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Maternal age at first birth and adolescent education in Brazil

By [Leticia Marteleto](#), [Molly Dondero](#)

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Abstract

Background: Brazil has witnessed dramatic changes in its fertility patterns in recent decades. The decline to below-replacement fertility has been accompanied by increases in the proportion of children born to young mothers. Yet we know little about the well-being of children born to young mothers in Brazil.

Objective: Using data from the 2006 Pesquisa Nacional de Demografia e Saúde and a quasi-natural experimental approach, this study examines the implications of maternal age at first birth for the education of Brazilian adolescents.

Results: We find that being born to a young mother is associated with educational disadvantages in adolescence, but that these disadvantages are attenuated once we account for mothers' selection into early childbearing. We also find that, in southern Brazil, adolescents born to young mothers have poorer educational outcomes compared with their peers born to older mothers, but that in northern Brazil no such disparities exist.

Conclusions: Adolescent educational disadvantages associated with being born to a young mother are not an artifact of selectivity, at least in southern Brazil. Regional variation in the effect of maternal age at first birth on adolescent education suggests the important role of the extended family and the father's presence as mechanisms through which disadvantages operate.

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