

Gender and Feminine Autonomy in Brazil's Bolsa Família Program

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Abstract

This study analyzes the empowering conditions of women assisted by Brazil's Bolsa Família. Our investigation develops two comparisons. Firstly, we compare the benefited women's social situation from the large-scale cities with the ones in small-scale cities, in Brazil. We also compare the women beneficiaries from the Bolsa Família Program with the non-beneficiary ones. We see a crystallization mechanism of gender's role in society that make the women beneficiaries maintain some tasks considered feminine responsibilities, such as the dedication to the care of others and the dependence on the government's aid. The access of these women to the income transference has provided some benefits in terms of empowering their decisions related to the consumption of basic goods. However, this change process doesn't reflect on the alteration of the traditional gender's patterns and it even occurs with the reinforcement of these same patterns.

Keywords: gender inequality; cash transfer program; poverty; feminine autonomy.

Introduction

In this study we reflect upon the possibilities or obstacles to the shift in gender status in women, considering that the social policies also play an essential role in the production and reproduction of social identities and subjects. It is also important to consider that social stratification, as it is demonstrated by Esping-Andersen (1991) is one of the central principles of The Social Welfare State. According to the author, 'the Welfare State is not only a mechanism which intervenes – and maybe alters – inequality. It is actually a system of stratification. It regulates the way social relations are structured (Esping-Andersen, 1991, p.104).

Social policies pose paradoxes and contradictions when it comes to women's citizenship. As Pateman (2000) reported, this embodies the sexually special types of constitutions in the Social Welfare State and the sexually special types of incorporation of men and women as citizens. For this reason, Ulrich Beck (2010) considers genders' role as one of the major features of the new modernity and acknowledges the attribution of gender characters as one of the essential aspects of the nuclear family and industrial society. Consequently, one of the crucial aspects of the Social Welfare State as well. All this considered, we understand that, to women, the care work related to activities of reproduction is the core of the link among citizenship, status and autonomy.

With this in mind, this work seeks to reflect on empiric elements which allow an analysis of poor women's conditions to achieve autonomy or empowerment. These women were assisted by Brazil's Bolsa Família Program. There were comparative case studies (Flick, 2009) which were developed in two cities in the state of Paraná, Brazil: Londrina, a city of 506.701 inhabitants and Guaraci with a number of 5.222 inhabitants (2010 Census).

Data collection was gathered in 2012 with 150 women being interviewed in Londrina and 32 in Guaraci. This is a purposeful non-probabilistic sample (Williams, 2004). However, its size is representative of the universe of the beneficiary families of the Bolsa Família Program. Data was examined based on content analysis technique (Bardin, 2011).

We perform two types of comparison: the possible variations in the social situation of the beneficiary women, according to the size of the city where they live; among the interviewees from Londrina we analyze and compare the life conditions of the beneficiary women with women that are users of social assistance and that are not beneficiary of the program. In order to make the second comparison possible, we divided the group of interviews from Londrina in two equal shares of 75 interviews. Two arguments are developed in this work: a) the Bolsa Família Program can be more meaningful to women who live in small cities due to their limited participation in the labor market. Nevertheless, the program can contribute to women's dedication in care work instead of paid work; b) regarding a large city, beneficiary women find themselves more vulnerable and undertaking a great amount of paid work and child care work compared to the other group of women who are found in a similar situation of poverty.

These disadvantages derive from the requirements of the program and also from the fact that in the first group, women are more likely to be the head of the family.

Gender relations and reproductive activities

The focus of research on the Bolsa Família Program is due to its recurrence in the Brazilian society and amongst women in situations of poverty. In 2013, the year of its 10-year anniversary, the program supported 13,800,000 (thirteen million eight hundred thousand) families which corresponded to more than 50 million people. In 93% of the cases the card is held by women¹. For this reason, part of research on the Bolsa Família Program has been targeting to investigate its impacts on the life conditions of women who are the card holders.

The program was established in 2003 after the unification of various types of conditional cash transfer programs. This is a policy which selects the poorest families to become beneficiaries. The program classifies a family as being extremely poor if they have as monthly per capita income the amount of R\$ 70,00 (seventy reais) and the family is considered poor if this number is from R\$ 70,00 to R\$ 140,00 (one hundred forty reais). Considering the exchange rate of one dollar for R\$ 2,40 (two reais and forty cents) the monthly per capita income is approximately 29 dollars for families living in extreme poverty and 58 dollars for families living in poverty.

