

THE PERSPECTIVES OF CHILDREN ON LEISURE CONSTRAINTS IN THE CONTEXT OF PANDEMIC ISOLATION

*AS PERSPECTIVAS DAS CRIANÇAS SOBRE AS RESTRICÇÕES
DO LAZER NO CONTEXTO DE ISOLAMENTO PANDÊMICO*

*LAS PERSPECTIVAS DE LOS NIÑOS SOBRE LAS LIMITACIONES
DEL OCIO EN EL CONTEXTO DE AISLAMIENTO PANDÉMICO*

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ABSTRACT The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed an unparalleled confinement on everyone, directly affecting family dynamics and emphasizing the need to understand how these restrictions alter people's routines. This research aims to identify children's perspectives and interests that may be affected by the restrictions on the routine of the Brazilian population aged 7 to 12 years, focusing on the ongoing situation imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil. Recognizing children as active subjects capable of expressing their needs and anxieties, we conducted research that collected primary data directly from these subjects. We carried out an iconographic-based content analysis, which indicates that the pandemic has directly impacted the leisure activities of the analyzed children, particularly those that need to be performed outside the home and collectively, affecting their socialization. The situation imposed on us leads us to reflect on the need for effective actions in the educational field to allow children to regain their free spaces and times to engage in various leisure activities, especially those aimed at sociability.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19; CHILDREN; LEISURE; EDUCATION.

RESUMO A pandemia do COVID-19 impôs um confinamento sem precedentes às diferentes populações do mundo, afetando diretamente a dinâmica familiar e evidenciando a necessidade de entender como essas restrições provocam mudanças na rotina dos sujeitos. Com

foco na situação em curso imposta pela pandemia de COVID-19 no Brasil, esta pesquisa visa identificar as perspectivas ou interesses das crianças que podem ser afetados pelas restrições na rotina da população brasileira de 7 a 12 anos. Ao considerar as crianças sujeitos ativos e capazes de expressar suas necessidades e anseios por si mesmos, realizamos uma pesquisa com coleta de dados do público infantil. Realizamos uma análise de conteúdo de base iconográfica, que indica que a pandemia afetou diretamente as atividades de lazer dos sujeitos investigados, notadamente aquelas que precisam ser realizadas fora de casa e coletivamente, impactando em sua socialização. A situação imposta nos leva a refletir sobre a necessidade de ações efetivas no âmbito educacional para que as crianças possam conquistar novamente seus espaços e tempos disponíveis para vivenciarem diferentes atividades no âmbito do lazer, principalmente aquelas que têm como propósito a sociabilidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: COVID-19; CRIANÇA; LAZER; EDUCAÇÃO.

RESUMEN La pandemia de la COVID-19 impuso un confinamiento sin precedentes en diferentes poblaciones del mundo, afectando directamente la dinámica familiar y evidenciando la necesidad de comprender cómo estas restricciones provocan cambios en la rutina de los sujetos. Centrándose en la situación actual impuesta por la pandemia de COVID-19 en Brasil, esta investigación tiene como objetivo identificar las perspectivas o intereses de los niños que pueden verse afectados por las restricciones en la rutina de la población brasileña de 7 a 12 años. Al considerar a los niños como sujetos activos y capaces de expresar sus necesidades y deseos por sí mismos, realizamos una investigación con recolección de datos del público infantil. Realizamos un análisis de contenido de base iconográfica, que indica que la pandemia afectó directamente las actividades de ocio de los sujetos investigados, en especial aquellas que requieren ser realizadas fuera del hogar y de forma colectiva, impactando en su socialización. La situación impuesta nos lleva a reflexionar sobre la necesidad de acciones efectivas en el ámbito educativo para que los niños y niñas recuperen los espacios y tiempos disponibles para experimentar diferentes actividades de ocio, especialmente aquellas que tienen como fin la sociabilidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: COVID-19; NIÑO; OCIO; EDUCACIÓN.

INTRODUCTION

In August 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that more than 200 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 had been recorded worldwide (WHO, 2021). To contain the virus, the WHO recommended isolation and quarantine measures in 2020, resulting in the closure of schools and the removal of over a billion students from classrooms (UNESCO, 2020). The confinement of children at home had a direct impact on family dynamics, emphasizing the need to comprehend the ways in which these restrictions caused a radical shift in daily routines.

Research studies have indicated that the lack of personal contact with colleagues, friends, and family members due to the pandemic can have negative and enduring effects on children and adolescents (FLORÊNCIO JÚNIOR; PAIANO and COSTA, 2020; IZENSTARK; CROSSMAN and MIDDAGH, 2021; LIMA, 2020; WANG *et al.*, 2020), un-

derscoring the importance of addressing the sudden curtailment of social activities among these populations.

