

Study that contests hunger opens crisis at Ipea – 08/22/2022 – Mercado

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A study signed by the current president of Ipea (Institute of Applied Economic Research), Erik Alencar de Figueiredo, contests recent research that points to the increase in the number of Brazilians in a situation of food insecurity or hunger. The argument of Figueiredo, who is an economist and was undersecretary for Fiscal Policy at the Ministry of Economy, is that the increase in hunger should have resulted in a “significant shock” in the increase in hospitalizations due to diseases resulting from hunger and malnutrition, in addition to a higher number of low birth weight children. “Surprisingly, this growth [de insegurança alimentar e desnutrição] has not impacted health indicators linked to the prevalence of hunger, which is directly contrary to the specialized literature”, he says in the document. Ipea was contacted, but declined to comment on the matter. In another excerpt from the 20-page study, it says that “if the data released are correct and food insecurity has grown, it does not seem to impact the health indicators of the Brazilian population directly related to malnutrition.” “This was possibly due to the existing social programs. In this aspect, the progress that the Auxílio Brasil Program has represented, expanding the number of beneficiary families in all regions of the country and increasing the purchasing power of the benefit in terms of baskets basics.” The study was presented by the institute's president during a press conference with the Minister of Citizenship, Ronaldo Bento, in Planalto, on the 17th. The distribution of the study to the press was the responsibility of the Secretary of Communication of the Presidency of the Republic, not Ipea. On the institute's website, the study was included on the 11th, a week before the event in Planalto. Internally, the material was not discussed nor received an opinion from other researchers, unlike what is usually done. For Afipea (Association of IPEA Employees), the press conference on the topic was a violation of electoral legislation that prohibits institutional advertising in the 90 days prior to the elections. “In an attempt to produce effects and repercussions, the Federal government uses the state machine to produce what ‘appears to be’, in reality, an expensive electoral propaganda. It costs the price of democracy, fair play and respect for institutions”, says the entity, in a note. Formally, Ipea technicians understand that they cannot even give interviews during the election period. Traditionally, the interval is used for the organization and systematization of studies and research, which are published at the end of the embargo. Health expert says assumptions are questionable For researcher Patricia Jaime, from the nutrition department at the Faculty of Public Health at USP (University of São Paulo), the starting point in the note from the president of Ipea, when trying to counter the studies that point to a worsening in the situation of hunger, is questionable. . One of the problems, says Jaime, who is the deputy scientific coordinator at Nupens/USP (Nucleus for Epidemiological Research in Nutrition and Health), is the fact that he uses data from hospitalizations. “As if being hungry means having disease. In food insecurity, the most serious form is hunger, and the impact on health takes time to happen”, he says. One of the data refuted by the current president of Ipea comes from the 2nd National Survey on Food Insecurity in the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Brazil, carried out by the Penssan Network (Brazilian Network for Research in Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security) and carried out by the Vox Institute. popular. The survey shows that 33 million people are hungry in Brazil today, more than 30 years ago, in a setback of social protection policies. Another study, this one by FGV Social, concluded that in 2021, the percentage of the population that did not have money to buy food for themselves or their family at some point in 12 months reached 36% (was 30% in 2019). Impact of hunger on children takes place over five years Part of the data used by the president of Ipea were extracted from the Datasus hospitalization system, the Unified Health System database. This basis for understanding the effect of malnutrition is the least accurate, in the researcher's assessment. The failure occurs because malnutrition has a cumulative effect on health, especially on child development up to age five. Therefore, when a child is admitted in a hospital, it is common for the first diagnosis to be dehydration from diarrhea or a respiratory infection, for example. Only then will the origin of malnutrition be identified. The SUS itself has another database that Jaime considers more accurate to observe the effect of hunger and food insecurity on children up to five years of age, the Sisvan (Food and Nutrition Surveillance System), which is used in primary care and records attendance at health posts. “Since 2017, there has been a gradual increase, as a recent worsening, in thinness and extreme thinness. This is public and is on Datasus. We can see the impact on children and, among them, children benefiting from income transfer programs”, it says. Figueiredo even uses data from this system, and notes that the prevalence of thinness or severe thinness in children aged 0 to 5 years increased by 0.43 percentage points in the comparison between the 2016 to 2018 and 2019 to 2021 intervals. advance of 7.10 percentage points in the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population. President of IPEA also predicts reduction of extreme poverty in Brazil “It is important to highlight that the growth of moderate and severe food insecurity does not seem to have increased the prevalence of underweight in other population groups”, says the president of Ipea in the study. The Nutrition and Poverty research group, from the Institute of Advanced Studies at USP, released a note on Friday (19) in which it also questions the conclusion of the Ipea material. For the researchers, the approach is misguided for a “sensitive, complex and serious issue.” “Income transfer programs have different impacts in adverse contexts. When experiencing double-digit inflation, rising unemployment, weakening social protection mechanisms and all sorts of restrictions imposed on society as a result of a fiscal policy that privileges the transfer of public resources to the private sector, the benefit effect is clearly compromised”, says the group. In the presentation he put together to talk about the study, the president of Ipea also stated that, unlike what has been happening in the world, this year Brazil will have an important reduction in extreme poverty. While the global forecast is for an increase of 15%, Figueiredo says that poverty will fall by 24% in Brazil in 2022. Auxílio Brasil replaces Bolsa Família, a program considered closely associated with PT administrations. In addition to the new name, the amount of the benefit paid rose to R\$400 (in August 2022, it was provisionally R\$600). According to Figueiredo, from January to July of this year, the program was responsible for creating 365 formal jobs for every 1,000 families included in the income transfer. “There was a directly proportional relationship in the amount of formal jobs generated and families added to Auxílio Brasil.” In the note, he states that he knows that “identifying the effects of income transfer programs on labor supply requires a complex data structure and a set of econometric models”, but that he intends to make an “initial exploration” of the available data.