The program assigns obligations in order to retain the benefits, which are named 'conditions'. These correspond to school attendance of children and teenagers and regular visits to the doctor, including pregnant women (MDS, 2006a and 2006b). We suggest considering the sense of improvement in women's life conditions, highlighting the conciliation between productive work and reproductive work and their implications to the economic female autonomy. We focus particularly on reproductive activities, presuming that these tasks place a great burden on women in situations of poverty.

Reproductive activities are defined as "the group of activities that comprise the care and maintenance of the household, including gestation and labor, parenting and children's education, health, food preparation, water and firewood collection, purchase of foodstuffs, household chores and family care" (FAO, 2003, p. 33).

Household chores are part of reproductive activities and can be defined as "a group of tasks related to the care of others; these tasks are carried out in the family context - conjugal domicile and relatives – and they are unpaid work performed specially by women" (Fougeyrollas-Schwebel, 2009, p. 257). The view of feminist authors confronts the dissociation of the two opposite spheres: production and reproduction, as they are conceived by the liberal doctrine. These spheres are linked to the dichotomy between public and private, which are widely questioned by feminist studies (Pateman, 2000).

The concept of sexual division of labor provides the explanatory base to the conventional segregation between productive work and reproductive work. As it is argued by Danièle Kergoat (2009, p. 67), Sexual division of labor is the social division of work which results from social relations of gender. This division is historically adapted to each society. Its main characteristic is the idea that men are intended to productive work and women are designed for reproductive work. Simultaneously, men participate in activities that have a strong social meaning (political, religious and military activities, among others).

Regarding economic, cultural and demographic changes that modify this classic sexual division of labor and which affect the organization of care work, families – preferably women – continue to have as main responsibilities the provision of protection and care to their dependents (Aguirre, 2005).

The role of "caretaker" is usually assigned to women in situations of poverty. They are deprived not only of services offered by the job market but also many of the facilities provided by technology. These women utilize public services that may be of inferior quality. The role that women play within their families works as a model for assistance programs (Mariano, 2011). This situation leads to reflection based on data about the presence of young children and the access to preschool education services, with special highlights to daycare services. This type of service occupies a crucial role in the field of reproductive activities.

If we compare the two cities, Table 1 demonstrates that in Guaraci there is a higher number of women who have school-age children with approximately 56% of the interviewees from Guaraci and 47% from Londrina being beneficiaries of the program. Table 2 displays that women from Guaraci have more children of this age group. Nearly 40% of the beneficiary women interviewed in Guaraci have two children of this age group whereas in Londrina this number is 23%. This difference is the result of the urbanization process, supposing that urbanized areas contribute to the reduction of fecundity rates.

Table 1 – Presence of Young children that could attend daycare servise, according to the type of access to the Bolsa Família Program – Guaraci and Londrina

School-age children	Guaraci		Londrina		Non-beneficiary	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Yes	18	56,3	35	46,7	27	36,0
No	14	43,8	40	53,3	48	64,0
Total	32	100,0	75	100,0	75	100,0

Source: This paper's author

In Londrina, if we compare beneficiary women to the non-beneficiary ones, the presence of young children is relatively more frequent in the first group (Table 1), with a difference of approximately 10%. With regard to the number of school-age children (Table 2), it is highly likely to find one or two children in each group. We interpret that the first group presents higher fecundity rate due to the program's priorities. The Bolsa Família Program prioritizes families with greater vulnerabilities, which includes the presence of children. Thus, the high fecundity rate is the cause – and not the effect – of the ingress in the conditional cash transfer program.