Furthermore, evidence suggests that the suppression of indoor leisure activities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has led to an increased demand for outdoor spaces (BREUNIG, 2020; DASHPER and KING, 2021; HILL, 2021; TAVARES and MARINHO, 2021), transformed the perception of leisure time (SHIR-WISE, 2021), and amplified domestic leisure practices (CLEMENTE and STOPPA, 2020).

Studies have examined the relationship between spare time and the pandemic context, particularly with regards to anxiety and stress among adults (IGLESIAS-MARTÍNEZ; ROCES-GARCÍA and BERMÚDEZ-REY, 2021; LIU *et al.*, 2021). Meanwhile, cross-sectional studies have focused on the health and physical activity of children and adolescents after school closures (XIANG; ZHANG, Z. and KUWAHARA, 2020; ZHU *et al.*, 2021). However, none of these studies have primarily addressed the issue of children's leisure activities during the pandemic.

In response to an unprecedented and long-lasting confinement scenario, we aim to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's leisure activities. Specifically, our objective is to identify the leisure interests of Brazilian children aged 7 to 12 years that may have been affected by the restrictions on daily routines imposed by the pandemic.

CONFINEMENT AND COVID-19 IN BRAZIL

COVID-19 is a highly infectious respiratory illness that is primarily transmitted through airborne particles during human interactions (WHO, 2021). The disease was first reported in China in December 2019 and was confirmed in Brazil in February 2020 (BRAZIL, 2020). In mid-March 2020, Brazil implemented restrictions on social contact in response to the pandemic. Unfortunately, these restrictions coincided with the beginning of a new school year, which was abruptly interrupted in some cases. Remote learning was not an option for all students due to economic and social factors, which limit access to quality education for many individuals in Brazil (BAUER; NOLETO and GROSS, 2021; CAMPOS and VIEIRA, 2021).

Whether due to a failed policy by the Brazilian government, with its successive changes of ministers and delayed investment in confinement measures (ORTEGA and ORSINI, 2020), or due to the unprecedented nature of such a prolonged confinement, the fact remains that by August 2020, when we concluded the data collection analyzed in this article, Brazil was experiencing its first wave of infections with an average of 800 deaths per day (WHO, 2021). As of 2021, we have witnessed a second wave of COVID-19 infections in Brazil, with over 4,000 deaths per day and a total death toll exceeding 500,000 (WHO, 2021; UNICEF, 2021). The situation has left Brazil among the countries with the longest school closures, resulting in reduced physical activity, poorer nutrition habits, and increased levels of anxiety and self-harm among Brazilian children (UNICEF, 2021).

While this work does not focus on schools, it is important to note that the prolonged confinement made it crucial for children to return to school and resume social activities. It appears that leisure activities were not the least affected, as businesses and services

were also closed multiple times in different regions of the country. (CLEMENTE and STOPPA, 2020).

METHOD

METHODOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION

We aimed to identify the impact of limiting or reducing leisure activities in the confinement routine of children, using a content analysis of pictorial representations made by children about the absences they felt during the pandemic.

To begin with, it is important to acknowledge that children possess a logical aspect and should be treated as human beings who perceive themselves in a world that is both concrete and abstract, one that is filled with words, symbols, ideas, and beliefs (LOPPES and MELLO, 2009; NAVARRO, 2000; PIAGET, 1979; WALLON, 2007). We believe that this research must view children as active subjects who are capable of thinking and feeling, and who can express their anxieties and shortcomings independently.

After considering the vocalization, age, and interactions of the subjects, we determined that projective pictorial techniques would be most suitable for collecting their perceptions. This is supported by a comprehensive group of researchers who have advocated for the use of these techniques since the 1970s (DERDIK, 1989; GOLDBERG; YUNES and FREITAS, 2005; NOVAES, 1972; PIAGET, 1979; PILLOTTO; SILVA and MOGNOL, 2007). Among the techniques available, we chose to analyze drawings due to their accessibility to children in the pandemic context and their recognition as a useful instrument among leisure researchers (PARNICKA, 1995; RHODEN; HUNTER-JONES and MILLER, 2016; THERKELSEN and LOTTRUP, 2015).

Therefore, we proposed that children's self-made graphic representations, with minimal interference, could be used to support this study as a means of demonstrating their emotions related to the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

SEARCH CRITERIA

Our research was conducted using a qualitative and exploratory approach, incorporating interpretive methods to analyze iconographic content. Our sample consisted of 25 participants intentionally chosen between July and August 2020. At the outset, we selected three children from different parts of Brazil who were in confinement due to the pandemic. To expand our sample, we employed a non-probabilistic snowball sampling technique, relying on recommendations from the families of our initial participants. We chose this technique because we believed it would increase acceptance and participation among families who received recommendations from their peers. When selecting children for our study, we considered their age, focusing on children between 7 and 12 years old. We asked them to voluntarily draw on the theme, "Draw what you are missing and cannot do because of being isolated." In this study, we did not take into account socioeconomic or quantitative factors.

