



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY



# Evaluating Saúde Criança: Policy Brief

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## OVERCOMING ILLNESS and POVERTY

*Saúde Criança's holistic approach to development effectively targets the most vulnerable groups and empowers beneficiaries to overcome the vicious cycle of severe illness and extreme poverty.*

Unanticipated adverse health events, such as serious illness or severe injury, can have substantial and long-lasting consequences on households, particularly the very poor. These types of events contribute to the inter-generational transmission of poverty. Recent evidence indicates that poor management of severe childhood illness/injury leads to lower human capital and consequently unfavorable



*Saúde Criança child with  
Dr. Vera Cordeiro,  
Founder & CEO.*

long-term prospects during adulthood. The result is that millions of poor families enter a vicious cycle in which abject poverty and illness lead to hospital admission and subsequent readmission and/or death.

Georgetown University Public Policy Institute researchers James Habyarimana, Daniel Ortega Nieto, and Jennifer Tobin, recently concluded the first rigorous evaluation of Saúde Criança (SC) a Brazilian NGO that works to break the cycle of poverty and illness of slum dwellers in Brazil. The researchers studied the long-term impact on the well-being of SC's graduates using quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the effects in the five areas of SC's approach.

- There are large and sustained gains across the five themes of Saúde Criança's approach (health, income generation, housing, education, and citizenship).
- Children enrolled in Saúde Criança significantly improved their health. SC children's hospitalization duration fell on average by 90 percent, and they were 11 percentage points less likely to have required surgery or clinical treatment than children that did not receive SC benefits.
- The economic well-being of Saúde Criança's families improved substantially. Beneficiaries' incomes almost doubled, and they were nearly 12 percentage points more likely to be employed than adults from similar families not exposed to SC.
- Saúde Criança's reaches vulnerable families and helps them close the socio-economic gap with better-off families. Beneficiaries attain education, housing, citizenship, and earning levels that are on par with "better-off" families, showing a powerful "catching up" effect.

## About Saúde Criança

Saúde Criança supports families with children that suffer severe health conditions such as cancer, brain tumors, and chronic respiratory diseases. Support from SC is structured by a co-responsibility action plan that focuses on the needs of the entire family, attending to the areas of health, income generation, housing, education, and citizenship. This innovative and holistic approach provides direct support to families, while also providing indirect support to prevent relapse. SC's objective is to improve not only the health of the child, but also the well-being and social inclusion of the child's family.

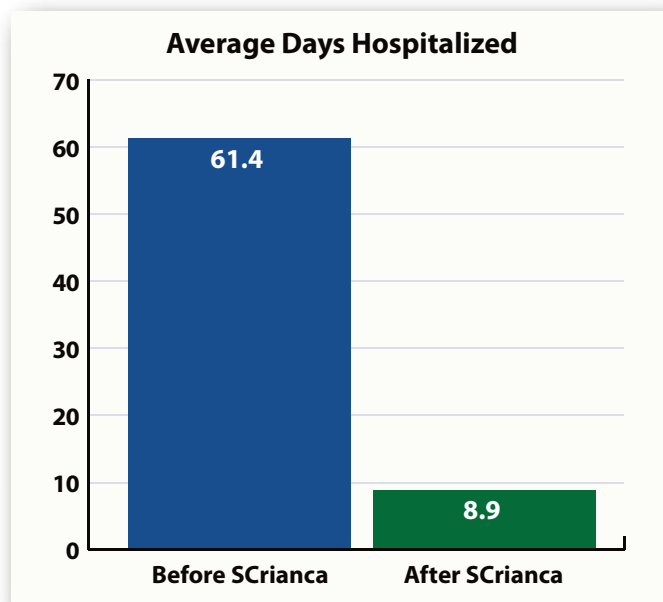


## The Evaluation

Saúde Criança's intervention has long-term positive impacts on the living standards of its graduates, specifically within their five main areas of focus:

