

THE MENTAL HEALTH OF THE ELDERLY IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC- COVID-19

A SAÚDE MENTAL DOS IDOSOS EM TEMPOS DE PANDEMIA- COVID-19

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Abstract

Theme: the elderly population and mental health during the pandemic. **Problem:** what are the main factors that influence the mental and emotional health of elderly people in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. **Hypothesis:** many elderly people suffer emotional shocks due to information about the pandemic that cause fear and anxiety, thus compromising their mental health. **Objectives:** to understand the aspects related to the mental and emotional health of elderly people in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. **Justification:** the SARS-COV-2 pandemic affected many elderly people with social isolation, low purchasing power and/or excessive news in the media, frightening everyone. **Methodology:** This is a literature review. **Results.** In situations like the Covid-19 pandemic that cause stress and discomfort, it is necessary to deal with the problem with resilience, and also identify the strategies used in the past that were useful at similar times.

Keywords: Elderly. Mental health. Pandemic. Drugstore.

Resumo

Tema: A população idosa e a saúde mental durante a pandemia. **Problema:** Quais os principais fatores que influenciam à saúde mental dos idosos no contexto da pandemia por COVID-19? **Hipótese:** Os idosos têm sofrido abalos emocionais devido as informações sobre a pandemia que causam medo e ansiedade, comprometendo assim a saúde mental. **Objetivos:** Compreender os aspectos referente à saúde mental e emocional de pessoas idosas no contexto da pandemia por COVID-19. **Justificativa:** A pandemia da SARS-COV-2 afetou muitos idosos com o isolamento social, queda do poder aquisitivo e/ou notícias em excesso pela mídia amedrontaram a todos. **Metodologia:** Trata-se de revisão bibliográfica. **Resultados.** Em situações como a pandemia de Covid-19 que causam estresse e desconforto, é preciso lidar com o problema, a resiliência, e também identificar as estratégias utilizadas no passado que foram úteis em momentos semelhantes.

Palavras-chave: Idoso. Saúde Mental. Pandemia. Farmácia.

Introduction

The pandemic has caused great discomfort in the general population, but especially for the elderly, who show greater concerns for both physical and mental health. As soon as it emerged, the alarm that the group at greatest risk was people over 60 years of age, triggered a series of problems, among which were psychological ones. The new coronavirus pandemic crosses the entire fabric of society and has affected all areas of life in society, whether collectively or individually, wreaking havoc on the mental health of many, especially the elderly. In pandemic situations, the number of psychologically affected people are usually higher among people with some genetic predispositions or in cases of recurrence. It is estimated that problems in psychiatric issues, if not treated properly, can lead to problems with Dantesque severity. ⁽¹⁾

The new coronavirus, named SARS-CoV-2, which causes the disease Covid-19, was confirmed in Wuhan, China in the month of December 2019. The disease of COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) is a respiratory infection caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Coronavirus is not the name of the disease, and the scientific world has decided to name the new virus Covid-19, that is, the "new coronavirus" discovered in 2019. It causes respiratory infections and has been very harmful to the elderly population. Between December 2019 and January 2020, Covid-19 was already spreading in other cities in China, Japan, the United States, Canada and Australia. In Brazil, on February 7, there were 9 cases under investigation, but without records of confirmed cases. ^(2,3)

The elderly population has been growing rapidly in Brazil and one of the explanations for this growth is the reduction in fertility. Brazil has more than 28 million people over the age of 60, a number that represents 13% of the country's population. The elderly person is more valued in today's society, in which care, attention and,

consequently, life expectancy have grown considerably. We are currently experiencing a series of measures adopted to contain COVID-19, which despite affecting the elderly and people with preexisting respiratory diseases more violently, no one is safe from this virus, and among the main prevention measures is isolation. social, which has been causing several mental disorders in the entire population, especially for the elderly. ⁽⁴⁾

Although mental health problems are gaining more visibility worldwide, being a frequently debated topic in the last decade, reinforcing the need to expand care for this population through devices in PC. Although the new psychosocial care policies are focused on the inclusion of AB in mental health care, the trajectory of both - Mental Health and AB - had their very different paths. ⁽⁵⁾

The present work has as its hypothesis the fact that the pandemic crisis has brought many issues little seen or cited in the context of mental health in general, even more so for those who, because they are in the risk group, need to strictly follow the rules of social isolation. In a pandemic, fear increases anxiety and stress levels in healthy individuals and intensifies symptoms in those with pre-existing psychiatric disorders. The art of psycho-emotional care is important, being one of the main supporting factors in the prevention of physical emotional illnesses and quality of life during isolation for the elderly.

