


DEMANDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE AREA OF LEISURE, EDUCATION AND WORK: A PORTRAIT OF THE REALITY IN SELECTED NEIGHBORHOODS OF MONTES CLAROS/MG

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ABSTRACT

Youth is a recurring theme in the Social Sciences and Psychology and the crucial point in this debate is the public policies designed and implemented for this population. In this sense, Dye (2011) points out that public policies are what the government chooses or does not do. In a clearer and more didactic way, "Public Policies are the totality of actions, goals and plans that governments (national, state or municipal) outline to achieve the well-being of society and the public interest" (Sebrae/MG, 2008). Public interest in the problems associated with youth is growing. Certainly, such reflection is closely related to the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the context in which it is inserted. The neighborhoods selected for the research are in a peripheral region of the city of Montes Claros, where a large part of its residents are from the lower class, where government actions aimed at education, professional qualification, access to culture and leisure, among others, are essential. A public policy agenda that takes into account the social context and the particularities of this public is important. With these elements, the objective of this work is to present the main demands of young people, aged 15 to 29 years, from the neighborhoods of Jardim São Geraldo, Vargem Grande, Joaquim Costa, Ciro dos Anjos, Chiquinho Guimarães and Chácara dos Mangues, in the municipality of Montes Claros (north of Minas Gerais) for public policies in the area of leisure, education and work. To meet the proposed objectives, we used the focus group, a qualitative research technique, combined with the application of a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

Keywords: Youth. Citizenship. Public Policies. Montes Claros/MG.

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INTRODUCTION

Youth is a recurring theme in the Social Sciences and Psychology, and the crucial point in this debate is the public policies designed and implemented for this population. In this sense, Dye (2011) points out that public policies are what the government chooses or does not do. In a clearer and more didactic way, "Public Policies are the totality of actions, goals and plans that governments (national, state or municipal) outline to achieve the well-being of society and the public interest" (Sebrae/MG, 2008). Public interest in the problems associated with youth is growing. Certainly, such reflection is closely related to the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the context in which it is inserted.

The neighborhoods selected for the research are in a peripheral region of the city of Montes Claros, where a large part of its residents are from the lower class, where government actions aimed at education, professional qualification, access to culture and leisure, among others, are essential. A public policy agenda that takes into account the social context and the particularities of this public is important. In this context, access to leisure activities is fundamental for the integral development of the human being, as guaranteed in the federal constitution, in Article 6, of Chapter II: "Social rights are education, health, food, work, housing, transportation, leisure, security, social security, protection of maternity and childhood, assistance to the helpless, in the form of this Constitution".

In the wake of this debate, an illustrative example is leisure, among other characteristics, it fulfills an educational role, due to its pedagogical possibilities, as it can provide the individual with socialization, cultural, intellectual and physical development; critical capacity and transformation of a reality; and it also encourages creativity. The implementation and consolidation of public leisure policies aims at the development of citizenship so that cultural and sports activities become part of the daily life of most people. Among the countless possibilities, such policies can contribute to expanding leisure and rest areas in cities, to the construction of spaces for sports practices, to the development of young people.

This paper presents the final result of the Research Project "Youth and Public Policies: a survey of the demands of young people in selected neighborhoods of Montes Claros/MG", developed at the Antônio Canela State School (E.E.A.C). With these elements, the objective of this work is to analyze the main demands of young people, aged 15 to 29 years, from the neighborhoods of Jardim São Geraldo, Vargem Grande, Joaquim

Costa, Ciro dos Anjos, Chiquinho Guimarães and Chácara dos Mangues, in the municipality of Montes Claros (north of Minas Gerais) for public policies in the area of leisure, education and work.

To meet the proposed objectives, it was necessary to articulate a quantitative and qualitative approach, articulating two research techniques: the questionnaire and the focus group. The questionnaire was applied to the young people of the school itself and later the research team went to the field to apply it to the young people of the neighborhoods. As Alburquerque (2009) points out, the technique is repeated until saturation or until the desired sample has been reached. The questionnaires were answered electronically, through *Google Forms*. The focus group, a qualitative research technique, was done as a way of complementing the information obtained through the questionnaires. Morgan (1997) *apud* Gondim (2003) reinforces that the focus group is a way of collecting data and information through group interactions when proposing specific topics. Thus, we made the focus group with students from the Antônio Canela State School, a school located in the Jardim São Geraldo neighborhood, in Montes Claros. The focus group, combined with the application of questionnaires, allowed us to understand the main demands of young people in this region for public policies in the area of leisure.

Although the research encompasses a local reality in a specific city, the results presented here can be identified in several other cities in the country, where more developed regions have a watchful eye of the public authorities, while the peripheral regions of the city are, in fact, on the margins of the reach of public resources.

CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES OF PUBLIC POLICIES FOR YOUTH

The Antônio Canela State School is located in the Jardim São Geraldo neighborhood and serves students from this neighborhood and others, mainly from the Vargem Grande neighborhood, Joaquim Costa, Ciro dos Anjos and Chiquinho Guimarães. These neighborhoods are in a peripheral region of the city, where most of its residents are from the lower class, highlighting the importance of government actions aimed at education, professional qualification, access to culture and leisure, among other essential aspects. According to Bourdieu (1983), the social context exerts a determining influence on the opportunities and trajectories of individuals, evidencing the need for policies that promote equal access and inclusion.

It is not uncommon to hear reports from students and professors about situations that make us reflect on the relevance of a public policy agenda sensitive to the social context and the specificities of this public. The Youth Statute reinforces this need by establishing fundamental principles and guidelines for the development of young people, especially in item II, which emphasizes the importance of broad youth participation in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies. In this sense, Fraser (1997) highlights the importance of social justice as a pillar for the design of inclusive public policies, recognizing the needs and voices of marginalized groups.

Although the field of public policies is a fertile ground for studies and research in the academic and political environment, investigating public policies aimed at youth is not trivial. As Giddens (1991) points out, policy planning must consider the multiplicity of possible paths and the complexity of contemporary social conditions. It is essential to recognize that, given the particularities of the socioeconomic contexts and the temporality in which young people are inserted, constant updating and critical analysis of the current scenario are essential to achieve the desired results.

Furthermore, the political reality is constantly changing, which, according to Bauman (2000), requires a dynamic and flexible approach to policy development, capable of responding to the challenges and changes of the current context. Therefore, the need for an unprecedented and contextualized survey of the current political scenario reinforces the commitment to effective and inclusive public policies for youth.

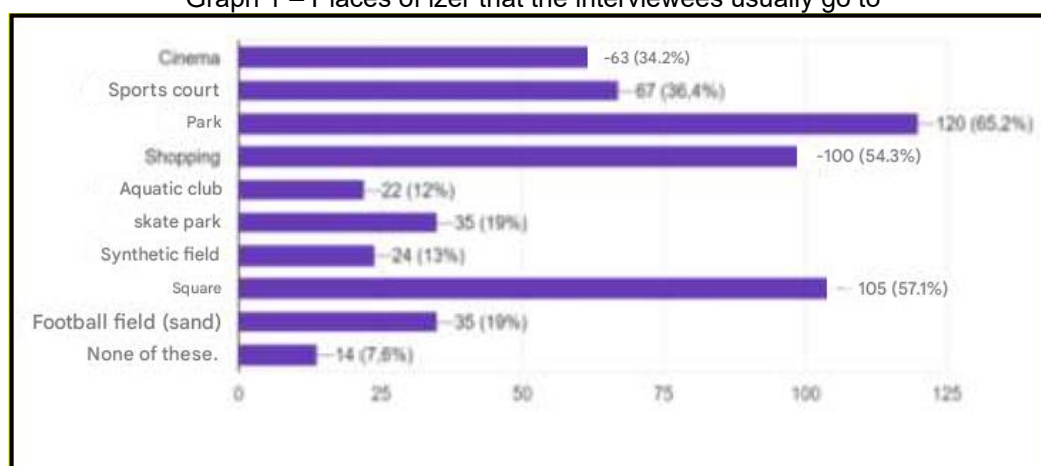
PUBLIC LEISURE SPACES: DEMANDS AND CHALLENGES

The data obtained in the survey indicate that the leisure places most frequented by the young people interviewed are, in descending order, parks (65%), squares (57.1%), *shopping malls* (54.3%), sports courts (36.4%), cinemas (34.2%), skate parks (19%), soccer fields (13%), synthetic fields (13%) and water clubs (12%). It is also observed that 7.6% of the interviewees stated that they did not attend any of these spaces. These numbers reveal a predominant tendency of young people to opt for public places, such as parks and squares. This preference is linked to economic factors, given that many do not have the financial resources to access paid spaces, such as water clubs or other private environments.

In view of this, the relevance of expanding and improving the infrastructure of accessible public spaces in the researched region becomes evident. Many of these places

may be in precarious conditions, which reinforces the need for public policies that prioritize their revitalization. The creation and maintenance of public leisure areas are essential to promote social inclusion and offer affordable alternatives for young people. In this sense, Pierre Bourdieu explains how economic and cultural conditions shape social practices and the choices of individuals. In the case analyzed, the leisure of young people is directly conditioned by economic limitations, which restrict their options to free or low-cost places, such as squares and parks, as shown in graph 1, while excluding many of these young people from more elite spaces.

