fifth of the leaders interviewed. A little over 20% of respondents also mentioned problems in accessing health equipment and services, i.e., structural problems exacerbated by the pandemic, which engender adverse situations with wide-reaching negative consequences. On the one hand, infrastructure problems such as lack of electricity and/or Internet, which prevent access to school activities for children and teenagers, and on the other hand, the postponement of medical treatments for non-COVID-19 health issues due to the lack of available spots, equipment, and staff in hospitals and health centers, a situation that has taken a dramatic turn and with no solution in sight.

"What we saw in the last week were demands from people because of interrupted treatments, medical treatments, and even other types of care. In our neighborhood we still lack some basic services such as piped water, and because of the pandemic, unfortunately, the verification processes with the city were also interrupted, and people have been looking for this alert, right. And specially people who suffer from rheumatism, or other chronic diseases, were unable to resume their treatment right away. Things are gradually returning, but medical treatments also need to resume. And so many people are worried and seeking out these contacts. People with no earnings or who had their income suspended. The assistance benefit was yet another problem affecting many people."

(Community leader at Vila Capuá, Francisco Morato – SP)

"Exclusion and limited accessibility for disabled people, medical appointments with specialist doctors, particularly neurologists and child psychiatrists, as children are more imperative, some are more aggressive and prone to stereotypic disorders due to lack of therapies. And the need to access information and the Internet, soliciting documents or copies, and the search for food supplies."

(Community leader at San Martin, Recife - PE)

"(...) our greatest demand right now has gone back to basic sanitation, public lighting, these issues, right? Leisure, education, culture, health, we already had all these problems before the pandemic, and now they've only gotten worse..."

(Community leader at Morro Fallet-Fogueteiro, Rio de Janeiro - RJ)

Lastly, although less recurrent (mentioned by 11% of leaders), dissatisfaction with government actions and psychological impacts resulting from the pandemic were associated with the population's dismay and helplessness.

"The social invisibility of people to the public authorities."

(Community leader at Capão Redondo, São Paulo - SP)

"On the peripheral communities, you won't find communications from the city warning us to continue wearing masks, nor deliveries of masks, hand sanitizers, food parcels. It's getting worse each passing day, with the periphery in dire need of support from authorities, who practically turned their backs on the communities."

(Community leader at Pirituba, São Paulo - SP)

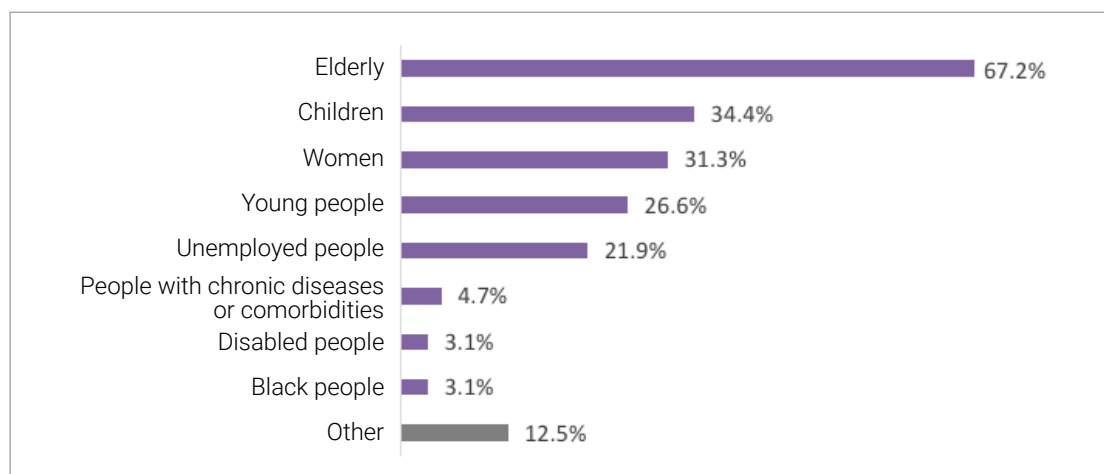
"The population has been desperate in the past recent weeks, insecure and feeling abandoned."

