


WHEN AFFECTION IS SILENT: MOURNING FOR ABANDONMENT IN THE LIFE OF THE ELDERLY WOMAN

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ABSTRACT

Aging is a natural phenomenon, initiated from birth, evidenced by functional, physical and psychological changes that become noticeable in old age. In the female dimension, menopause can be characterized as the initial milestone of the aforementioned process, and aging is commonly marked by situations of affective abandonment, absence of emotional support and emergence of emotional reactions such as grief, a scenario explored in this chapter. The objective is to categorize and explore the physical, emotional and social manifestations of affective abandonment and grief in elderly women. The methodology adopted for this work is based on a narrative review of the literature, with the objective of exploring the dynamics of affective abandonment and grief in the health of elderly women. Searches were carried out in scientific databases such as PubMed, Scielo, LILACS and gray literature Google Scholar, using the descriptors "elderly women's health", "affective abandonment", "mourning" and their English correspondents, according to the DeCS/MeSH criteria. Among the main results, it can be highlighted that grief triggers implications in the physical, emotional and social spheres, and the State should devise and execute public policies concerning the theme. It is concluded that the health of elderly women requires multidisciplinary attention and action, especially with regard to the scenarios in which affective abandonment and grief are present, given that such phenomena alter and intensely affect the quality of life of the population.

Keywords: Mourning. Affective abandonment. Elderly Women's Health.

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INTRODUCTION

Aging is a natural and gradual process, started from birth, in which both men and women undergo functional, physical, and psychological changes. It is a multifaceted process that affects not only the body, but also the emotional and social dimensions of life. Although there is no universal definition that determines the beginning of old age, for women, the arrival of menopause is considered the starting point, even if they are not yet in old age (Pereira and Derzi, 2021).

In old age, the experience of aging is predominantly female, a phenomenon known as the 'feminization of old age'. Older women face specific biological, psychological, and social challenges, which may intensify as they watch their now-independent children build their own families and homes. This change often generates a feeling of loneliness, often associated with the image of a lonely bird in its empty nest (Miani & Cordeiro, 2023).

For many elderly women, this phase is marked by situations of affective abandonment, a worrying reality that is manifested by the reduction or absence of emotional and affective care by family, friends and even society. This type of negligence can have serious consequences for physical, psychological, and social well-being, compromising the quality of life and dignity of these women (Leão, 2023).

The experience of affective abandonment can trigger an adaptive emotional reaction to significant losses, often characterized by grief and emotional protest, i.e., grief. When associated with isolation, loneliness, and the absence of support, this process can intensify feelings of helplessness, negatively impacting the mental and physical health of older women (Moraes et al., 2019).

Grief is a deep and natural response to any significant loss, and it is an essential process so that the void left can gradually be resignified. Although it is a universal experience, it is particularly intense among the elderly, who often face losses more frequently at this stage of life (Silveira & André, 2024).

In the social imaginary, old age is often perceived as a period marked by increasing limitations, physical losses, and a sense of despair in the face of the proximity of death. As they age, older people experience the sense of finitude as a kind of grief—for time that runs out, for past experiences, and for relationships that change. In this context, in addition to the pain of losing friends and acquaintances, many face grief due to the emotional or physical absence of loved ones who are still alive, an experience that is especially impactful for women (Miani & Cordeiro, 2023).

In view of this scenario, the present study aims to identify the biopsychosocial aspects related to grief due to abandonment in elderly women, contributing to the understanding of this reality and providing subsidies to minimize its impacts.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this work is based on a narrative review of the literature, with the objective of exploring the dynamics of affective abandonment and grief in the health of elderly women. Searches were carried out in scientific databases such as PubMed, Scielo, LILACS and gray literature Google Scholar, using the descriptors "elderly women's health", "affective abandonment", "mourning" and their English correspondents, according to the DeCS/MeSH criteria. The inclusion criteria included articles published in the last 5 years, available in Portuguese, English and Spanish, which addressed psychological, social and emotional aspects related to the theme. Studies that did not present a specific discussion about elderly women or did not relate affective abandonment and grief to health were excluded. Data analysis was carried out qualitatively, organizing the information into thematic categories that supported the critical discussion of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Brazil, the Statute of the Elderly (Law No. 10,741/2003) guarantees the elderly fundamental rights, such as protection, respect, dignity, social inclusion and guarantee of healthy aging, in addition to the preservation of their physical, moral and mental integrity (BRASIL, 2003). However, affective abandonment remains a phenomenon present in our society and still little debated, representing a significant challenge for the realization of these rights.