Furthermore, we established the following criteria:

- a. That the children had been living in complete social isolation without access

to outside leisure or school for a minimum of three months;

b. The parents agreed to the Informed Consent Form and were responsible for submitting the drawings and supplementary data required for this study. We collected supplementary data by requesting parents to complete a questionnaire when submitting their children's drawings and descriptions. The questionnaire included requests for information such as the parents' names, contact details, neighborhood, city, state, housing details, age, quarantine routine, and family composition. Respondents were also given the option to receive a copy of any publications that resulted from the research.

c. We required the children to be literate so that they could describe their drawings if they wished to do so.

Chart 1 displays the age distribution of our sample, which was intentionally not designed to be homogenous, as the variation in age significantly contributed to the richness of the responses. It is worth noting that the majority of children who participated in this study lived in a house with a backyard, which may have impacted our results.

Chart 1. Sample for age

Age	Type of residence	who resides with the child
7	house with backyard	mother
7	house without yard	mother and 3 brothers
7	house with backyard	mother, father and 1 brother
7	house with backyard	mother, grandmother, great grandmother, uncle and aunt
7	house with backyard	mother, grandfather, grandmother and 1 brother
7	house with backyard	mother, father, 1 brother and 2 cousins
7	house with backyard	mother and stepfather
8	apartment with playground	mother and father
8	house with backyard	mother, father and 2 brothers
9	house with backyard	mother, father and 1 brother
9	house with backyard	mother, father and 1 brother
9	house without yard	mother, father and 1 brother
9	conventional apartment	mother and father
9	house with backyard	mother, father and 1 brother
9	house with backyard	mother, father and 1 brother
10	conventional apartment	mother and grandfather
10	house with backyard	mother, father and 1 brother
10	conventional apartment	mother and 2 brothers
11	house without yard	mother
11	apartment with playground	mother, father and 1 brother
11	apartment with playground	mother, father and 1 brother
11	house with backyard	mother, father and 1 brother
11	house without yard	mother, father and 1 brother
12	house with backyard	mother and grandmother

Source: The authors.

We had participants from different states in Brazil, including Goiás (1), Maranhão (6), Pará (1), Paraná (1), Rio de Janeiro (7), and São Paulo (9). It is worth noting that 14 of our participants lived with other children, some of whom had adult siblings. This was also taken into consideration for further analysis.

We chose to use content analysis (CA) to categorize the elements of the drawings. Our decision to use this method was based on our desire to facilitate the observation of the subject matter, to “obtain the maximum amount of information (quantitative aspect), with the maximum relevance (qualitative aspect)” (BARDIN, 1977, p. 45-46).

Since content analysis (CA) primarily deals with words, we needed to encode the drawings into expressions based on the elements used in the children’s graphic projections. Each element was first coded as a unit and then grouped into larger blocks that allowed us to analyze the most representative elements, as shown in Figure 1:

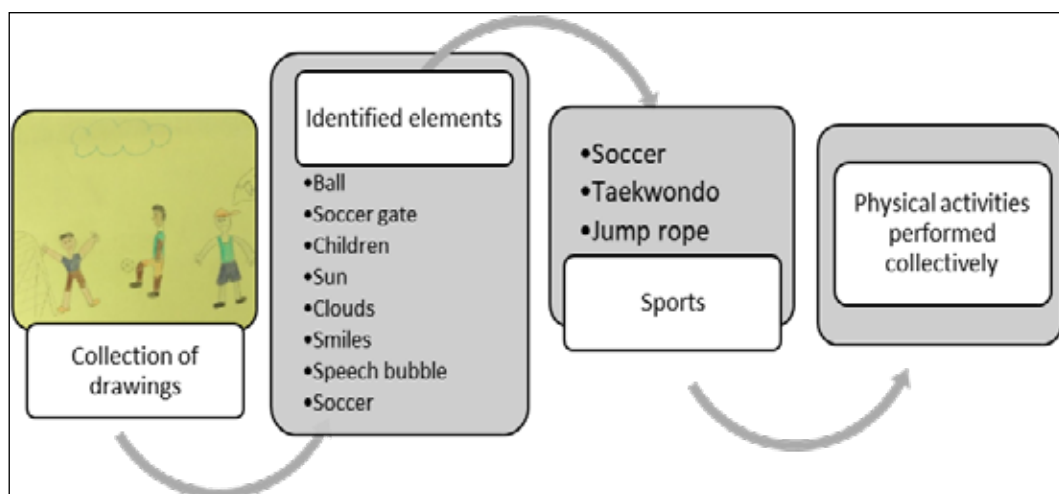


Figure 1. Stages of the content analysis (CA) process from drawings

Source: The authors

After analyzing each drawing, we identified 104 elements that represented the children’s moments and leisure activities. We then organized them into key words (shown in Figure 2), which, after eliminating articles and prepositions, highlighted some of the main points of the drawings.