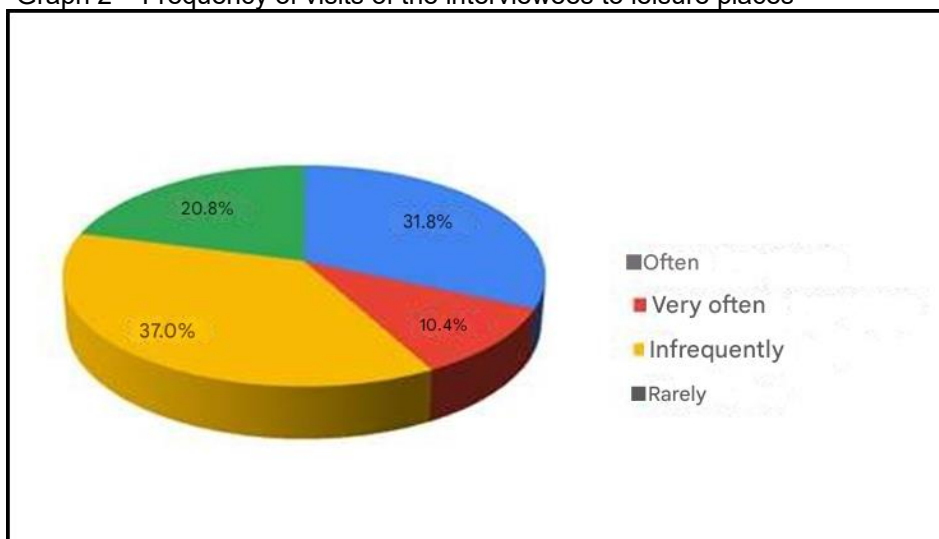
Graph 1 – Places of lzer that the interviewees usually go to



Source: Survey data, 2022.

Regarding the frequency of visits to the places mentioned in graph 1, it can be seen, according to graph 2, that most of the interviewees go infrequently to leisure places, 37%. 31.8% go frequently, 20.8% rarely, and 10.4% go very often.

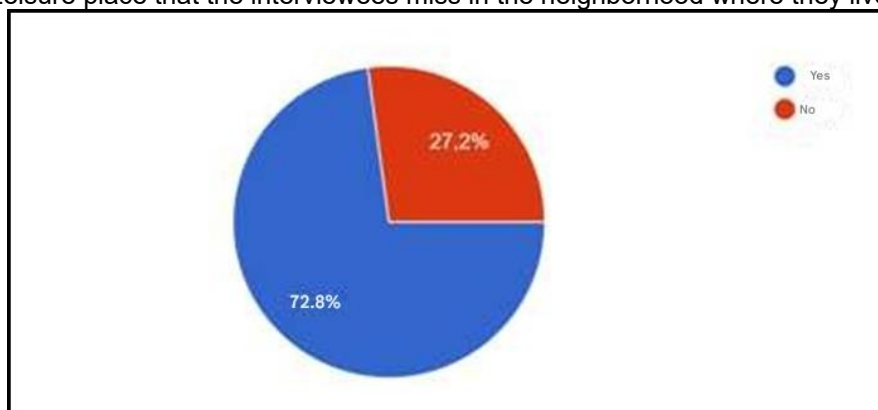
Graph 2 – Frequency of visits of the interviewees to leisure places



Source: Survey data, 2022.

In graph 3, the data reveal that almost all of them, 72.8%, of the interviewees miss a place of leisure in their neighborhood and another 27.2% do not miss any place of leisure in their neighborhood.

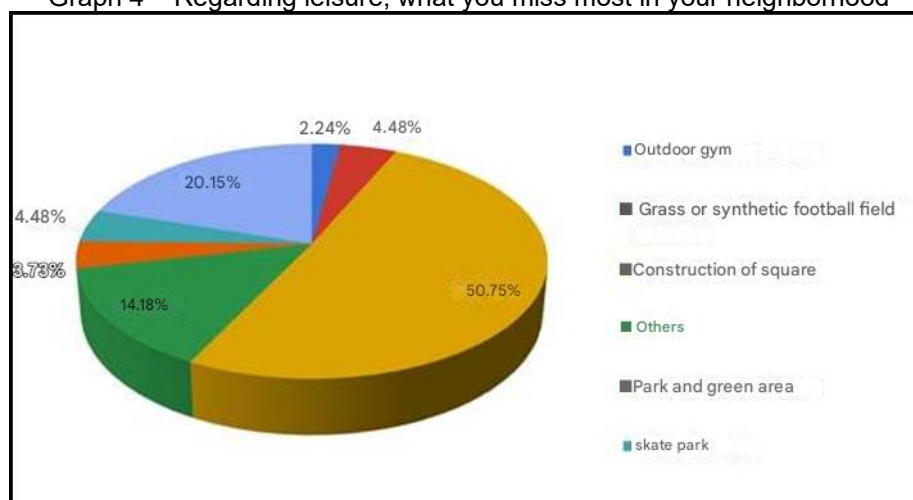
Graph 3 – Leisure place that the interviewees miss in the neighborhood where they live



Source: Survey data, 2022.

Analyzing graph 4, below, we can identify that 50.75% of people miss the construction of a square, 20.15% a skate park, 4.48% the construction of a grass (or synthetic) soccer field and a skate park, with 3.73% a park or green area, and finally 2.24% want an outdoor gym.

Graph 4 – Regarding leisure, what you miss most in your neighborhood



Source: Survey data, 2022.

Through these data, we observed that the interviewees miss the construction of a square in their neighborhood the most, which is clearly a demand from young people, and then the skate park is also highly requested, because in addition to being a sport, it is a means of making new friends.