(Community leader at Brejo do Beberibe, Recife - PE)

Social Groups most affected by the pandemic in communities

Community leaders also expressed their perceptions as to which social groups were most affected by the pandemic, as well as the reasons for their perceptions. The elderly appeared as the most affected group, mentioned by 67% of the leaders, due to risk of death from infection, loneliness resulting from social isolation, and lack of access to health services. Children, women, and young people were also cited as severely affected groups.

Graph 4. Social groups most affected by the pandemic in communities (n = 64)



Source: Monitoring Panel with Community Leaders Amidst the Covid-19 Scenario. Multiple answers in %.

Two out of three community leaders identified the elderly as the most affected group by the pandemic. The first reason directly relates to vulnerability to the disease: the elderly comprises one of the COVID-19 risk groups, very susceptible to infection and fatal aggravations of the disease. The leaders also mentioned other indirect reasons. Given the need for social distancing, many elderly people have ceased non-COVID-19-related health treatments, which aggravated other diseases, sometimes to fatal outcomes. Finally, being part of a risk group, the pandemic forced this population to isolate themselves at home. Elderly people are literally “trapped inside their houses”, with their routines and sociability profoundly affected, factors that lead to further loneliness, feelings of abandonment, and a proliferation of depressive conditions.

Children are the second most affected group by the pandemic, according to the leaders in our survey, with 34.4% of mentions. The main reason given is the effect of social distancing on access to educational activities. Lack of access to the Internet and technological resources such as computers, cellphones, and printers were frequently mentioned, as well as the difficulty of learning and keeping up with educational content from a distance. There is also the perception that, without school lunches, many children express psychological distress with food insecurity and isolation.

“Children are staying at home and they're the most affected because they used to have four meals at school, and that's not the situation in their homes. It's really sad when a mother says she doesn't even have potatoes to put in her son's soup, so terribly sad”

(Community leader at Jardim Ângela – São Paulo, SP)

“Children, because of distance learning. In truth, an attempt at distance learning, but which is not possible because homework is being sent. Many who live in poverty are not doing the tasks because their parents aren't able to help, not to mention the (sometimes) lack of Internet to communicate with the teachers”

(Community leader at Joinville – SC)

Issues related to distance learning have also affected youth and women. Young people accounted for 26.6% of mentions and, just like for children, the main cited problem was access to education: families feel they lack the necessary resources to access the content, to keep up with classes, and prevent school evasion. In the case of women, distance education meant yet another responsibility for an already overburdened group.

Furthermore, women appear as one of the main groups affected by the pandemic (31.3%), especially due to unemployment afflicting domestic workers and housekeepers. Household mothers face more critical difficulties, according to the leaders' perceptions, as they amass the roles of material provision and family care, aggravated by the pandemic. Women were also particularly affected by the increase in domestic violence during social distancing periods.

“Many of them are single mothers, and many of these women have lost their jobs, you know. And now they're returning to the market, they're going back to their daily activities. But the big question here is who to leave the children with, besides their worries of going back to in-person school classes. That is not what they want”

(Community leader at Sapopemba – São Paulo, SP)

"Women also suffer a lot as those who work must mediate work at home and outside work, but the women who stay at home are overburdened since they're left with all the domestic problems, the children... the school which has now transferred the responsibility to the mother, to the parents, to help their children with school tasks... there was a mother who approached me and said "how am I going to help my son if I can't even read or write?"

(Community leader at Maringá – PR)

"Black women, most of whom head of their households, are trying to find a way to feed their families even during this period moment without any support. Not to mention the cases of domestic violence."

(Community leader at Recife – PE)

"Women, many of whom used the daycare center, must now take care of their children at home, and with that emerges a whole new demand, a new organization. Women and children are the major educational concerns."

(Community leader at Francisco Morato – SP)

Educational access is not the only issue afflicting young people during the pandemic, as respondents also reported unemployment and the subsequent lack of prospects for the future. Part of this group has responded to the psychological impacts of the pandemic with increased depression and use of alcohol and drugs.

