


Mental health in the elderly: A brief psychosocial analysis in a geriatric residential in the midwest of Santa Catarina

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ABSTRACT

With the aging process, there are several changes in quality of life and lifestyle that can lead to the development of psychiatric syndromes. Studies cited in this article show that prevention and health promotion interventions have been shown to be essential to avoid such syndromes. In view of this, a descriptive and exploratory study was elaborated in order to prove in practice the theory found of promotion actions, for this, a nursing home in the midwest of Santa Catarina was chosen as the target audience. From this, it was obtained the proof that approximately 70% of the elderly had difficulty in the proposed activities that assessed cognition and memory, thus exposing the importance of practicing activities that stimulate the cognitive areas. Finally, a booklet with tips was passed on and explained to the professionals of the place to work with the elderly, to prevent and promote their mental health.

Keywords: Mental Disorders, Mental Illness, Depression, Senior, Quality of life.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of aging and old age, as processes of the life cycle, is today one of the main points of attention of social and governmental agents, as well as of medicine in general (BARBOSA; BIERMANN; PEIXOTO JÚNIOR; ALMEIDA, 2013). It is notorious that in recent decades, there has been a large increase in the population over 60 years of age, and it is expected that by 2050 there will be a 223% increase in people in this age group, totaling two billion elderly people worldwide (LEANDRO-FRANÇA; MYRTLE, 2014).

In Brazil, the number of elderly people reached 32.9 million in 2019, and according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the aging of the population remains constant (PREVIVA, 2018). Still speaking of this population aging, it is estimated that by 2060, the number of people aged 65 and over will triple, reaching the equivalent of 25.5% of the population (PREVIVA, 2018).

We know that the older the population gets, the more the costs of health services to the government increase, which can create a collapse in the public health system. It is always interesting to create strategies to reduce this burden on the Brazilian health system, and certainly, investing in policies for the prevention and stabilization of chronic diseases is fundamental. Among the diseases In order to ensure the maintenance of the functional capacity of patients with these pathologies, we emphasize the chronic diseases that deserve special attention, with a view to reducing costs for Brazilian public health.

According to Gato, Zenevicz, Madureira, Silva, Celich, Souza and Léo (2018), in order to avoid compromises and greater restrictions, public policies focused on functional and healthy aging should include measures to reach advanced ages with a better quality of life. Related to the mental health of the elderly, action plans should provide for the application of strategies that promote the prevention of mental disorders, their early detection when present, the appropriate management of these diseases, and the training of professionals and family members who care for this public (LEANDRO- FRANÇA; MYRTLE, 2014).

Para Gato *et al.* (2018, p. 304):

“(...) The national policies of primary care, health care for the elderly, health promotion and humanization in the SUS intend to subsidize multiprofessional, interdisciplinary and intersectoral work promoting health conditions for the aging population”

In addition, it is important to point out that the aging process occurs concomitantly with several changes in quality of life and lifestyle that can lead to the development of psychiatric syndromes, such as: loss of contacts and social functions; abandonment; social isolation; inability to engage in activities; lack of social return; retirement; limitation in mobility, development of chronic diseases and conditions; and the loss of loved ones (BARBOSA *et al.*, 2013).



Leandro-França and Murta (2014) highlight that, according to the specialized literature, interventions for the prevention and promotion of mental well-being offer excellent potential in promoting empowerment in health and citizenship, planning and adaptation to the new lifestyle, and these factors seem to positively influence quality of life and consequently the development/management of psychiatric disorders.

In this sense, the main psychiatric disorders that affect the elderly for Lacerda (2018) are depression, anxiety disorders (panic and generalized anxiety disorder), bipolarity, schizophrenia and dementia, the latter being represented by Alzheimer's disease and classified as Alzheimer's disease higher prevalence. Therefore, knowing these diseases, their signs, symptoms and how they manifest themselves in this age group become important and relevant today.

Therefore, it is pertinent to take a look at this theme, and, mainly, at this age group that will gain more expressiveness in the coming years, in an attempt to make evident the main diseases that affect this population in order to recognize and be able to give due support to those who already suffer from these psychiatric changes, as well as to act in their prevention, thus avoiding the overload of our public health system.

The objective of the article is to recognize the psychosocial aspects of old age, analyze vulnerabilities, identify the most prevalent mental disorders, produce actions that stimulate memory and cognition, and finally inform the importance of mental health stimulation.

METHODOLOGY

The present work is a descriptive and exploratory research with qualitative foundations. For the literature review, searches were carried out in the databases of *the Acientífica Electronic Library Online* (SciELO) and the Virtual Salde Library (VHL), for the discussion of the project, articles between 2006 and 2017 were analyzed. In addition, the study has an extension activity for the target audience, which is the elderly population, this action is of a multiple nature with the objective of correlating the literature review with the practice experienced, resulting in benefits for the community and for the current research.

To this end, a visit was made to a nursing home in the Midwest of SC to elaborate activities with a group of 24 elderly people and 18 nursing home professionals. This action included the elaboration of musical recreations to reach the emotional aspect and memories of the elderly group. In addition, an informative material was prepared with tips for caregivers to stimulate memory and reasoning, presented and discussed among the professionals, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Tau Integrative Project, UNIARP (2022).



Source: Prepared by the authors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In view of the methodology detailed above, it is possible to conclude that most of the elderly participants in the study presented difficulties when it came to memory and cognition stimuli. Since, when cognitively stimulated, these individuals demonstrate a marked deficiency in this process, so that they could not understand the proposed activities - making it necessary to adapt on the part of the applicators -, they also exhibited too much difficulty when stimulated with music, so that approximately 70% of the elderly could not recognize the songs played, indicating that there was a deficiency in this aspect.

In view of the above, it is possible to observe the high vulnerability of the third age in relation to mental health, since, due to the senescence and senility they face, there is the development of psychiatric syndromes and a decrease in cognitive conditions together with biopsychosocial factors, such as abandonment, the inability to engage socially and genetics itself.

In relation to the professionals, it is noted that they perform numerous activities to work on the mental health and psychosocial aspects of the elderly, through group and individual dynamics, such as, for example, the use of word searches, dominoes, use of music, among others. Through the extension project, we seek to reaffirm to these caregivers the importance of promoting daily activities



with a psychosocial focus, in order to try to minimize the deficiencies and difficulties presented in the items mentioned above, aiming to improve the quality of life of these individuals.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Functional and healthy aging should include measures to reach advanced ages with a better quality of life. Regarding the mental health of the elderly, action plans should include the application of strategies that promote the prevention of mental disorders, their early detection when present, the appropriate management of these diseases, and the training of professionals and family members who care for this public.

Therefore, it is pertinent to look at this theme to make evident the main diseases that affect this population in order to recognize and give due support to those who already suffer from these psychiatric alterations, as well as to act in their prevention, thus avoiding the overload of the public health system.

The present study sought to correlate the literature review with the lived practice, and, based on this experience, it was possible to conclude that most of the elderly participants in the study presented difficulties when it came to memory and cognition stimuli. The vulnerability of the elderly in relation to mental health was observed, since, due to senescence and senility, the development of psychiatric syndromes and decreased cognitive conditions are common, even when constantly stimulated by the multidisciplinary team in charge.

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