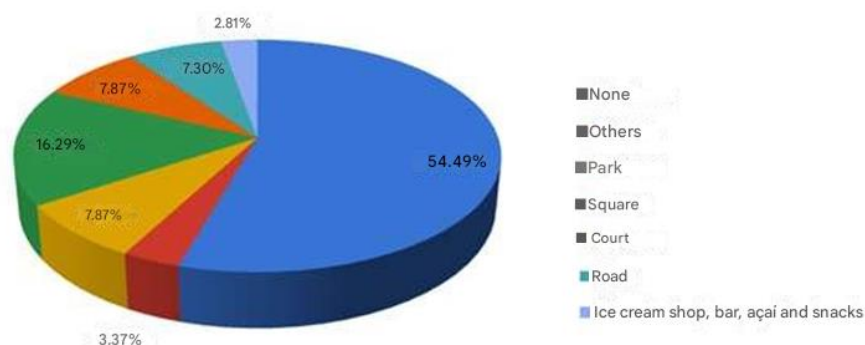
All these leisure places mentioned by the young people are extremely important as a means of entertaining themselves, strengthening friendships, practicing sports, among other various opportunities created by these places where crime is very intense. Squares and courts, in general, leisure places can contribute to taking young people out of the world of crime, because access to leisure and a dignified and healthy life are essential for the development of a healthy youth.

Respondents from all neighborhoods surveyed answered that they miss leisure places in their neighborhoods, this is due to these neighborhoods not having a place conducive to young people having fun. In the region studied there is only an inadequate dirt field where young people practice sports and a small square, with poor lighting and security.

We can see, as shown in graph 5, that 7.87% of the young people located in the neighborhoods of Jardim São Geraldo, Chiquinho Guimarães, Ciro dos Anjos and Mangues go to the park to have fun, 16.29% go to the square, 7.87% go to the court, 7.30% go to the street, 2.81% go to the ice cream parlor, bar, açaí and snack, 3.37% go to other places and 54.49% do not go anywhere to have fun. This last data draws our attention, but it is not surprising, since there are no suitable leisure places in these

neighborhoods for young people to attend. To have fun, young people need to move to another neighborhood, and not everyone can make this trip.

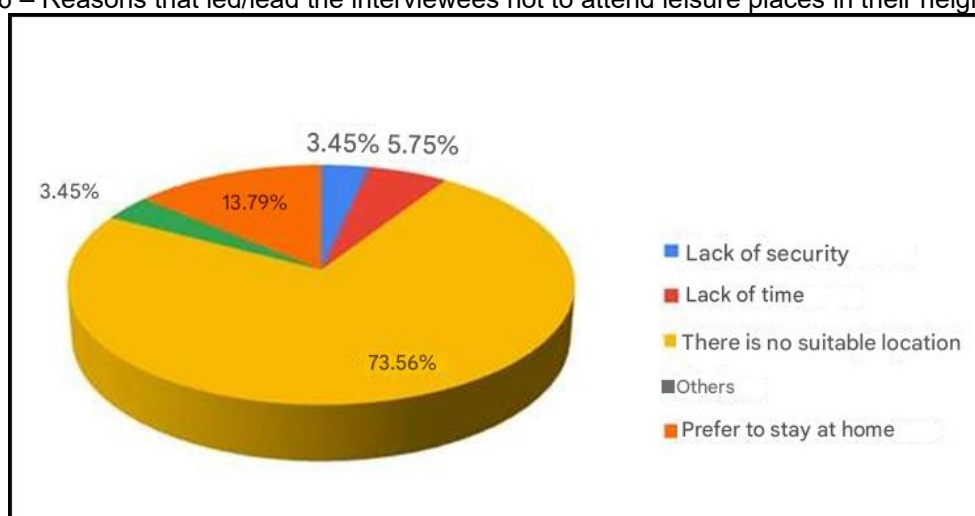
Graph 5 – Places that the interviewees go to have fun



Source: survey data (2022).

With the information obtained in graph 6, we noticed that 5.75% of the young people do not go to leisure places in their neighborhood due to lack of time, 3.45% due to lack of security, 13.79% prefer to stay at home and almost all do not go to leisure places in their neighborhood, 73.56%, because there is no appropriate place. The data obtained here confirm what was inferred in the previous graph: most young people do not go to leisure places in their neighborhood because there is no appropriate place.

Graph 6 – Reasons that led/lead the interviewees not to attend leisure places in their neighborhood



Source: survey data (2022).

When analyzing what they miss the most, in relation to leisure, by neighborhood, we notice, once again, that the construction of a square is what young people miss the most in their neighborhoods, followed by a sports court.

In the neighborhoods surveyed, the data show that there is a significant lack of leisure places, as reported by residents. At Chácara dos Mangues, 91% said they missed recreational spaces, while 9% said they did not; in Chiquinho Guimarães, 77% pointed out this need and 23% did not; in Ciro dos Anjos, the percentages were 69% and 31%, respectively; in São Geraldo, 71% highlighted the absence, against 29% who did not; in Joaquim Costa, 83% indicated neediness, while 17% did not; and, finally, in Vargem Grande, 71% indicated the absence of leisure places, while 29% stated the opposite.