"Children and young people are really the focus of the pandemic. Many parents lost their jobs, many parents are now without income, and so many had turn to crime, to drug trafficking."

(Community leader at Morro do Coroa, Rio de Janeiro, RJ)

"Young people who were pursuing... looking for jobs and activities in internships, this entire situation has affected them. That anxiety about starting their activities... the few opportunities they had, this was abruptly taken away from them."

(Community leader at Francisco Morato – São Paulo, SP)

Another commonly cited group by the leaders in our survey was unemployed people, with 21.9% of mentions. This group includes not only young people and women, but also men and heads of household.

"Unemployment is everywhere and everyone's desperate with the current unemployment situation."

(Community leader Butantã – São Paulo SP)

"Young people who can't find a job, women and fathers who have lost their jobs"

(Community leader at Torrões - Recife - PE)

"Young people and adults of both genders are suffering from unemployment, or from reduced income and what this entails, such as consuming low-quality food for themselves and their family."

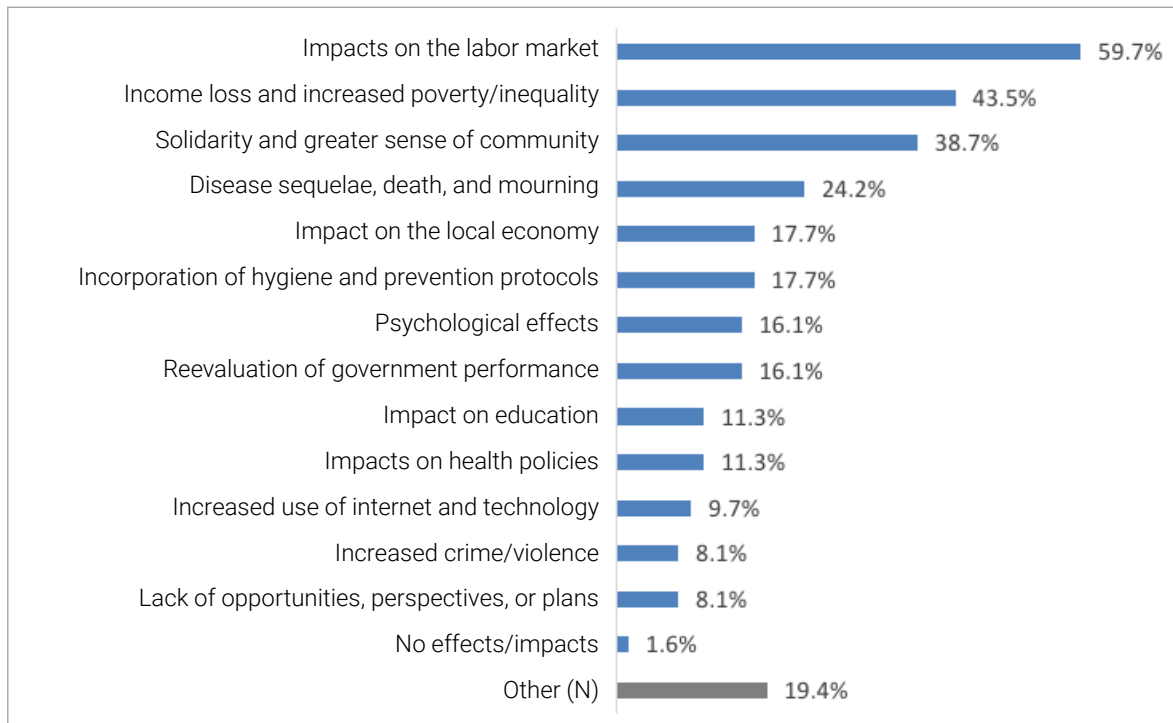
(Community leader at Santana – São Paulo, SP)

Finally, people with disabilities, chronic diseases, and comorbidities were also mentioned as groups impacted by the pandemic due to the difficulty in accessing medical care and therapeutical activities.

The pandemic and its effects on the future of communities

The fourth wave of the Panel concluded the survey with the leaders' perceptions about the effects of the pandemic on the future of their communities.