The present study is justified, since during the SARS-COV-2 pandemic it affected many elderly people with social isolation, a drop in purchasing power and/or excessive news by the media, frightening everyone due to the negative aspects of its contents, thus, the elderly were affected in terms of their desires, physical integrity and mental health. Thus, it is clear that the elderly need more attention by various health professionals, to meet their desires in all aspects, whether social, physical and emotional. At this crucial moment, the greater the information and studies on the mental health of the elderly, the greater the probability of accumulating knowledge and strategies to deal with the mental health of the senile population.

Faced with this reality in which all of the Brazilian population, it is believed that the situation of the COVID-19 Pandemic has brought panic and generalized fear that permeates the routine of society as a whole, as people seek ways to prevent and take precautionary measures against the disease. The elderly are more concerned and in great fear for themselves and their loved ones. Your sleep changes and your appetite can also be impacted. A scenario conducive to even aggravating chronic health problems such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases and mental disorders. In this context, the guiding question of the present study is: what are the impacts on the mental health of the elderly who experience the period of the COVID-19 pandemic for their psychic and emotional health?

The research aims to understand aspects related to the mental and emotional health of elderly people in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also sought to reflect on how the pandemic scenario affects the elderly population and describe the impact of the emotional health of the elderly due to the spread of viral and infectious disease during this phase. Finally, we will seek to evaluate the literature on the reaction of the elderly regarding nursing guidelines during the pandemic period.

This is a bibliographic review, in which scientific articles were selected regarding the mental health of the elderly in times of a pandemic - Covid-19. Bibliographic research is based on previously published material, consisting mainly of: books, magazines, publications in periodicals and scientific articles, monographs, dissertations, theses, internet, with the objective of putting the researcher in direct contact with all material already written. .⁽⁶⁾

The research has a qualitative approach. This approach considers that there is a dynamic relationship between the real world and the subject, that is, an inseparable link between the objective world and the subject's subjectivity that cannot be translated into numbers. ⁽⁶⁾

Articles were selected from the databases of the Virtual Health Library (VHL), the Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature (LILACS), Medical Literature databases. Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE), and articles published in Scientific Electronic Library Online (SCIELO). The inclusion criteria involved articles published in Portuguese between the years 2011 to 2021 and that had some of the following descriptors: mental health, elderly, pandemic and pharmacy. Articles published and recognized as scientifically valid in the last ten years, with at least one of these descriptors selected, were accepted.

Development

Mental health is intrinsically linked to a person's full well-being, regardless of chronological age. From this point of view, studies have shown the effects on the mental health of the elderly after changes in behavioral adaptation and reconfiguration during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Mental health plays a key role in achieving full biopsychosocial well-being. In this scenario, the need for psychiatric care is not limited to reducing hospitalizations or controlling symptoms, but also includes personal, emotional, social and financial problems that affect health. Therefore, it is obvious that psychological sensitivity must not be neglected to ensure the holistic maintenance of well-being. ⁽⁷⁾

The elderly are highlighted in the COVID-19 pandemic mainly because they present changes caused by senescence or senility. Unfortunately, despite the aging of the population, there is little visibility and appreciation of this part of the population. There is a distorted, stigmatized and stereotypically persistent view that incites age discrimination that legitimizes chronological age as a class differentiator, including the involvement of beliefs and attitudes that ridicule the elderly. The COVID-19 pandemic

has singled out the elderly primarily because of the potential risk posed by this population group through targeted social distancing measures and strategies specific to this group. ⁽⁸⁾