This disparity reflects a common problem in low-income communities, which often lack adequate access to green spaces and recreational areas. According to Jacobs (2011), the absence of well-planned areas that are integrated into the daily lives of residents compromises the sense of community and social well-being. In addition, according to Gehl (2013), the lack of squares, sports courts and other living spaces reduce social interaction and quality of life, generating direct impacts on mental health and the development of interpersonal relationships.

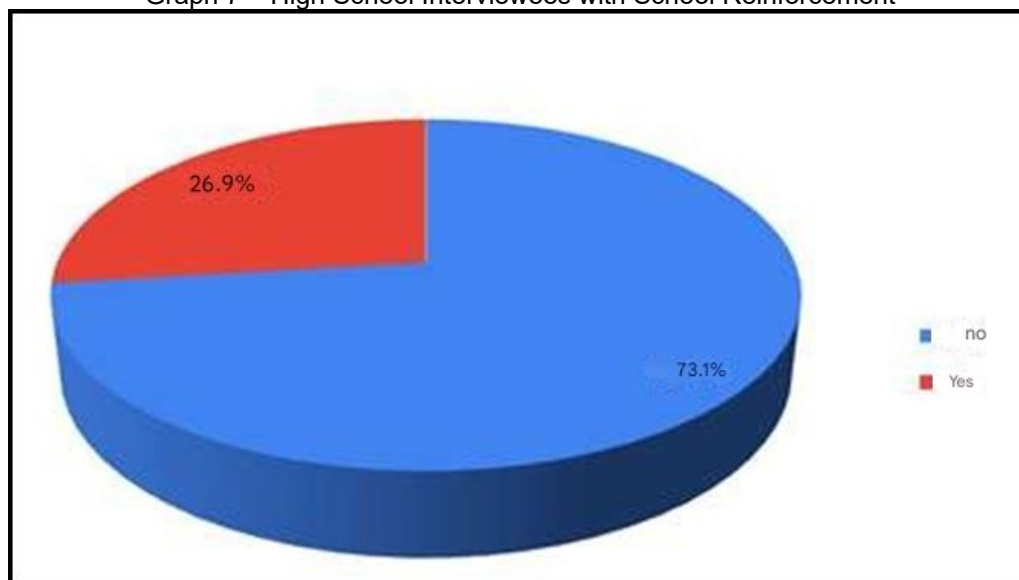
In the neighborhoods analyzed, this situation is aggravated by the lack of adequate leisure structures. Young people reported that, in addition to the scarcity of recreational spaces, they only have improvised dirt fields to play soccer. An emblematic example of this reality was the report that many young people jumped over the wall of the Jardim São Geraldo school to use the sports court, an alternative that was lost after the wall was repaired. Without this possibility, leisure options were further reduced, forcing them to move to other neighborhoods or to use the street as a space for coexistence and recreation. The need for urban interventions that promote illuminated and accessible leisure spaces emerges, therefore, as a priority to improve living conditions in these communities.

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Of the respondents who are still attending high school, more than half answered that they need school reinforcement, that is, 57.3%. And within those who depend on school reinforcement, almost all of them, 73.1% answered that they do not have school

reinforcement. Only 26.9% answered that they have school reinforcement, as can be seen in graph 7.

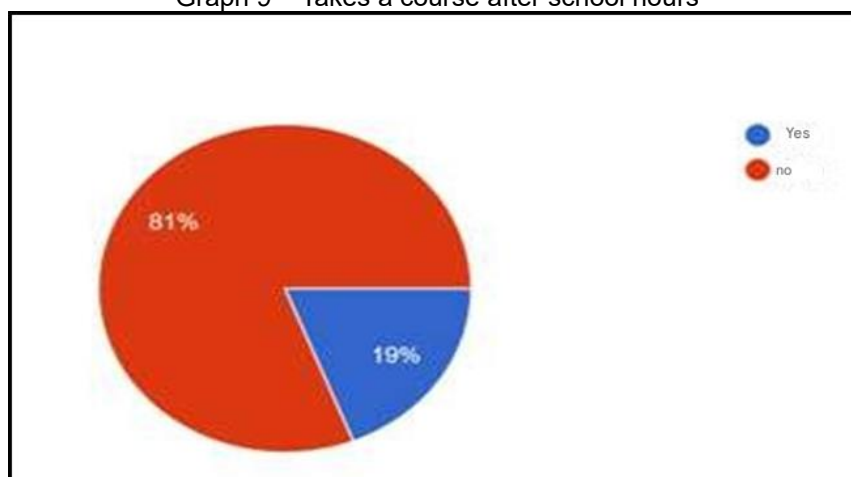
Graph 7 – High School Interviewees with School Reinforcement



Source: Survey data, 2022.

According to the survey, 81% of young people do not attend courses in the after-hours and only 19% do, a data that can be seen in graph 8. This is mainly because, in addition to the financial issue, after the new high school, students have fewer hours available for other extracurricular activities and because they are tired and only want to rest after long hours at school. This evidence reinforces the importance of public policies that expand access to tutoring programs and promote greater integration between curricular demands and student well-being.

