

Exploring the reasons for school dropout in Brazil: an analysis based on the education supplement of PNADC-2022

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Summary. This technical note aims to contribute to the characterization of young Brazilians from 15 to 21 years old who are out of school. In particular, it proposes to characterize the reasons given for being out of school, also considering possible differences between the pre- and post-Covid-19 pandemic period. The note seeks to characterize possible differences in the reasons for abandoning school according to age, sex, and income groups. Poorer women mostly point to pregnancy as the main reason for being out of school, while poorer men point to work. For both, the lack of interest is also a relevant factor.

Introduction

The school period is a fundamental stage in the lives of young people. Those who attend school partake of opportunities to learn fundamental concepts in various areas of knowledge, in addition to developing important skills such as communication skills, problem solving and teamwork. These cognitive and socio-emotional skills are decisive for insertion in the labor market and, consequently, for the degree of social mobility that young people will have during their life cycle¹.

Although in recent decades Brazil has been successful in expanding access to basic schooling (OECD, 2021), there is still an alarming number of young people who leave the education system early. As shown in Table 1, this situation still affects 2.8 million young people aged between 15 and 21 years.

Table 1 also shows the profile of this group of young people who were out of school in the second quarter of 2022. Note that, of the total of young people who were out of school and who did not finish Basic Education, about 60% were men and 70% of these were young non-whites. It is also noteworthy that the concentration is higher at older ages: more than 80% of the young people who were out of school were 18 years or older. In addition, about 60 percent of these young people were among the poorest 40 percent and only 5 percent were among the richest 20 percent. This shows under-representation of the richest in the group of young people who were out of school and over-representation of the poorest.

¹In addition to the economic aspects, the economic literature also points to the non-economic benefits of education (Heckman et al., 2018)

This over-representation of the poorest is worrisome from the point of view of social mobility, since early exit from school hinders the possibility of social ascension of these young people.

Table 1. Total number of young people aged 15 to 21 who did not complete Basic Education and who were out of school according to sex, skin color/race, income and age: 2022.

Group		Out of school*
Total		2,826
Sex	Men	1,639
	Women	1,187
Skin color or race	White	803
	Non-white	1,991
Income	20% poorest	875
	20%-40%	842
	40%-60%	600
	60%-80%	347
	20% richest	157
Age	15-17	462
	18-19	995
	20-21	1,369

* In thousands of people

Source: Elaboration of the authors based on the National Household Sample Survey (*Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios*): Education Supplement, 2022.

Note: *Per capita* household income was used to define income groups. The income groups do not add up to 2,826 (100%) due to missing information in the income variable. The skin color/race groups do not add up to 2,826 (100%), because there are other skin colors/races not analyzed in this note.

In addition to the share of young people out of school itself, it is also important to understand which groups are most affected by this problem. This way, a more accurate diagnosis of the problem can be reached in the Brazilian scenario.

Table 2 shows the share of young people who were out of school according to sex, skin color or race, and income group. Among young people aged 15 to 21 years and level of education below the complete Basic Education, 21.54% were out of school in the second quarter of 2022.

It is noted that this share is higher among men, among young non-white people, among the poorest and among older young people. The need to work explains why there is a

higher share of out-of-school youth among men when compared to women. Non-whites are also the most affected by this problem since their school trajectories are marked by greater difficulties². School difficulties are also more present in the trajectory of the poorest, who are the most impacted by the problem pointed out.

Table 2. Share of young people aged 15 to 21 who did not complete Basic Education and who were out of school according to sex, skin color/race, income, and age: 2022.

Group		Share out-of-school
Total		21.54%
Sex	Men	23.44%
	Women	19.36%
Skin color or race	Whites	17.47%
	Non-whites	23.68%
Income	20% poorest	24.28%
	20%-40%	23.59%
	40%-60%	21.25%
	60%-80%	20.03%
	20% richest	11.47%
Age	15-17	5.23%
	18-19	39.77%
	20-21	76.22%

Source: Elaboration of the authors based on the National Household Sample Survey (*Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios*): Education Supplement, 2022.