Graph 5: The effects of the pandemic on the future of communities (n= 62)



Source: Monitoring Panel with Community Leaders Amidst the Covid-19 Scenario. Multiple answers in %.

Impacts on the labor market and occupational insertion

Mentions to the negative impacts of the pandemic on the labor market and occupational insertion were the most recurrent, comprising almost 60% of the total citations.

They expect that the economic and health crisis will continue to negatively affect future opportunities, leading to further risk of unemployment, informality, and job instability. The leaders also mentioned changes in the strategies for finding work and generating income, with an increase in "side hustles", self-employment, entrepreneurship, and even a more intensive use of social networks for marketing and providing services.

It'll take a long time to recover jobs and from the increased informality.

(Community leader at Sítio do Berardo, Recife)

Society endured losses in employability (...) everything previously organized has now changed, with an impact, above all, on politics and the economy.

(Community leader at Jardim São José, São Paulo, SP)

Many people are trying to adapt to the new reality, seeking other means of income. Many people left the formal labor market to venture into the informal market. Some even manage to sustain themselves and pay their debts, earning income from handicrafts, selling cosmetic products, or even digitally over the internet.

(Community leader at São Remo, São Paulo- SP)

Income loss and increased poverty and inequality

The second most cited effect is the income drop in communities, which in turn led to increased poverty and inequality. This issued received 45% of mentions regarding the future effects of the pandemic.

As the crisis unfolds and affects the labor market, amidst growing uncertainty about the continuation of the government income assistance program, the leaders predict that access to income will remain critical, with rising poverty and social vulnerability in communities.

I believe we'll see the aftermath after the pandemic, with a very large number of unemployed people. (...) I can't measure what will happen once the emergency income assistance ends (...) but here in the community the end of the emergency assistance will lead to extremely serious economic consequences. (...) I believe the effect of the pandemic will be hunger and misery.

(Community leader at Bairro A.E. Carvalho, São Paulo, SP)

As a negative point, the future will demand plenty of financial assistance, a lot of debts, overdue credit cards, unemployment, hunger, and looting.

(Community leader at MBoi Mirim, São Paulo, SP)

We'll see lack of income and unemployment, since most are surviving from this emergency assistance and when the situation is over it will be very difficult.

(Community leader at BuritisII, Planaltina, DF)

Lasting effects from illness, deaths, and mourning

In addition to the economic dimensions, another negative development mentioned by the interviewed leaders was the lasting permanence of the feeling of mourning and loss in the communities.

Circa 24.2% of the mentions referred to the direct consequences of Covid-19 infection, such as deaths and long-lasting effects. There is a strong perception that these vulnerable territories have been harshly affected by COVID. Sadness and mourning for the losses were mentioned as dramatic consequences of the pandemic in these locations.

As for the future effects of the pandemic on our community, I think it comes down to the losses, right. Many people, some elderly people who died here. As well as the issue of vulnerability, as we've noticed a huge discrepancy in social issues. Those on the periphery are more likely to have contact with Covid-19 than those who live in other neighborhoods.

(Community leader, São Remo, São Paulo-SP)

There'll be a huge scar left for everyone. (...) that's what the pandemic has already left us with, longing. Things and people who were lost and left behind.

(Community leader at Morro dos Macacos, Cotia-SP)

All this loss will change things. The loss of people who died, people who still suffer lasting effects. Some people will have lasting effects. As well as the losses of people who died, right

(Community leader at Coque, Recife - PE)

Impacts on the local economy

Impacts on the local economies represented 17.7% of the mentions by the interviewed leaders. The leaders believe that the crisis has also directly affected the economy of vulnerable territories, with less money flow and small commercial establishments and service providers deteriorating in the territories.

What we saw here in our region... we realized that a lot of shops closed, a lot of stores such as markets, bakeries, butcher shops. I saw many closed businesses. That's a scary thing. And you realize that the local commerce cannot sustain itself.

(Community leader at A.E. Carvalho, São Paulo-SP)

The downside is that many people have closed their stores and are financially unable to reopen them.