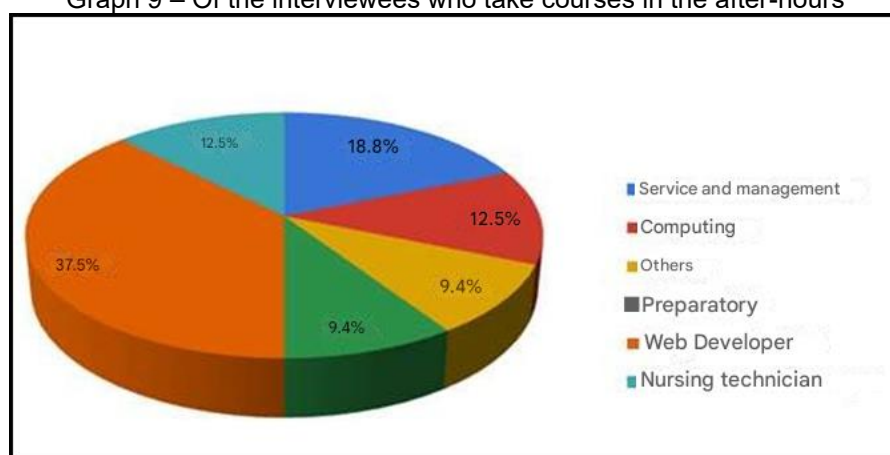
Graph 9 – Takes a course after school hours



Source: Survey data, 2022.

It is noteworthy-that, in relation to those who take courses in the after-school period, shown in graph 9, 37.5% of the young people surveyed have taken or are taking courses in web programming, 12.5% in nursing technicians, 18.8% in administration and management, 12% in computer science, 9.4% in preparatory courses and 9.4% in other courses. We can observe that most of the courses were completed in the Web programmer category, which was offered free of charge at the respondents' school.

Graph 9 – Of the interviewees who take courses in the after-hours



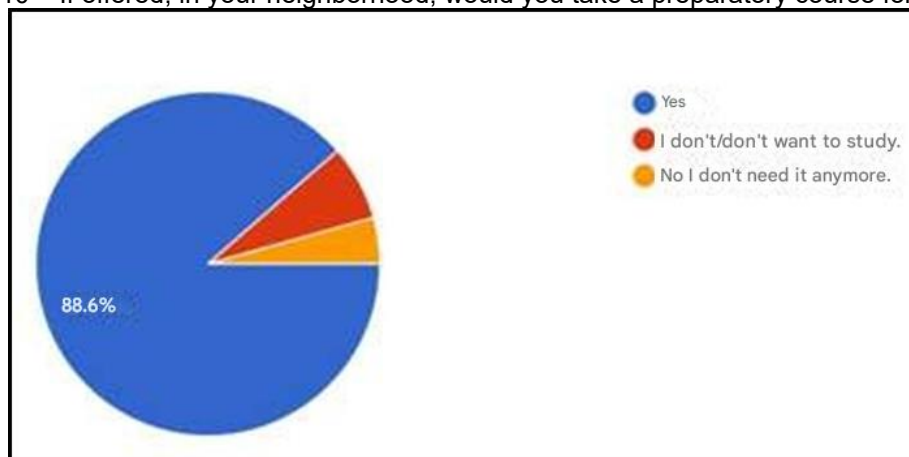
Source: Survey Data, 2022.

In order to demonstrate the opinion of the young people interviewed in relation to their interest in taking a preparatory course for the National High School Exam (ENEM), an expressive majority of 92.4% showed interest in taking a preparatory course in their own neighborhood, while only 7.6% declared that they did not see the need, according to graph 9. These data indicate a latent demand for localized educational initiatives, especially among those that aim to enter public universities, often their only viable alternative to higher education. As highlighted by authors such as Bourdieu and Passeron (1970), cultural capital can be decisive in breaking down social barriers and expanding opportunities for social ascension. In this context, the presence of courses in the neighborhood could act as a catalyst, not only offering academic support, but also reaffirming the importance of equal access to education.

The analysis of the graphs reflects regional nuances of this demand: in the neighborhoods of Chácara dos Mangues, Chiquinho Guimarães and Joaquim Costa, the majority of young people considered it essential to implement a local preparatory course for Enem. On the other hand, in the neighborhoods of Ciro dos Anjos, Jardim São Geraldo and Vargem Grande, the perception that the prep school is not a priority predominated.

Even so, 88.6% of the interviewees stated that they would participate in a preparatory course in their neighborhood if it were offered, evidencing a high potential adherence, regardless of regional disparities, as shown in graph 10.

Graph 10 – If offered, in your neighborhood, would you take a preparatory course for ENEM?