Note: *Per capita* household income was used to define income groups.

There was a significant difference between the age groups analyzed. Of the 15 to 17-year-olds who did not complete Basic Education, only 5.23% were out of school. Note that for this age group, in particular, the condition of not having completed Basic Education does not considerably restrict young people, since this group is of high school age. In the other age groups, the condition of not having completed Basic Education is more restrictive. The consequence of this is that the older these young people are, the greater the probability of age-series distortion and also the greater the average distortion. In other words: the older the young person, the greater the probability of delay in relation to the grade they should be attending. Thus, as the age-grade distortion is an important factor to explain the exit from school, it is observed that the larger the age group analyzed, the greater the share of young people who were out of school.

This technical note systematically considers the reasons revealed by young people aged 15 to 21 years for the decision to

²In addition to the socioeconomic aspect, there is evidence of racial inequalities in educational trajectories in Brazil. Even when they belong to the same socioeconomic level, there are differences between the share of non-white and white students who achieve adequate learning rates, for example. To see more, visit <https://gestao.qedu.org.br/planilha/desigualdades-ligadas-a-cor-raca/>

discontinue the process of formal schooling. Using data available from the *PNAD Contínua* Education supplement for the most recent years, the note presents a characterization of the reasons pointed out by young people for the decision to be out of school, considering potential heterogeneities by age, sex, and by income group.

Databases

All the data used in the analysis below comes from the

National Continuous Household Sample Survey (*PNAD Contínua*), conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). The IBGE conducts supplementary surveys to the *PNAD Contínua* in specific quarters of the year. In this technical note, in particular, the supplementary education survey was used, which is released in the second quarter of each year. This supplementary survey provides information on whether the person attends school and, if not, why they stopped attending. This information on why they stopped attending school is available only in the education supplement of the *PNAD Contínua*. Although the *PNAD Contínua* began in 2012, this supplemental education survey is available only as of 2016. Also, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a discontinuity in the release of this supplement, so there is no data from this survey for the years 2020 and 2021.

In this study, we used the sample of young interviewees aged between 15 and 21 years at the time of the interview. We use this age cutout because it is during high school that dropout becomes more severe.³ Considering young people up to 21 years old is important because this public can still be the object of active search policies.⁴ In addition, it was decided to keep in the base only young people with a level of education lower than complete high school. This cut was made because young people who are out of school with a level of education equal to or higher than complete high school may not exactly represent a problem, since these individuals have completed at least basic education.

In the analyses of differences by income group, we chose to compare 20% of the lowest incomes (the poorest) with 20% of the highest incomes (the richest). To define these groups, *per capita* household income is used, a variable also available in the *PNAD Contínua*.

³For a more in-depth diagnosis of school dropout in Brazil, see <https://imdsbrasil.org/artigo/diagnostico-do-abandono-e-da-evasao-escolar-no-brasil>

⁴Active search policies aim to identify and track children and adolescents who were out of school or at risk of dropping out. The Imds has supported one of these policies (the *Bora para Escola* Program, of the Municipal Secretariat of Rio de Janeiro) and closely followed others (*Todos Jovens na Escola*, from the State of Rio Grande do Sul). Other examples of policies adopted by states and municipalities are: Espírito Santo with the *Todos na Escola* Program, Pernambuco with the *Pacto Pela Educação* Program and Goiás with the *Acolher para Permanecer* Program.

The main variable of interest for this study informs what is the main reason for the individual to have stopped attending school⁵, if that is the situation. This information is only available in the *PNAD Contínua* education supplement. In this question, the interviewer offers the interviewee alternatives for the main reason for not attending school. The alternatives are: I needed to work; there was no school in the vicinity, or vacancy, or desired shift; there was a lack of money to pay for tuition, transportation, school supplies, etc.; due to pregnancy; had to do household chores or take care of people; gave up because they weren't learning or because of too much repetition; completed the level of study they desired; the school was not adapted for people with disabilities; due to a permanent health problem; had no interest in studying; another reason. As there are many possible reasons, it was decided to consider only the main reasons and gather the others into "other reasons". Thus, the reasons considered in this note are: Needed to work; no school or vacancy or desired shift in the vicinity; due to pregnancy; had to do household chores or take care of people; permanent health problems; lack of interest in studying; other reasons.