Thus, by grouping the words generated in steps I and II into broader analytical categories, we identified seven general categories present in the drawings of the children’s group (step III), which we will analyze in the next section.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion of children’s leisure is a complex topic, as different authors have varying perspectives on the application of the term “leisure” to childhood. Given that childhood is a social construct, the concept of childhood has evolved over time and differs across societies throughout history. In contemporary times, childhood is often viewed from a de-

velopmental perspective, with many societies rejecting child labor and viewing it as the responsibility of families and the state to protect children, provide education, and offer emotional and financial support (ARIÈS, 1986).

According to Marcellino (1996), we should not consider the child's life as an absolute realm of play, especially during school age. Therefore, we understand that the child is a participant in the dynamics of society, where there are times of obligation and "spare time". Therefore, it is understandable that limitations imposed on the entire society also affect children and restrict their opportunities for leisure activities.

When discussing the implications of children's leisure practices during the COVID-19 pandemic-induced social isolation, we found support in Camargo's (1998) research that suggests that a significant portion of people's leisure time is spent at home. However, a smaller but important portion of free time is spent outside, particularly in activities such as strolling through streets, parks, squares, and restaurants. According to the author, some of the highlights of leisure activities include spending time in green areas, watching movies, engaging in physical activities, and socializing. Our research identified several of these elements, highlighting similarities in leisure needs across different age groups reported in other studies (DASHPER and KING, 2021; DATAFOLHA and ITAÚ CULTURAL, 2021; FERREIRA and DAOLIO, 2015; MARTINS and CRUZ, 2014).

As depicted in Figure 2, the recurring elements depicted in children's leisure activities were characterized by freedom and movement, which were constrained during the pandemic-induced social isolation. Notably, among these elements, sports, school environment, and the absence of friends and peers in engaging in these activities emerged as prominent factors.



Figure 2. Word cloud generated from graphical representations

Source: The authors

Thus, by grouping the words generated in stages I and II into broader analytical categories, we identified seven general categories in the drawings created by the group of children under investigation.

Although the drawings revealed a wide range of leisure elements, they all reflected the children’s concerns. To provide a comprehensive picture of the leisure landscape that mattered to them, we categorized these elements into seven broad categories. From these categories, we created a scenario that captures the key spaces, people, and games that were important to the children’s leisure life but were disrupted by the pandemic.

For a better view of the initial analysis of stage III of categorization, Figure 3 shows the main elements that were grouped in the formation of general categories.



Figure 3. General categories emerging from C. A.

Source: The authors (2021)

It should be noted that a single element may appear in multiple categories, depending on its representation or interpretation, including information from the questionnaire answered by parents and textual elements present in the drawings, such as speech bubbles and labels for places. For instance, the teacher may represent the school, but a child hugging the teacher also conveys an element of affection, indicating a teacher-student relationship.

Still, it is important to note that while the sample size of 25 children is limited, the

final categories were present in several of their drawings. Therefore, we have organized the categories into a Sankey diagram, as shown in Figure 4, which connects the variables (elements found in the graphical representations) with their sources (drawings). The thickness of the lines corresponds to the number of references to each category in each drawing, connecting the elements representing those variables. This demonstrates that children express their desires and interests through their drawings, which are a reflection of their world.