Table 2 – Distribution of the interviewees, according to the number of school-age children and the type of access to the Bolsa Família Program – Guaraci and Londrina

Number of school-age children	Guaraci		Londrina		Non-beneficiary	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	10	55,6	23	67,6	19	67,9
2	7	38,9	8	23,5	7	25,0
3	0	0	2	5,9	2	7,1
4	1	5,6	0	0	0	0
NR	0	0	1	2,9	0	0,0
Total	18	100,0	34	100,0	28	100,0

Source: This paper's author

As it is demonstrated in Table 3, the situation of the beneficiary and non-beneficiary regarding access to daycare does not differ significantly in Londrina. On the other hand, between Guaraci and Londrina the smaller city offers wider coverage. We notice that it is not by participating in the program that the families can have access to the public service destined to children. Yet, it is the structure of the public services of the city that works as a differential.

Table 3 – Distribution of the interviewees according to daycare services and the type of access to the Bolsa Família Program – Guaraci and Londrina

Access to daycare	Guaraci		Londrina		Non-beneficiary	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
All children enrolled in daycare	2	11,1	4	11,4	4	15,4
Some children enrolled in daycare	4	22,2	2	5,7	2	7,7
No children enrolled in daycare	12	66,7	29	82,9	20	76,9
Total	18	100	35	100,0	26	100,0

Source: This paper's author

In view of the low number of children attending daycare, we are led to an ambiguity regarding the program's conditions. The obligation to attend school that is required to the regular basic education acts on the levels of education precisely where the access is universal. Then, it does not contribute to tackle the issue of access to preschool education in Brazil. According to national data, in 2008 “the school attendance rate [was] 79,8% to children at the age between four to six years old and 18,1% between zero to three years old” (Fundação Carlos Chagas, 2012, p. 26). The increase in coverage to children aging from four to six years old is a recent phenomenon, especially after 1998. The increase in coverage to preschool education, however, is still unequal in different regions of the country and in different social classes. The first and the second fifth of per capita income, which is the poorest portion of the population, constitute the income groups that have the lowest growth rate in these services.

The black and rural populations are the groups with the lowest coverage rate (Fundação Carlos Chagas, 2012). Notwithstanding the coverage rate being relatively high to the age group between four and six, it is important to highlight that normally preschool is not full-time, which urges women to care for their own children in some periods of the day.

Bila Sorj's studies (2004) reveal that the access to daycare and preschool facilitates the conciliation between work and family and has positive impacts on women, since it promotes their participation in the job market, in the family income and it increases their workday. "This positive impact is generally felt in every social class. The poorest families are the ones who obtain the greatest benefits, though, when compared to families with higher income" (Sorj; Fontes; Machado, 2007, p. 576-577).

Therefore, the coverage of preschool education services tends to improve women's life conditions and consequently, contributing to women's autonomy. In compliance with the II National Planning Policy for Women, we comprehend women's autonomy as it follows:

Female autonomy – women should be granted the power to make decisions about their lives and their bodies, as well as the conditions that influence the events in their community and in their country. Women should be capable of ending historical legacies, cycles and dependency; also exploration and subordination that constrain their lives in the personal, economic, political and social spheres (Brasília, 2008, p. 27). In this view, economic autonomy is a constitutive part of a broader notion of autonomy, which involves the participation in the job market.

Accumulation of Paid Work and Child Care

In Guaraci, 34% of the 32 beneficiary women interviewed have paid jobs and among these, 36% have school-age children. Out of 18 women with children, 22% have paid jobs, according to Table 4.

Table 4 – Distribution of the beneficiaries, according to paid jobs and the presence of school-age children Guaraci

Paid jobs	Total (%)	School-age children (%)	
		Yes	No
With paid jobs	34	36	64
Without paid jobs	66	67	33
Total	100	56	44

Source: this paper's author

The accumulation of paid work and the care of school-age children affects 12,5% of the beneficiaries that were interviewed in Guaraci. The presence of school-age children limits the labor market participation from 34% to 22%. These findings are corroborated by the combination of paid work and the presence of children. Among women who have paid jobs, 36% have school-age children and 64% do not. Among women who do not have paid jobs these proportions are reversed: 67% have young children and 33% do not. In this small city, the presence of children limits the labor force participation.

In Londrina (Table 5), 40% out of 75 beneficiaries that were interviewed perform paid jobs. This number is relatively higher than in Guaraci (34%). Among the beneficiaries that work, 47% have young children.