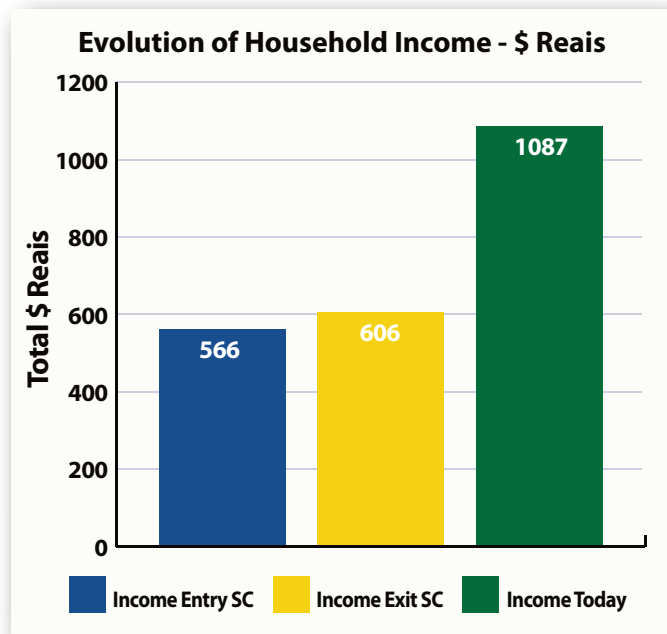
**HEALTH:** On average, the number of days that children spent in the hospital fell from just under 62 days at entry into the program to less than 9 days after graduating, representing a reduction of nearly 90 percent 3 years after graduation from the program. This impressive reduction in hospital stays may result from effective and sustained

management of the illness that reduces the likelihood of surgery or clinical treatment. Compared to the children who never had any exposure to the organization, SC children are 11 percentage points less likely to need surgery or clinical treatment in the six months before SC's evaluation survey.



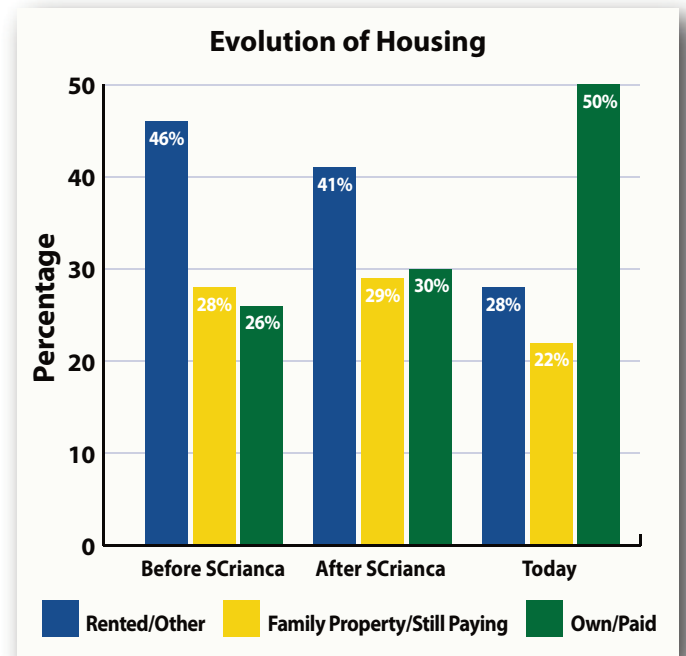
***SC's goal is to implement its methodology in every public hospital. The methodology is currently being replicated by social franchises across six states in Brazil and has been adopted as public policy by the Belo Horizonte government.***

**INCOME GENERATION:** SC's interventions significantly improved the economic well-being and employment prospects of beneficiaries. Household income per capita almost doubled when compared to figures after graduation, and there was a substantial increase in the percentage of employed adults, from 54 percent at entry into the program to 70 percent up to 5 years after graduation. When we account for broad based improvements in Brazil we still find that SC beneficiaries are nearly 12 percentage points more likely to be employed than other adults in the area not exposed to SC. This is at least partly due to the marketable skills such as professional hairdressing and cooking provided/financed by SC.