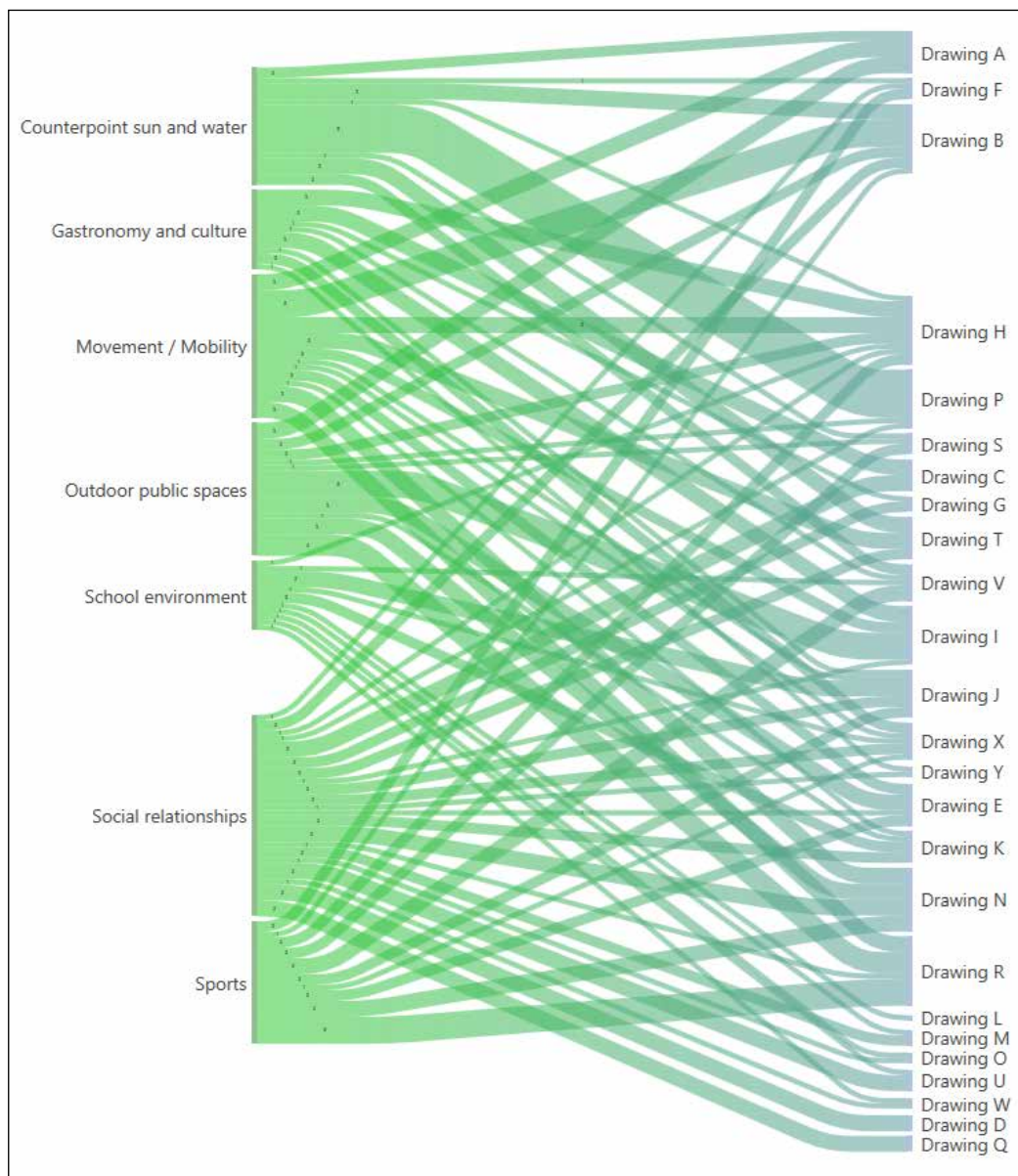


Figure 4. Interfaces between general categories and their sources

Source: The authors

OUTDOOR PUBLIC SPACES

In the initial months of the pandemic, when we collected the drawings, many public spaces for socializing were completely closed, especially in larger cities. Parks, beaches, and squares were closed for months. However, these are the very places where diverse encounters often occur, making social isolation even more pronounced “[...] people would be restricted to socializing among equals, confined to the domestic space” (MAGNANI, 2007, p.1).

The loss of the right to use public space was evident in ten of the analyzed drawings, in which the street element and street games were illustrated. Four of these representations showed children using the street to ride their bikes, play ball, and engage in other sports, drawing them together with other children. Thus, the street represents a place where games are established and reinvented, playing a role in the composition of urban culture, as supported by the theory mentioned earlier (FERREIRA and DAOLIO, 2015).



Figure 5. Representation of a walk to the park.

Source: Drawing I, by an 11-year-old child (2021).

The child is depicted as the main focus in Figure 5, enjoying an ice cream in the park amidst local food and craft stalls. According to a questionnaire answered by the family, this was a weekly activity that they used to do together before the pandemic. This is one of the few drawings where the child represents himself without the company of other people. Nature is strongly represented by the presence of trees and flowers, and the child is depicted smiling with all the elements converging towards him in the drawing.

Three other children surveyed represented public spaces as places of coexistence and socialization, which is in line with Tandy's (1999) assertion that children have a clear preference for playing in outdoor and wooded areas when given the power to choose.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the excessive use of technology in modern society has led to a decrease in natural environments and, consequently, has transformed the contact with nature into a special moment to strengthen family bonds and reduce stress (IZENSTARK; CROSSMAN and MIDDAUGH, 2021)

Martins and Cruz (2014) and Dashper and King (2021) reinforce that not all families have access to these spaces due to various barriers such as insecurity, traffic volume, and affordability, which limits leisure practices in such areas. Therefore, many children have their space for playing and socializing at school, which was also an important element highlighted in the drawings of our respondents.

THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

While the presence of the school in multiple drawings may seem peculiar to some leisure scholars, it's important to note that there are significant periods of free time during the school day, during which children can organize their own activities and interact with one another, fostering social bonds and shaping their personal development (RODRÍGUEZ FERNÁNDEZ *et al.*, 2019).

The findings of a Chinese study suggest that when children are out of school, they tend to become less physically active, spend more time in front of screens, have irregular sleep patterns, and follow less healthy diets. These behaviors may lead to weight gain and a reduction in cardiorespiratory fitness (WANG *et al.*, 2020). The authors suggest that these negative health effects are exacerbated when children are confined at home without access to outdoor activities or interactions with peers of the same age. In addition to the physical impact, the psychological well-being of these children is also affected. Feelings of frustration, boredom, fear, lack of privacy at home, and limited contact with peers can have troubling and long-lasting effects on children and teenagers.

The two projects include some elements of the school environment, such as the facade of the school shown in Figure 6. According to the questionnaire responses from the parents, the child who drew it has a younger brother and misses playing with other children in the same age group, which is only possible at school. It is important to note the light colors and clean and cheerful atmosphere with which the children depicted these places. Upon closer analysis, we can see that the school represents happy moments for these children, which is why it is positioned in the foreground.



Figure 6. Representation of the facade of a school.

Source: Drawing L, by a 10-year-old child (2021)

The absence of these playful moments at school is noticeable even in cases where children have access to online classes and resources for communication with teachers and peers. The impact of the lack of face-to-face classes is remarkable and is evident in the drawings, which depict not only the physical structure of the school but also the presence of classmates. In half of the school drawings, children are shown interacting with their peers or teachers.

Lastly, it's worth noting a drawing that depicts a teacher in an empty room, as well as another one where the child portrays physical education and arts classes as enjoyable, even though these activities aren't explicitly identified as taking place during school free time. These drawings suggest that school isn't just a place for socializing and play, but also a setting where children have positive interactions with teachers and engage in enriching educational experiences.

SUN AND WATER COUNTERPOINT

Studies have shown that spending time in the sun helps to stimulate the immune system, and can even provide mental and emotional relief (BREUNIG, 2020). Water is also significant during leisure time, particularly in outdoor activities, where people seek contact with natural elements (CAMARGO, 1998). Therefore, it is noteworthy that several drawings by the children depict these elements during moments of stress and anguish.

The sun and water were depicted in eight drawings, with water being the central element in half of them. One child drew themselves with friends in a water park, while another drew themselves alone on the beach. Another child drew themselves in a swimming class, and yet another drew a pool in a holiday camp. "Contact with green (woods) and blue (water) spaces, with animals and the sun-water counterpoint (tan, get wet) represent the primary motivations" (CAMARGO, 1998, p. 46). It is highlighted in the drawing (Figure 7), a large sun at the top of the page in warm colors and the sea below, drawn in blue waves. The child wearing beach clothes is smiling.



Figure 7. Representation of a walk to the beach.

Source: Drawing P, by a 7-year-old child (2021)

Marafa *et al.* (2018) emphasize that humans tend to experience tranquility in locations where natural sounds such as water sounds, birdsong, and visible natural resources predominate. We believe that children may unconsciously perceive the pleasure of being under the sun or in contact with water due to these natural elements.

In conclusion, according to Camargo (1998), hotels and holiday camps provide significant leisure experiences, but unfortunately, only those who can afford them are able to fully enjoy these opportunities.

SPORTS

The children's drawings depict collective play in nine instances, which demonstrates their interest in physical activities during their free time. However, the lack of company to participate in sports is evident in the drawings. Although it is possible to engage in some physical activities at home, the absence of peers to play with has a negative impact on the children's experience.

Until five or six decades ago, children had limited choices for leisure activities. "Sports and outdoor play with other children had a very strong role in their lives. Sport improved physical fitness and contributed to child development, the formation of self-concept, social skills and the values of teamwork and tolerance" (JAIN, 2010, p. 43).

Four boys who participated in the research drew soccer, which was the most prevalent sport in the received drawings. The ball was present as a playful element, and some drawings showed friends and the goal post element, as seen in Figure 8. This illustrates that soccer is a sociocultural phenomenon that is highly prevalent in Brazilian society (RICARDO and ALVES, 2016).



Figure 8. Representation of a soccer game with friends.

Source: Drawing F, by an 8-year-old child (2021)

Amaral and Lopes (2016) suggest that sports, such as soccer, allow for the building of a sense of belonging, and this is also evident in the drawings, as children not only draw themselves but also others playing. A study by Souza, Silveira, and Rocha (2013) also demonstrated that soccer is an important element for creating bonds of friendship.