Results

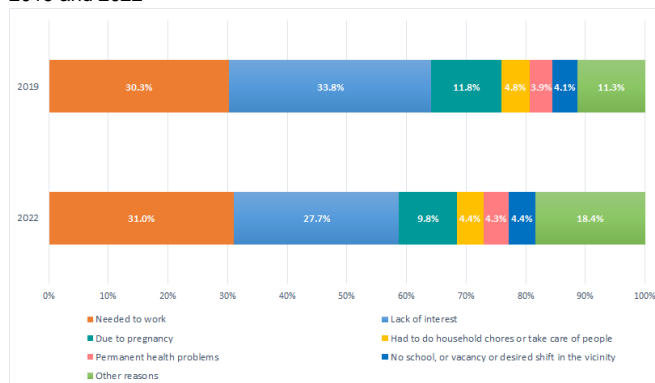
This section presents a characterization of the reasons why young people have stopped attending school. Overall differences between 2019 and 2022 (pre- and post-pandemic) and differences by sex, age, and income groups in 2022 are analyzed.

A. General Patterns. Graph 1 presents the main reasons that led young people to have stopped attending school before completing Basic Education, in 2019 and 2022. Thus, we have a picture of these decisions in the pre- and post-Covid-19 pandemic periods.

In 2019, the main reason for young people to stop attending school was a lack of interest. In 2022 there is a difference: the main reason pointed out became the need to work. There was a slight decrease in absence from school due to pregnancy (-2 p.p.). Health problems, the need for household chores or caring for people and the lack of school in the desired locality, vacancy or shift presented stability in the period (less than 0.5 p.p. of variation).

⁵Note that the individual answers the reason in reference to the moment when he stopped attending school.

Graph 1. Young people from 15 to 21 years of age who have not completed Basic Education because they have stopped attending school: 2019 and 2022



Source: Elaboration of the authors based on the National Household Sample Survey (*Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios*): Education Supplement, 2019 and 2022.

There was a large reduction in the percentage of young people who stopped attending school due to lack of interest (-6.1 p.p.). On the other hand, there was a large increase in the percentage of young people who answered any of the questions grouped as other reasons (+7.1 p.p.). It is important to note that this increase stems from the greater share of young people who pointed out, in fact, another reason for not attending school - and not from any of the reasons that were grouped in "other reasons".

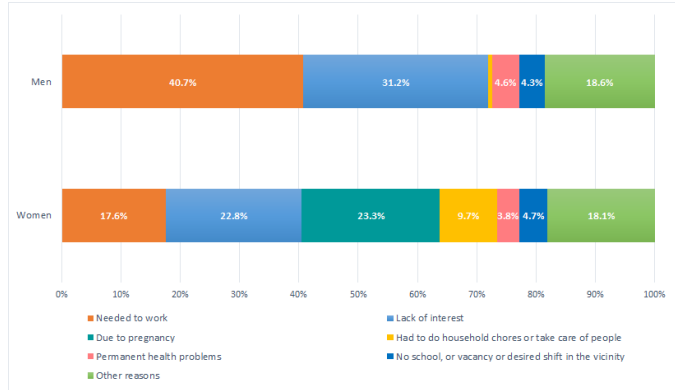
In general, young people between the ages of 15 and 21 stop attending school to work or out of interest. These two main reasons added together reach about 60% of these young people who left school without at least completing Basic Education.

This general configuration, however, masks important differences in observable characteristics of out-of-school youth. For a more accurate diagnosis, it is important to analyze possible differences in the reasons given for the absence from school. This note, in particular, presents the differences by sex, by age, and by income strata⁶.