Added to this are economic losses in the hardest-hit areas and growing concerns about the practical consequences of the pandemic on the economic sector. For example, it has been shown that the stress of financial loss in times of economic recession, poverty and unemployment would be a very common psychosocial risk, i.e. factors that could also negatively affect an individual's mental health during this pandemic episode. There is also an abundance of misinformation on social media, which increases fear of the disease. In addition, the very nature of the information and the way it is provided can have more or less positive effects on the mental health of the population in times of a pandemic. ⁽⁹⁾

The elderly in Brazil

The Brazilian elderly population has grown significantly as a result of the increase in life expectancy and is seen as a reflection of public health measures and advances in medicine and technology in force since 1940. Compared to the male universe, women's life expectancy increased, becoming larger. In less than forty years, Brazil has migrated from a mortality profile typical of a young population to one characterized by chronic and multiple diseases, especially in the more advanced age groups. ⁽¹⁰⁾

The aging of the population alone is not enough to believe that the senile population has quality of life. It is important to live for so long, but with situations and moments that add quality to the years lived. This longevity-of-life phenomenon originally occurred in developed countries, but recently population aging has become more rapid in developing countries. In Brazil, the number of elderly people (aged 60 and over) increased from 3 million in 1960 to 7 million in 1975 and to 14 million in 2002 (more than 500% in 40 years) and in 2022 it will reach 22 million. ⁽¹¹⁾

The traditional medical approach, which focuses on a chief complaint, and the medical approach of combining symptoms and signs into a single diagnosis, are not suitable for the elderly. The elderly may be involved in more than one organ or system, making them candidates for constant medical surveillance and polypharmacotherapy. This practice can lead to undesirable synergisms and antagonisms, non-compliance with essential clinical product regulations, and excessive costs for unnecessary use. ⁽¹⁰⁾

The elderly are probably the group most exposed to polypharmacotherapy in society. The average number of drugs used by these people is two to five drugs. In relation to the elderly residing in geriatric institutions, this number can be higher than seven medications per patient 8,9. Some studies have shown that women are the social group most likely to use drugs in terms of age, probably due to worse functioning and self-reported health, evidenced by the greater number of symptoms of depression and hospitalization. ⁽¹⁰⁾

The pandemic and its effects on the lives of the elderly

The context of the pandemic requires greater consideration by health professionals, including those related to their mental health. There were repeated reports of increased symptoms of anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, increased drug use, psychosomatic symptoms, and fear of infection or transmission of infection to family members. One of the works with Wuhan doctors shows that they were under tremendous pressure, including high risk of infection and adequate protection from infection, overload, frustration, discrimination, isolation, support for patients with negative emotions, lack of contact with family and exhaustion. . This condition caused mental problems like stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, insomnia, denial, anger and fear. These problems not only impair physicians' attention, understanding and decision-making ability, but can also affect their general state, well-being over time. ⁽¹²⁾

The fear of infection, the proximity of the patient's suffering or death, as well as the fear of family members regarding the lack of medical care, insecure information about various resources, loneliness and concern for family members were aspects that were also addressed by mental suffering. of health professionals leading, in some cases, to reluctance to work. ⁽¹²⁾

The greater risk of mental illness among the elderly is evidenced by the social isolation that keeps them away from family and loved ones. In addition, the observation of the high number of deaths causes anxiety and fear. The experience of death and death of employees, co-workers and neighbors as a result of contamination by SARV-CoV-2 scares people in their daily lives. In addition to this scenario, the configuration of an international economic crisis and the worsening of financial instability in Brazil can lead to widespread unemployment for both health professionals and their families. Therefore, there is a context of anxiety and panic disorder, depression, stress, insomnia, irritability, anger, signs of suicidal behavior and other manifestations that worsen the mental health of many people in the pandemic scenario, especially in relation to the senile population. ⁽¹³⁾

The pandemic caused by Covid-19 has had a negative impact on the mental health of health professionals, especially those who work on the front lines of the health system, as they fear every day of being infected and infecting others, of not having personal protection and to overload work. (DANTAS, 2021).