Table 5 - Distribution of the intervieweed, according to paid jobs and access to the Bolsa Família Program – Londrina

Paid jobs	Beneficiary (%)	Non-beneficiary (%)
With paid jobs	40	39
Without paid jobs	60	61
Total	100	100

Source: this paper's author

Table 6 shows data about paid jobs and the presence of school age children, considering the 75 beneficiaries from Londrina. Among these, 47% have and 53% do not have children of this age group. Among women with young children, 40% have paid jobs and 60% do not. The same percentage is true for women without young children. This 40% contrasts with the 22% previously observed in Guaraci.

Table 6- Distribution of the beneficiaries, according to paid jobs and the presence of school-age children – Londrina

Paid jobs	Total (%)	School-age children (%)	
		Yes	No
With paid jobs	40	40	40
Without paid jobs	60	60	60
Total	100	100	100

Source: This paper's author

Data illustrates that although women from Londrina have restricted access to daycare services comparing with Guaraci, the presence of young children at home does not influence women's participation in the labor market. We verify that the relationship between these two factors is neutral in Londrina and negative in Guaraci. Besides, the labor force participation of beneficiaries with young children in Londrina is twice as large as it is in Guaraci. As a result, the beneficiaries from Londrina show greater accumulation of paid work and child care: 12,5% in Guaraci whereas in Londrina this number reaches 19%.

The homogeneity of data in Table 6 illustrates that by virtue of its conditions, the Bolsa Família Program in Londrina creates the same demands of child care in the first phases of childhood and the further steps of children's development. As a result, regardless of age, child care is the main obstacle that limits women's labor force participation. Therefore, in case of Londrina, the program tends to interfere negatively to the management of productive work and reproductive activities in the beneficiaries' lives.

Child care as an obstacle to work is not only true for women who have school-age children. Women sometimes encounter the same difficulty when caring for older children when they are still required to attend school. It is also true for women who care for grandchildren or other children.

When we compare the beneficiaries and the non-beneficiaries of the program we understand that the presence of young children among the non-beneficiaries restricts women's labor force participation from 39% (Table 5) to 30% (Table 6). This decrease is slighter in Londrina than it is in Guaraci (from 34% to 22%). Among the non-beneficiaries, 36% have young children and 64% do not (Table 7). Among these women with young children, 30% work and 70% do not. Out of the 48 non-beneficiaries without children, 44% work and 56% do not.

Table 7 – Distribution of non-beneficiaries, according to paid jobs and the presence of school-age children – Londrina

Paid jobs	Total (%)	School-age children (%)	
		Yes	No
With paid jobs	39	30	44
Without paid jobs	61	70	56
Total	100	100	100

Source: This paper's author

The contrast between Tables 6 and 7 shows that the accumulation of paid work and child care affects slightly more the beneficiaries of the program in Londrina, featuring 19% as opposed to 11%. The fulfillment of the conditions of the program is not the only variable that explains this phenomenon, as well as the differences in occupation rate in women. We should take into account the influences of the presence of spouse: 33% of the beneficiaries and 52% of the non-beneficiaries had a spouse. This indicator draws attention to the fact that women who are heads of their families tend to have lower income; this favors their inclusion in the Bolsa Família Program, in case of large cities. In Guaraci, on the other hand, 75% of the beneficiaries have spouses. These variations reflect the fact that the phenomenon of women as the head of their families and single-parent families headed by mothers are more common in large cities. All in all, women's participation in the labor market grows as the presence of a spouse decreases.

Tables 6 and 7 also reveal that with regard to Londrina, being a beneficiary does not influence women's labor market participation, considering that 40% of the beneficiaries and 39% of the non-beneficiaries find themselves doing paid work. Nevertheless, these rates are lower than the national ones. According to data from The National Household Survey Research (originally PNAD in Portuguese) collected in 2009, 59,5% of the Brazilian population constituted the Economically Active Population (PEA) and among women this number was down to 49,7% (IPEA, 2010). Although these variations are not considerable, they suggest that women in situations of poverty had limited labor market participation due to social and economic processes that result in exclusion. A great number of women work as temporary employees, meaning precarious working relations with no labor and welfare rights and guarantees.