B. Differences by Sex. Graph 2 considers the differences in responses between men and women. For men, work is the main reason given, accounting for 40.7% of the reasons for being out of school. Then, disinterest, which corresponds to 31.2% of respondents.

⁶It is important to highlight that, according to the results, there are no relevant differences by skin color or race in the reasons indicated by the young people for having stopped attending school. Thus, we chose not to present these results.

Graph 2. Young people aged 15 to 21 who have not completed Basic Education, by sex, and main reasons for having stopped attending school: 2022

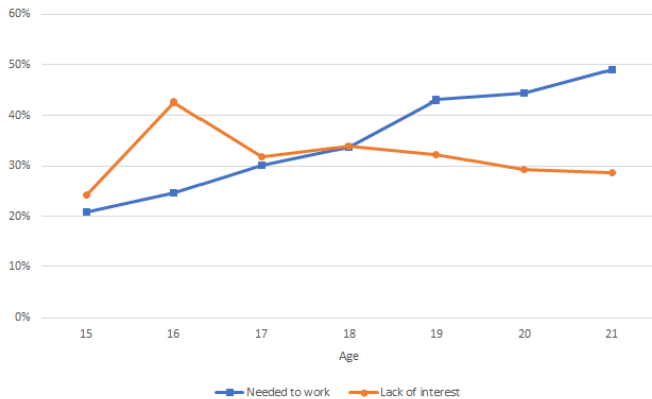


Source: Elaboration of the authors based on the National Household Sample Survey (*Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios*): Education Supplement, 2022.

For women, pregnancy is the main reason they have left school, followed by lack of interest and, only then, work. Of the total number of young women who left their studies, 23.3% had pregnancy as their main reason. Also notable is the percentage of women who left school due to the need to perform domestic chores or take care of people (9.7% for women and less than 1% for men).

C. Differences by Age. The differences between the main reasons for not attending school vary according to age.

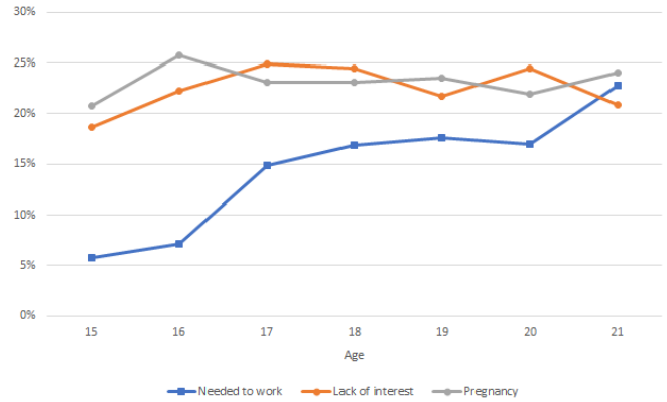
Graph 3. Young people aged 15 to 21 who have not completed Basic Education, by age and by main reason for having stopped attending school: Men, 2022



Source: Elaboration of the authors based on the National Household Sample Survey (*Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios*): Education Supplement, 2022.

As shown in Graph 3, for men aged 15 to 18 years, the main reason for not attending school was lack of interest. From the age of 19, the need to work prevails as the main reason.

Graph 4. Young people aged 15 to 21 who have not completed Basic Education, by age, and main reasons for having stopped attending school: Women, 2022

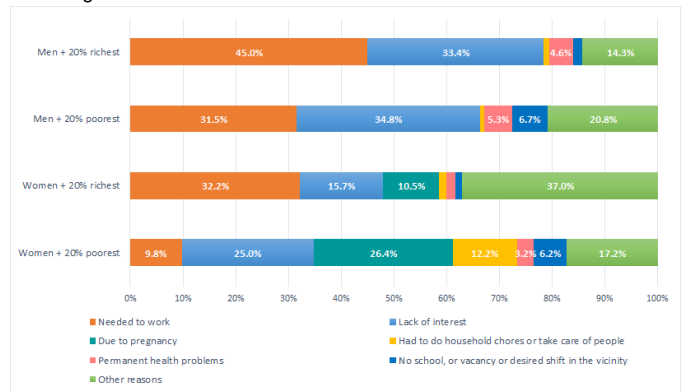


Source: Elaboration of the authors based on the National Household Sample Survey (*Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios*): Education Supplement, 2022.