As the pandemic progresses, there has been an overload of health services at the expense of suspected and confirmed cases of Covid-19, and there has been great demand for health services for mental health investigations that affect communities and people at large. When referring to mental health in this context, the elderly experience emotional distress on a daily basis while dealing with stress factors in their daily lives. ⁽¹⁴⁾

The UN in a publication on COVID-19 made a report on the need for action to address the needs in the context of the mental health of infected people and makes it

clear that the COVID-19 pandemic is linked to a broad health crisis with potential and could get worse. the misery of the existing world. ⁽¹⁵⁾

Among the problems are:

1. Fear: getting sick and dying from illness; infect others; losing loved ones; Losing livelihoods and income; Being socially excluded by illness or as a first-line professional

2. Feeling of insecurity about the future, helplessness in the face of events, helplessness, loneliness, sadness, pain and fear.

3. Changes in behavior: eating (having more or less appetite) and sleeping (insomnia or excessive sleep, nightmares).

4. Aggravation of interpersonal conflicts with family members and at work.

5. Thinking change: recurring thoughts about the pandemic, the health of loved ones, death and dying.

Faced with the pandemic reality, it is necessary for everyone to strive to have psychological resilience. This is understood as a positive manifestation that aims to overcome adverse situations and complex moments in life, whether or not there are imminent risks of a healthy development. It is also a dynamic process that allows the person to adapt despite the presence of stressors. Resilience involves factors that affect the emotional, cognitive and sociocultural aspects that were built throughout human existence, through gradual challenges, strengthening personal traits, coping strategies to crises, resizing the new values of life. ⁽¹⁶⁾

In moments of great difficulty, it is possible to perceive that most people have the strength and capacity to face challenges. There are situations like the Covid-19 pandemic that cause stress and discomfort and to deal with them it is possible to identify the strategies used in the past that can also be useful in the present moment. While the scenario is different, stress management strategies can be accessed again individually or collectively to achieve resilience. ⁽¹⁶⁾

The results of several studies have shown the effects of exposure on the mental health not only of the elderly, but also of those who care for them, that is , health professionals. Many of them are more often exposed to information about dead and infected and therefore have developed a greater likelihood of minor mental disorders. This exposure to frequent news of a situation like a pandemic is known to harm mental health. Previous research has shown that indirect exposure to mass trauma (such as the current pandemic) by the media can increase the rate of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms . ⁽⁹⁾

Regarding the mental impact on the elderly during the pandemic, it is common for health workers to detect despair, aggravated fear of repetition of the phenomena, fear of death for themselves and their loved ones, depressive and anxious symptoms and suicidal behavior in this population. ⁽¹⁶⁾

A study of the elderly Chinese population, during the 2020 pandemic, found that frequent exposure to social media and news about COVID-19 is linked to an increased

risk of symptoms of anxiety and depression, which persists even after other factors have taken place. been quelled. ⁽⁹⁾

The WHO director-general said the world is facing not just a pandemic but also an infodemic , indicating prolonged and excessive exposure to information about a problem, making it difficult to imagine a solution. As a result, a lot of misinformation and rumors can be spread even during a health emergency, which can hamper an effective public health response and create confusion and suspicion among people. ⁽⁹⁾

Final considerations

The bibliographic review aimed to understand aspects related to the mental and emotional health of elderly people in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the findings during the research, among others, were the following: the elderly population in Brazil has been growing since the 70s.

From the studies analyzed, it was observed that the elderly are more subject to diseases such as depression, stress and anxiety in times of a pandemic. Associated with this, the restrictive measures in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the mental health of the elderly.

Given this reality, it was noticed that there is a link between the limitations of the pandemic scenario and the increase in the pathology of mental illness. The context of the government, the media and the population facing the pandemic has heightened feelings of fear and anguish, due to the lethality of the new coronavirus and the impotence in the face of the severity of the disease.

The COVID-19 pandemic made it evident that the health of the elderly was in need of government protection, respect, care, dignity and concern. Distance protection measures should preserve the autonomy and independence of the elderly and professionals need specific knowledge about this specific population group for better care.

These findings may suggest that social distancing and reduced physical contact with people during the pandemic are not in themselves a risk factor for mental illness; but that there is influence of other factors that permeate this context. It is concluded that the mental health of the elderly, during the Covi-19 pandemic, had problems, due to several factors, being preponderant to the reduction of family income due to the impact of the disease on the local economic scenario and the negative information of COVID-19. (such as number of deaths and infected people) providing an extremely hostile psychological environment for the elderly.

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