As it was previously seen, the presence of school-age children in Londrina is a neutral variable to beneficiaries' labor force participation; On the other hand, to non-beneficiaries, having young children is an aspect that limits their labor force participation. Forty percent of women who have young children and are beneficiaries of the program participate actively in the labor market, contrasting with 30% among the non-beneficiaries. Considering the difficulties to handle double workday, we presume that even though non-beneficiaries of the program are users of social assistance (which classifies them in a situation of poverty) they are still likely to make choices between care work and paid work.

The excessive workload affects women in situation of poverty and is more severe to women that are beneficiaries of the program, especially in large cities. If we consider this excess as a negative indicator to women's autonomy, then the beneficiaries' situation concerning autonomy is more precarious. Comparing the two cities elected for this case study, we conclude: the beneficiaries from a small city have a more limited economic autonomy and are less likely to handle double workday whereas the beneficiaries from a large city have greater economic autonomy and are more likely to cope with double workday. This relation demonstrates the persistence of the patriarchal foundations in social policies as it is analyzed by Carole Pateman (2000), which raises obstacles to the increase in women's autonomy.

According to the women interviewed, the excessive burden of care work involves the absence of children at full-time period in school as well as the distance of the educational institutions (in case of large cities) and the conditions of the program. These obstacles tend to be more significant in large cities; for this reason, beneficiaries from Londrina express more criticism over the conditions of the program than in Guaraci. Approximately 24% of the interviewed from Londrina voice their disagreement as for the conditions of the program due to the difficulties to handle the journey from their domicile to the educational institution. Also, they find great difficulty to control their children attendance in school.

Table 8 shows the reasons which restrict women's labor market participation. Reproductive activities create obstacles to their insertion into the labor market, including child care, household chores, elderly care and other home-based care, such as the care for debilitated and disabled people or pregnancy. Roughly 11% of the beneficiaries from Guaraci mentioned that not many job offers are available and in Londrina this number is high to 15%. We highlight the considerable numbers to the totality of problems regarding education and health. In Londrina, approximately 35% of the obstacles mentioned by women to their insertion into the labor market are due to these factors. In Guaraci the number is 15%. These figures are relatively high and are closely associated with public services, which is precisely what constitutes the conditions of the program. The Bolsa Família Program, which intends to end the poverty cycle, seems to be concerned about future generations; however, it also seems to show disregard for current adult generation.

Table 8 – Obstacles to paid work, according to the type of access to the Bolsa Família Program – Guaraci and Londrina

Obstacles	Guaraci		Londrina			
	Total		Beneficiary		Non-beneficiary	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Child care/household chores	14	51,9	20	38,5	20	35,7
Elderly care / debilitated / disabled people	5	18,5	1	1,9	6	10,7
Shortage of job vacancies	3	11,1	8	15,4	5	8,9
Low level of education / lack of qualification or training	1	3,7	4	7,7	0	0,0
Spouse's resistance	1	3,7	0	0,0	2	3,6
Pregnancy	0	0,0	3	5,8	4	7,1
Health problems	3	11,1	14	26,9	16	28,6
Age	0	0,0	2	3,8	1	1,8
Other	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
Did not answer	0	0,0	0	0,0	2	3,6
Total	27	100,0	52	100,0	56	100,0

Nota: Open question with the option for multiple answers. Source: This paper's author

We verify that there is no direct relation between the shortage of school vacancies and obstacle to labor market. In Londrina, nearly 83% of the beneficiaries with school-age children suffer from the shortage of school vacancies. Nevertheless, among women who did not have any paid work only 38,5% mention this factor as a reason not to work outside the home. In Guaraci the discrepancy of data is slighter: 66% of the beneficiaries with school-aged children have absolutely no access to this service while 52% of those women who did not carry out any paid work acknowledge the shortage of school vacancy as a reason not to do so.

Considering that practically all young children are looked after by their mothers/beneficiaries, we suppose that the acceptance of the caretaker role explains the gap between these measured phenomena. The discrepancy among the answers shown in Tables 3 and 8 (presence of child with no access to child care center and obstacle to women's paid work) is found in the two compared items: among the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries and between Guaraci and Londrina. The structures of gender relations seem to be the explanatory factor to such a repeating pattern. With this regard, we observe the interviewed women's preference for paid work outside the home and housework. As demonstrated in Table 9, 37,5% of the beneficiaries from Guaraci and 36% from Londrina would prefer to commit themselves to housework, if they had this option. Among the three compared groups, the greatest frequencies of this answer (preference for care work) derive from the beneficiaries (Guaraci and Londrina), although the difference is minor in the group of the non-beneficiaries. If economic autonomy is a needed condition to the empowerment of women, even though it is not the only condition, then the ideas of women's autonomy are more frequent among non-beneficiaries of the program.