As seen above, for women, in addition to the lack of interest and the need to work, there is a third reason that stands out: pregnancy. Graph 4 shows that the most relevant reason for not attending school alternates between lack of interest and pregnancy. Also note that as age increases, the need to work becomes more relevant to explain the absence of women from school.

D. Income Differences. Graph 5 presents the reasons for school absence considering income groups: 20% richer and 20% poorer.

Graph 5. Young people aged 15 to 21 who have not completed Basic Education, by income and sex groups, and the reason for having stopped attending school: 2022



Source: Elaboration of the authors based on the National Household Sample Survey (*Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios*): Education Supplement, 2022.
Note: *Per capita* household income was used to define income groups.

From the Graph above, one can identify some important differences. It is noted that, for the richest young people - both men and women - the main reason given for not attending school was work. For the poorest 20% who have decided to stop attending schools, work, lack of interest and pregnancy stand out - the latter for women. It is worthwhile

pointing out that the number of poor young people who stopped attending school before finishing Basic Education is much higher than the number of rich young people (see Table 1).

The wealthiest men who stopped attending school largely report that the main reason was work. Among the poorest, work and lack of interest are the most frequent reasons. For the poorest women, pregnancy was pointed out as the main reason for not attending school. For wealthier women, however, pregnancy is not widely touted as an obstacle to study. In this group, the main reason given for not attending school was work. The need to perform household chores or care for people is another reason that most broadly affects poor women.

Other factors that affect poor young people more when compared to the richer ones are the lack of schools in the desired locality, vacancy, or shift, as well as permanent health problems.

Final Comments

This technical note contributes to the characterization of young Brazilians who were out of school in 2022. Despite the advancement of basic education in Brazil over the last few years (OECD, 2021), there are still 2.8 million young people out of school (Table 1).

A characteristic of this young people out-of-school scenario in Brazil is that the most affected groups are men, non-whites and the poorest (Table 2). Men are more affected, in general, by the greater need to work when compared to women. Young non-white people and poorer young people face greater difficulties in their school trajectories, which explains why they are more affected by this problem.

When analyzing the reasons given for the absence from school, it is noted that, in general, young people stop attending school to work or due to lack of interest. About 60% of young people who have stopped attending point out that one of these is the main reason.

We note the importance of also analyzing the reasons given by the different affected groups for being out of school. For women, the main reason given was pregnancy. This reason, however, is significant only for the poorest women, since it is not notably pointed out by the richest women who are out of school (Graph 5). Therefore, pregnancy as a factor of withdrawal of poorer women from the school trajectory deserves a close look from public policy makers.

In addition, there is a high percentage of women who stopped attending school due to the need to perform household chores or take care of people (9.7%). For men, work is the main reason pointed out,

followed by a lack of interest in studying. The main reason the wealthiest left school was work. For the poorest, it is important to distinguish between men and women. Poorer women mostly point to reasons such as pregnancy and lack of interest. The poorest men point mainly to the need to work and then to the lack of interest. Note also that the poorest are 5.6 times more affected by this problem of absence from school (Table 1).

We understand that a careful consideration of these reasons can contribute to the elaboration of public policies and social programs that allow: (i) reintegration of young people who have dropped out to complete basic education; (ii) prevent the dropout of young people who are currently linked to the educational system. It is important that public policy makers be aware of the reasons given by the groups most affected by the absence of school. In particular, the pregnancy pointed out by the poorest women, and, in addition, work and lack of interest pointed out by the poorest men stand out.

References

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