Another recurrent element found in multiple drawings was the bicycle. Children drew

themselves riding bicycles with friends, indicating that they miss not only physical activity but also the interaction with peers. Studies have shown that cycling is one of the primary outdoor leisure activities among families from various social strata (AMARAL and LOPES, 2016; IZENSTARK; CROSSMAN and MIDDAUGH, 2021; SOUZA and ROCHA, 2012; TANDY, 1999).

For Tandy (1999), the possession and use of a bicycle is a crucial symbol of freedom for children. The author argues that bicycles offer a practical way for children to explore their neighborhoods and navigate urban environments. The kite, rope games, and swimming also appeared in some of the drawings, and they have a playful meaning for socialization and fun.

CULTURE AND GASTRONOMY

For Clemente and Stoppa (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has led to restrictions on the use of leisure and cultural spaces and equipment, resulting in the closure of parks, museums, clubs, theaters, cinemas, and beaches. For these researchers, “the limited structures of homes for the experience of leisure, for most people, translate into a barrier” (CLEMENTE and STOPPA, 2020, p. 475). Perhaps this is the reason why cultural and gastronomic elements were present in eight of the drawings made by the children in the study.

As highlighted by Camargo (1998), the cinema is a powerful space for family entertainment. Three children in this study represented it as part of their pre-pandemic leisure routines. Another study also reinforces cinema as the cultural activity that people miss attending the most (DATAFOLHA and ITAÚ CULTURAL, 2021).



Figure 9. Representation of family in the cinema.

Source: Drawing C, by a 12-year-old child (2021)

According to the data provided by the parents in the questionnaires, children who drew the cinema space had this element as a family outing. As we can see in Figure 9, the child is with his mother buying popcorn, indicating that watching a movie while eating popcorn is a cultural element.

In this category, elements of craft and arts fairs were also included, which were present in two drawings, as well as five representations of eating out. Eating out is considered a cultural value (IZENSTARK; CROSSMAN, and MIDDAUGH, 2021; MCKEEVER, 1993), and this leisure habit is typically restricted to people with higher economic status. Two children drew a well-known fast-food restaurant with their families, two drew an ice cream shop, and one drew a food fair. According to McKeever (1993), a fundamental part of outings is to have a snack or a full meal, which is an important time for families to socialize outside the home.

MOVEMENT AND MOBILITY

For Tandy (1999), mobility is fundamental for children to explore the environment and have fun while developing their own identity and role in the community. Eleven drawings in the study were related to this category, with three of them focusing on tourism. They were represented by a holiday camp, a water park, and an airplane. The parents mentioned in the questionnaires that these tours were part of the children's routines who participated in the study.

Camargo (2019) suggests that tourism, although sometimes undertaken for practical reasons, can also provide opportunities for leisure, fun, and playfulness. For children, who may be less concerned with practical considerations, tourism is often seen as a form of leisure in itself. This is evident in Figure 10, which depicts tourism as a regular family activity.

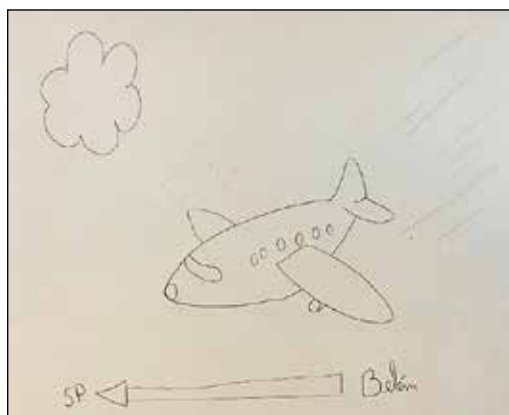


Figure 10. Representation of air travel

Source: Drawing A, by an 11-year-old child (2021)

We grouped several drawings in this category that show children in motion, dancing, jumping rope, hugging, and sliding. The feeling of freedom that children experience with movement can be observed among those who live in apartments (6) and houses without a yard (4).

THE CENTRALITY IN SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

In 15 out of the 25 drawings investigated, the central element was other people. The children not only depicted but also named their friends and family. The representation

of parents in leisure time appeared in three of the drawings, while the other 12 drawings indicated childhood friendships in various leisure spaces. According to Souza and Rocha, there is a close relationship between leisure time and childhood friendships, “[...] leisure facilitates healthy peer relationships and friendship offers fruitful opportunities for leisure practices” (SOUZA and ROCHA, 2012, p. 3).



Figure 11. Representation of school recess, titled “Me and my friends at school”

Source: Drawing K, by an 11-year-old child (2021)

Figure 11 is a significant drawing that depicts the boy’s classmates. He drew himself in the schoolyard and used arrows to indicate and name each of his classmates. Although the child sees his peers daily on camera during online classes, the face-to-face interaction cannot be replaced.