Table 9 – Assessment of the interviewees regarding their preference for housework and paid work outside the home, according to the type of access to the program – Guaraci and Londrina

Preference	Guaraci		Londrina			
	Total		Beneficiary		Non-beneficiary	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Work outside the home	16	50,0	46	61,3	45	60,0
Dedicate to housework and children	12	37,5	27	36,0	26	34,7
Should do both	2	6,3	0	0,0	2	2,7
It depends / maybe	1	3,1	2	2,7	2	2,7
I don't know	1	3,1	0	0	0	0
Total	32	100,0	75	100	75	100

Source: This paper's author

The group containing the greater number of women with active participation in the labor market is constituted by non-beneficiaries with no spouse. These women reach the total of 61% composed of 22 women, among which only five have children aging until five years old. The variables that have the most interference in the insertion of these women into the labor market are the presence of a spouse and young children. Hence, the Bolsa Família Program interferes directly in the amount of women's reproductive responsibilities.

The symbolic dimension that configures the lifestyles and the behaviors of families in situations of poverty help us understand the construction of roles and functions of men and women within this social group. The cultural association that is symbolically made between 'the provider man' and 'the maintainer woman' is widely recognized. This allows men to have economic control and women to have emotional control, the care and affection to the members of the family. The man as a 'provider' of the family carries a moral and economical meaning. Even though this division cannot be interpreted strictly, it still characterizes the social relations in several groups. As Cynthia Sarti highlights (2005, p. 8),

Recent studies on people in situations of poverty show (...) the symbolic power of these patterns remaining in today's world, reaffirming the male authority through the central role of men as a mediator to the external world, while it also socially weakens the family that does not have a man to 'provide' home, food and respect.

When it comes to the complementary division of roles and authority between men and women, it is women's responsibility to maintain the unity of the group and to manage the family budget. This attribution is not related to the capacity of earning money; yet it is attributed to the role of housekeeper (Sarti, 2005). These attributions favor the election of women as responsible for the funds provided by the conditional cash transfer programs. By relying on these attributions that are socially designed to women, these programs intend to maximize the chances of achieving efficiency. Pragmatically speaking, these programs reinforce the idea that the woman is the housekeeper, considering the ideological factors of gender domination (Carlotto and Mariano, 2010).

As it is observed by Ana Maria Goldani (2002, p. 34), the feminist movement 'drew attention to the presuppositions of the different models of welfare and social policies'. By doing so, it emphasized that women's contribution "goes beyond the provision of care work to their dependents". In case women did not perform these tasks, these services would have a considerable cost to the private sector and to the State. As the author notes, "although the feminist movement and other women's groups have had significant achievements in terms of rights and promotion of women's wellness, the basic presuppositions of our precarious social welfare state still remain" (Goldani, 2002, p. 34).

Conclusions and Discussions

The findings resulted from research in the cities of Guaraci and Londrina, in the state of Paraná, Brazil suggest that the effects of the urbanization processes should be taken into consideration when reflecting upon the results. Also, there is no evidence to suggest that the differences found in this research are due to the distinctive aspects of the Bolsa Família Program in the several contexts mentioned along this research. Among these situations we highlight the variations regarding presence or absence of spouse, women as heads of their families and single-parent families. These factors are more frequent in Londrina than in Guaraci. We corroborate the general impressions that urbanization favors women's insertion into the labor market. Nevertheless, it does not count on public services to provide support for reproductive tasks.

Notwithstanding this reservation, we can identify paradoxes with regards to women's insertion into social policies. This phenomenon has been modified by the issues of care work and social roles of gender. The paradox is that in the large city, where women accumulate double workday and the job of being the head of the family the beneficiaries of the program have more restricted access to the enrolment of children in daycare center services. This ambiguity becomes clearer with the fact that, in Londrina, non-beneficiaries in situation of poverty have greater access to daycare center services comparing with the beneficiaries. The coherence of this data relies on the reinforcement of the social attributions of reproductive activities to women, usually among the beneficiaries of the program.