This reality highlights the need to understand the biopsychosocial factors involved, since affective abandonment and its consequences directly affect the integral well-being of the elderly, especially women at this stage of life.

PHYSICAL RESPONSES

Grief resulting from affective abandonment can trigger or intensify physical responses to stress, manifesting itself through physiological changes such as increased blood pressure, insomnia, muscle pain, persistent fatigue, and a predisposition to untreated health problems. Additionally, conditions such as malnutrition, dehydration, and other medical complications become more common, especially among vulnerable individuals such as the elderly. These manifestations highlight the deep interrelationship between

emotional and physical health, highlighting the need for integrated interventions and a careful look at the consequences of affective abandonment on general health (Leão, 2023).

EMOTIONAL IMPACT

Studies show that the emotional impact of affective abandonment can also manifest itself as homesickness, depressive symptoms, anxiety and loneliness, sadness and hopelessness. The results suggest that the absence of a social and affective support network contributes to the decline of mental health in old age (Santos and Andrade 2024). As a result of these negative feelings, physical and mental illnesses arise that reduce the quality of life and can reduce the life expectancy of these women. Especially in elderly women, the lack of recognition or the reduction of responsibilities can result in existential crises (Júnior and Fonseca, 2022).

SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

In capitalist society, older women face a double burden of invisibility and devaluation, being often considered "useless" to the productive system and relegated to secondary social roles. This perception reflects and reinforces prejudices and stigmas related to age and gender, resulting in neglect and abandonment in various contexts. In addition, these women are often excluded from decision-making and representation spaces, which deepens social marginalization. The lack of effective public policies to meet the specific needs of this population, such as emotional support, access to integrated health services, and social inclusion programs, further aggravates their vulnerability, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and inequality (Parvin, 2020). This reality requires a closer look and concrete actions to promote the dignity, recognition and integration of older women in society.

PUBLIC POLICIES

It is the duty of the State to guarantee the protection of life and health to the elderly, ensuring their rights through effective public policies. However, it is observed that the current model in the country has significant gaps, failing to comprehensively and satisfactorily meet the diverse needs of this population. Among the challenges identified are the insufficiency of resources for public health, the lack of specific programs for healthy aging, and the absence of integrated actions that consider the physical, psychological, and social dimensions of old age, Souza and Silva (2020).

In addition, the overload on health and social care systems, compounded by inadequate infrastructure and a shortage of trained professionals, contributes to neglect

and precariousness in care for the elderly. This scenario highlights not only the need to expand and restructure public policies, but also a more inclusive and humanized approach, which prioritizes aging with dignity and quality of life. The implementation of intersectoral policies, which integrate health, education, housing and social assistance, is crucial to respond to the challenges imposed by population aging and ensure the rights of older people, as provided for in the Statute of the Elderly and in international legal frameworks, Brazil (2003).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The health of elderly women is a topic that requires urgent and multidisciplinary attention, especially when contextualized by affective abandonment and grief, phenomena that profoundly affect the quality of life of this population. Aging, already marked by biopsychosocial transformations, becomes even more challenging in the face of the impact of loneliness, invisibility, and social exclusion faced by many women at this stage of life. Affective abandonment not only harms emotional well-being, but also generates significant physical consequences, intensifying preexisting vulnerabilities and exposing the fragility of social and family support networks.

The analysis presented in this chapter reinforces the interdependence between emotional, mental, and physical health, highlighting the need for integrated and specific public policies to meet the demands of older women. It is essential to promote actions that value these women, guaranteeing them access to health, continuing education, social inclusion, and emotional support. The invisibility and devaluation faced by them reflect structural issues of our capitalist and patriarchal society, which must be combated with concrete initiatives, such as expanding access to quality services, training professionals, and implementing programs that strengthen family and community bonds.

Finally, understanding the biopsychosocial aspects related to affective abandonment and grief is essential to support more humanized and effective interventions, contributing to elderly women being able to experience this stage of life with dignity, recognition and quality. May this study inspire transformative actions and expand the debate on such a relevant, but still neglected, topic in our society.

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