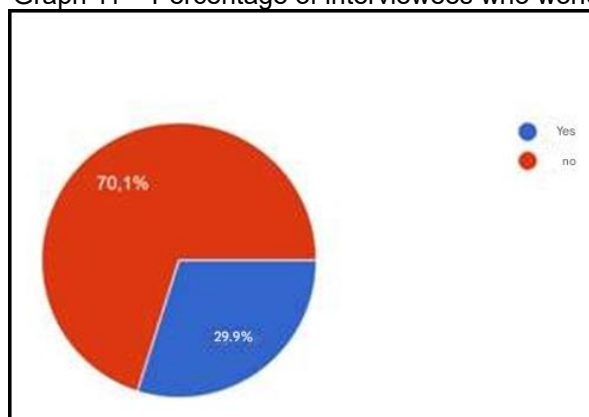
Source: Survey Data, 2022.

These data reinforce the relevance of public policies aimed at the decentralization of educational opportunities, as proposed by Paulo Freire (1968), when he highlighted that education should be contextualized and accessible, valuing the cultural and social particularities of each community. A preparatory course, especially in disadvantaged neighborhoods, can not only broaden the educational horizon of young people, but also promote effective inclusion by integrating the community into the teaching and learning process.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE LABOR MARKET: INEQUALITIES, CHALLENGES AND THE STRUGGLE FOR OPPORTUNITIES

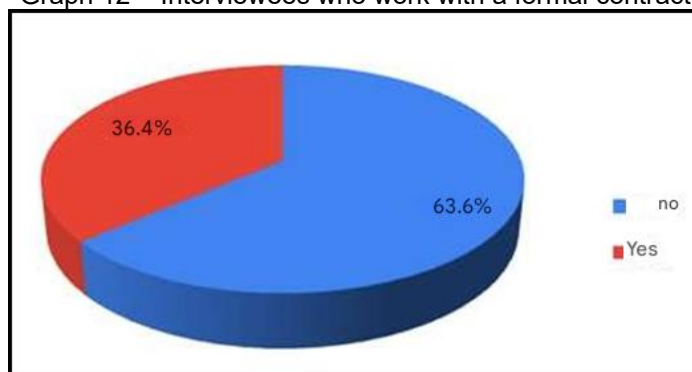
The data obtained in the survey reveal that the majority of the interviewees do not work (70.1%) and only 29.9% work, as shown in graph 11. The survey revealed that more than half of the young people who work do not do so with a formal contract. Of the total, less than 40% work with a formal contract, according to graph 12.

Graph 11 – Percentage of interviewees who work



Source: Survey data

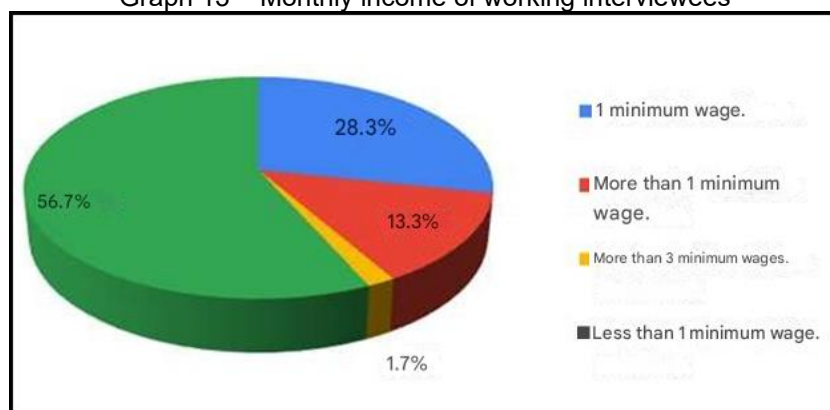
Graph 12 – Interviewees who work with a formal contract



Source: Survey data

The survey data revealed that more than half of the young people who work receive less than a minimum wage, showing a majority insertion in low-paid occupations and, probably, high informality. In addition, graph 13 showed that 28.3% receive exactly one minimum wage, while only 13.3% reach values above this range, and 1.7% have a salary above three minimum wages. These numbers reflect structural inequalities in the youth labor market, where the transition from school to employment tends to be marked by precarious occupations with low financial progression, as pointed out by studies by authors such as Neri (2021) and Ribeiro (2015), who discuss the vulnerability of young populations in contexts of high inequality.

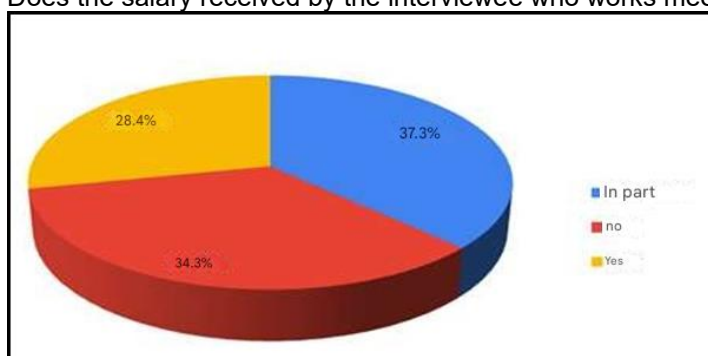
Graph 13 – Monthly income of working interviewees



Source: Survey data, 2022.