Contrary to the impressions conveyed by the media about poverty and the impacts of the Bolsa Família Program, we consider that women from large cities find themselves more socially vulnerable due to provided data: higher occurrence of double workday; less support from public services to preschool education; major difficulties of spatial mobility not only to the utilization of public services offered to reproductive activities but also to perform paid work; ultimately, higher occurrence of single-parent families.

We also reject the hypothesis that the Bolsa Família Program interferes positively in women's autonomy in small cities. Our analysis is guided by the realization that the increase in women's autonomy relies on the reduction of reproductive work and on the promotion of favorable conditions that allow women to manage paid work outside the home and housework. However, we confirm that in the small city the social vulnerability is less critical; on the other hand, women's economic autonomy tends to be more limited due to their low participation in the labor market. Data from Guaraci also indicate that we should question the assumptions that women from small cities achieve autonomy to determine their marital relations, by virtue of the benefits of the program.

The comparison of the two cities suggests that the presence of children interfere directly in women's economic autonomy in small cities. Considering that their low participation in the labor market and the presence of young children pose more obstacles to women's economic autonomy, it is possible to deduce that the Bolsa Família Program is more likely to influence women's situations in small cities. On the other hand, we cannot acknowledge this influence in this research.

In the case studies, the variables that most interfere in women's insertion into the labor market are the presence of a spouse and young children. The Bolsa Família Program interferes in the amount of women's reproductive responsibilities. The presence of a spouse inhibits women's participation in the labor market which confirms strong presence of traditional roles of gender with regards to the separation between productive work and reproductive work. The presence of young children also tends to exert negative influence in women's participation in the labor market, by virtue of the shortage of public services to reproductive activities and to the designation of care work to women. The social responsibility of child care is distant from women's reality, especially women in situations of poverty. Also, maternity care and reproduction of biological and social life are women's responsibilities, even when these women are inserted in conditional cash transfer programs. The group with the greatest advantage in the proportion of women participating in the labor market is constituted by non-beneficiaries with no spouse.

The Bolsa Família Program does not exert any influence in women's participation in paid work. On the other hand, the program does influence the increase of reproductive work carried out by women, which exercises negative influence on women's autonomy. In other words, the program tends to interfere negatively with the management of productive work and reproductive activities, while it equals care work demands from the first phases of child development and the other phases. Thus, child care is the main obstacle mentioned by women to their insertion into the labor market and the highest frequency is found amongst the beneficiaries of the program.

We were surprised to identify that there is no direct relation between shortage of child care service and the obstacles to participate in the labor market. In Londrina, nearly 83% of the beneficiaries with school-age children do not have access to this service. Nevertheless, among unemployed women only 38,5% cite this as a reason not to work. This data shows full approval of the attribution of child care work to women in domestic spheres.

Women's preference for paid work and domestic work is an indication of their idea of female autonomy. Among the compared groups, the beneficiaries present higher frequency in preference for domestic work. This indicates that the ideas of female autonomy are more common amongst the non-beneficiaries of the program.

So far, the focus of Bolsa Família Program has been to alleviate poverty and the expected result is the break of the intergenerational poverty cycle. Consequently, the insertion of women as card holders tends to take functional advantage of full performance of a social role that is historically designed for women. It is for a pragmatic reason and it makes use of women's social work for objectives established by state social policies. This pragmatism may achieve positive economic results; however, it demands considerable social and political efforts. Therefore, the improvement of the cash transfer policies requires the review of their foundations of gender: to confront the privatization of social issues it is necessary that social policies devote their attention to reproductive activities. This requires questioning and reviewing the sexual division of labor and the social roles of gender. In order to advance in the reduction of social inequality it is necessary to create mechanisms which can contribute to women's autonomy. Reducing social inequalities requires reduction in gender inequalities.

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ⁱ Source: <http://bolsafamilia10anos.mds.gov.br/infograficos>, Retrieved on 12/02/2013.