(Community leader at Paraisópolis, São Paulo-SP)

Psychological effects

The expectation that the pandemic will have an impact on the mental and psychological health of community residents was mentioned by 16.1% of the leaders interviewed. Depression, anxiety, hopelessness, and lack of perspective due to mourning, social isolation, and the economic crisis are some of the psychological effects predicted by the study's informants.

The pandemic will leave behind some lasting effects: people who are more depressed or anxious, further entrenched poverty, financial hardships further afflicting people who already endure difficulties.

(Community leader at Floriano, Maringá-PR)

I believe that, for now, the biggest problem we face is a psychological issue for youth. More people turning to alcohol and drugs.

(Community leader at Campo Limpo, São Paulo-SP)

Increased solidarity and sense of community

As a future positive effect of the pandemic, the leaders mentioned the strengthening of the sense of community, which has spawned several local solidarity initiatives since the outset of the health crisis, as well as the incorporation of hygiene and prevention habits.

The respondents emphasized the positive prospect of incorporating hygiene measures disseminated during the pandemic in the daily lives of communities. Circa 18% of mentions referred to this expectation for the future. They believe that these protocols will become common in communities in the long-term.

Regarding the effects that the pandemic will leave behind, one example is hygiene, which we already practiced, but we didn't practice this type of cleaning as often, you know.

(Community leader at Ibura, Recife-PE)

One positive point is the increased awareness of the importance of personal care and hygiene.

(Community leader at Cidade de Deus, Manaus, AM)

Furthermore, and even more pronounced, almost 40% of respondents professed an optimistic expectation that community actions for tackling their problems will remain strong and organized after the pandemic.

According to the leaders, the dramatic experience of the pandemic revealed the importance of organizing themselves and the sense of belonging. Thus, they believe that the social engagement process is a positive legacy that tends to persist in vulnerable communities.

The positive side is that communities began to understand that they need to organize themselves to save ourselves, because in the end we're on our own.

(Community leader at Ilha do Retiro, Recife-PE)

The positive thing is that the community learned its strength! Without the government, without the state, without the city! The favela helping the favela!

(Community leader at Paraisópolis, São Paulo-SP)

And a positive legacy for the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and all over Brazil is that people have joined forces, sat at the table, not as politicians, but as community leaders. (...) So, we set up a solidarity network. (...) I can safely say that the communities are prepared for any pandemic that comes from outside to affect the slums.

(Community leader at Morro da Coroa, Rio de Janeiro-RJ)

Reevaluation of Government performance

Circa 16% of the reports signaled to lasting effects in electoral politics. Among the interviewed leaders, there is a strong expectation that the pandemic has sparked a more critical view among community residents in relation to public authorities, government officials, and future political candidates. The perception that government performance was unsatisfactory in vulnerable territories could potentially inform future choices in the upcoming elections, penalizing candidates uncommitted to these communities.

A positive thing in all this: it got the community to think, the periphery to think better in the next elections as to who they'll elect, who they'll vote for, ensuring that it'll be someone who truly does something for the peripheries, which are forgotten.

(Community leader at São Remo, São Paulo-SP)

A great deal of discontent with the government due to the irresponsible way authorities have dealt with this situation thus far. A lot of people are angry at the government, yes, because they're feeling it close to home, the economy, money, these things ... So I think that's something that will persist.

(Community leader at Morro do Macaco, Cotia-SP)

ABOUT

We are over 100 researchers, actively engaged in the task of improving the quality of public policies within federal, state, and municipal governments as they seek to act amidst the Covid-19 crisis to save lives. We dedicate our energies towards rigorous data collection, devising substantial information, formulating indicators, and elaborating models and analyses to monitor and identify pathways for public policies and review the responses presented by the population.

The Solidary Research Network has researchers from all scientific fields (Humanities as well as Exact and Biological Sciences) in Brazil and overseas. For us, the combination of skills and techniques is vital as we face the current pandemic. The challenge ahead is enormous, but it is particularly invigorating. And it would never have come to fruition if it weren't for the generous contribution of private institutions and donors who swiftly answered our calls. We are profoundly grateful to all those who support us.

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