**EDUCATION:** Most children enrolled in SC are too sick to attend school. SC's program has a clear positive impact on school enrollment: the percentage of sick children who were attending school rose from approximately 10 percent at the beginning of the program to almost 92 percent, 3-5 years after graduation from the program.

**HOUSING:** Home ownership is an important step to economic self-sufficiency for the beneficiaries. Compared to an ownership rate of 25 percent on entry into Saúde Criança, 50 percent of beneficiaries now own their homes.



**CITIZENSHIP:** Many families who entered the program were eligible for government-provided benefits but did not claim them. SC provided enrollment assistance in programs like pensions and disability insurance to eligible families. As a result, the percentage of families receiving government transfers improved substantially from 6.6 percent at entry into the program to 20.8 percent at the time of SC's evaluation survey.

### Catching Up Effect

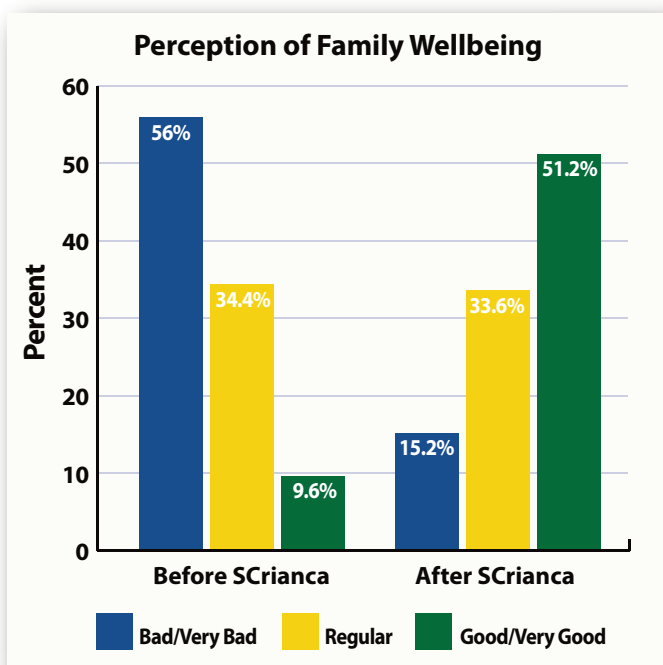
SC beneficiary households had more severe health shocks, and were poorer at the time of the initial illness/disease than similar families not exposed to SC. The economic status and severity of the disease of SC families affected their ability to effectively overcome these health shocks.



Mother receiving nutritional council at Saúde Criança.

But as result of SC’s holistic approach, these families improve their overall living standards, allowing them to “catch up” to the better-off families from the control group. Through the SC program, they attained education, housing, citizenship and earning levels on par with their better-off counterparts, showing a powerful catching up effect.

The impressive improvements in living standards are also reflected in the families’ perception of well-being. Upon entering the program, 56



percent of the families self-identified their well-being as “bad” or “very bad.” After graduating, most of the families improved their self-assessment of well-being, which reflects in the 51.2 that are doing “good” or “very good.”

## Policy Lessons & Conclusion

Attempts to tackle health shocks, eradicate poverty and promote social inclusion in the world depend crucially on the targeting, design, and impact of programs. Identifying the



Professionalization course with Saúde Criança mothers.

specific ways in which a vicious cycle of poor health and low wealth keep large sections of the population in abject poverty is an important contribution to the fight against poverty and social inclusion, not just in Brazil, but also in other developing countries. Saúde Criança effectively targets the most vulnerable groups and enables them to take control of their own destinies.

***“Everything that I know and I am now, I owe it to Saúde Criança ...when you arrive here you are sad, downcast, and hopeless. Here they teach you to walk with your head up high.”***

***Saúde Criança beneficiary***