The pandemic has significantly affected children’s leisure activities, as evidenced by the analysis of the drawings. The prolonged social isolation has not spared children from missing their pre-pandemic leisure activities, as seen in the drawings. The seven categories analyzed have revealed how important cultural elements, mobility, outdoor activities, sports, and socialization are for children’s leisure time. The drawings also showed that children miss spending time with family and friends and participating in activities that allow them to move freely and have fun. The desire to return to in-person activities is evident in many of the drawings, highlighting the impact of the pandemic on children’s leisure and overall well-being.

With the use of drawings, it was possible to identify the various leisure activities that were curtailed during the pandemic, revealing the children’s feelings and experiences of reduced freedom and limited social interaction. Drawing on Ferrés Prats (2014), emotions are fundamental in guiding individuals’ actions and behavior in their daily lives, and the production of drawings provided an outlet for children to express their emotions and attach meaning to their experiences of social isolation, as represented by the categories analyzed.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, children have experienced a period with fewer opportunities for the production of emotions that foster learning. Emotions are controlled by the limbic system of the brain and may not reach the neocortex, the area of the brain responsible for higher brain functions, and where information is rationalized. To reach the

neocortex, a more extended pathway in the brain is required. The isolation situation caused by the pandemic can lead to longer periods without stimulating emotions in children. They cannot interact with friends, go outdoors, watch movies, or interact with more people, among other activities. This abrupt change in routine can make it harder for children to rationalize and learn during the isolation period. However, messages that mobilize children's emotions may increase the possibility of reasoning the content and reach the neocortex, allowing for assimilation of new knowledge.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have long-term effects on children's learning, as the lack of stimuli that trigger emotions can impede the assimilation of new knowledge. This is a concern that should be addressed from both an educational and health perspective. When children return to school, they may face the challenge of assimilating a large amount of new content in a short period of time, which could lead to frustration and discouragement rather than a sense of enjoyment and accomplishment. This hypothesis warrants further investigation.

The reopening of various spaces, almost a year and a half after the beginning of the pandemic in Brazil, is allowing children to return to the streets and schools, and gradually resume leisure activities outside the home. However, many families remain cautious due to uncertainties about new COVID variants and the challenges of carrying out certain routine activities without a mask or in large crowds. Therefore, it is crucial to expand research on the impact of confinement and its long-term effects on society, particularly in the field of leisure.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This research has certain limitations in terms of sampling that must be considered when interpreting the results. Since our study was not quantitative, it is possible that new categories could emerge from the analysis if a larger group of children were included. Additionally, our study did not take into account the sociocultural background of each child and family. Other studies (DASHPER and KING, 2021; MARTINS and CRUZ, 2014) have shown that it is possible to compare restrictions on leisure activities with financial restrictions faced by families, as many of them experienced a considerable reduction in income during the pandemic. Therefore, future research should take into account these variables in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the pandemic on children's leisure activities.

The use of drawings as a research method can be compared to interpreting a snapshot of the participants' emotions at a specific point in time. It is important to note that this study was conducted during the first five months of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil, and conducting a follow-up study with the same children after more than a year and a half of restrictions may reveal different elements in the drawings. However, despite this limitation, we believe that our study is valuable in addressing the question of children's perspectives and interests regarding leisure restrictions during the pandemic isolation.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

One of the major contributions of this study is the use of an innovative model of analysis based on drawings made by the children themselves, which allowed them to express

their feelings and anxieties directly. Consequently, our research was able to demonstrate that the pandemic has affected the leisure activities of children, especially those activities that require leaving the house and engaging in social interactions.

The collected drawings indicated that even after a few months of confinement, the children had already expressed their discomfort with the lack of social interaction, which is a fundamental element for their personal growth and well-being. The drawings revealed that the many leisure activities that were suddenly taken away from them were still present in their minds and thoughts, as they were depicted in various elements of their artwork.

The element of public spaces was more noticeable among children who live in apartments, but further intentional sampling would be needed to establish any causality. It was also observed that children with siblings did not exhibit as many social relationships with children outside their family, suggesting that the option to play with other children at home may be a significant alternative to mitigate the effects of isolation.

This analysis suggests that children are experiencing limitations in their routines due to the confinement imposed by the pandemic, as they are unable to use places outside of home and interact with different people during their leisure time. Even activities that can be performed at home, such as watching movies, having an ice cream or eating a snack, appeared in the drawings as outdoor activities that bring pleasure in leaving home and being with friends and relatives.

The current maintenance of social distancing, as advocated by health organizations, is essential for the health of children and their families. This unprecedented situation has imposed restrictions on children, resulting in real consequences in the way they experience leisure. As a result, the quality of life of these children is affected, and it is crucial to minimize the feeling of social isolation as much as possible.

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