With regard to the sufficiency of wages, the data show that 37.3% of young people say that the income is only partially sufficient to meet their needs, while 34.3% consider it insufficient. Only 28.4% believe that they are able to meet their basic needs, as shown in graph 14. This perception reinforces the idea that youth work often does not provide financial independence or stability, limiting the possibilities of investment in professional qualification and contributing to the reproduction of inequalities, as highlighted by Souza (2020) in his analysis of youth and the labor market in Brazil.

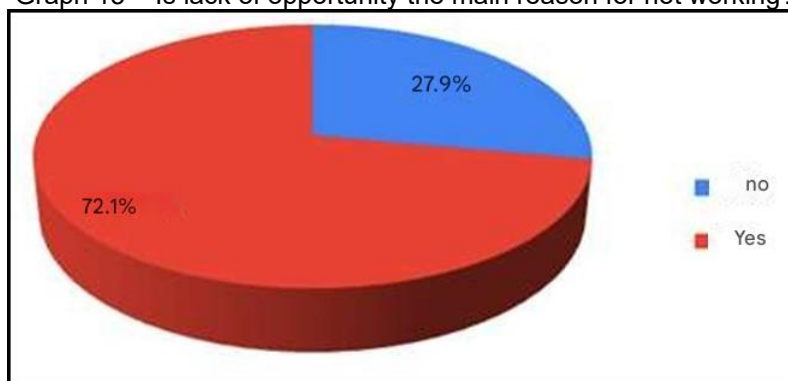
Graph 14 – Does the salary received by the interviewee who works meet his needs?



Source: Survey data, 2022.

It can be observed in graph 15 that, among young people who do not work, 72.1% point to the lack of opportunity as the main reason, indicating a misalignment between the offer of jobs and the expectations of young people. According to authors such as Castel (1998), exclusion from the labor market can generate what he calls "social disaffiliation", where the absence of employment compromises not only economic development, but also the prospects of social belonging of these young people.

Graph 15 – Is lack of opportunity the main reason for not working?



Source: Survey data, 2022.

On the other hand, the data show that 61.4% of young people who work manage to reconcile work and study, while 26.5% report partial difficulties and 12% say they are unable to maintain both activities simultaneously, according to data collected during the survey. This scenario, although optimistic for most, still reveals barriers for a significant portion. Studies by Carvalho (2019) highlight that reconciling work and study is one of the main challenges for young people in vulnerable situations, since incompatible schedules and physical or mental exhaustion often impact academic performance, perpetuating cycles of social exclusion.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The reports of these young people lead us to reflect on how unequal the distribution of public resources is. While some neighborhoods in the city have even more than one well-lit square, with a playground, court and/or skate park¹, in the region in question, which has five neighborhoods, there is no adequate space for young people to partner and practice sports. Whatever the demand, the young people of the selected neighborhoods need these places, since in other upscale neighborhoods of the city they have more than one block or square, for example. A clear inequality that is extremely harmful to peripheral neighborhoods.

In view of the analyses made, it seems to us that addressing the unequal distribution of leisure equipment throughout the city is fundamental to reflect on the consequences that this lack in some neighborhoods can cause. According to Marcellino (1998), *apud* Button and Fortunato (2008, p.2) "the positive practice of leisure activities is necessary for learning, stimulation, which enriches the critical spirit, both in practice and in observation".

In general terms, in Montes Claros it was possible to identify a great inequality in the distribution/quality of leisure equipment and, mainly, the notorious lack that makes these young people have a place close to their residence to socialize with friends or practice sports.

In the reports of the young people, the desire and, I would say, the need to have access to these spaces was evident. An illustrative example of this desire were the questions regarding what would be the way to be able to put the construction of a square, with a court and playground, on the agenda of public policies. They were even willing to mobilize the community and the political authorities of the city to achieve such a feat.

Regarding the job vacancies of the Young Apprentice Program, young people from the neighborhoods selected for research reported that vacancies are few and many young people are unable to enter the job market through the Program. The expansion of vacancies in the Young Apprentice Program would be very important, as it would help this population a lot. Today's young people have many needs, such as: means of transportation to go to the place of study (schools, colleges, courses, etc.), food, clothes, accessories, and of course, help with household expenses. This condition can be transformed by legal means. Firstly, by expanding the vacancies of the Program, secondly, by intensifying the dissemination of vacancies. It is necessary to emphasize, however, that it is necessary to awaken in young people the protagonism to go in search of their interests and look for ways to be aware of the available job vacancies of the Young Apprentice Program, because the number of vacancies is few and the competition is great.

We also identified that in the selected neighborhoods, most of the young people have informal jobs, without a contract or formal contract. A portion of these young people receive remuneration far below the minimum wage, configuring super-exploitation and preventing them from being able to meet their needs adequately.

Although the present research encompasses a local reality, in a specific city, the facts presented here can be identified in several other cities in the country, where more developed regions have a watchful eye of the public power, while the peripheral regions of the city are, in fact, on the margins of the reach of public resources.

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