

Evaluation of the dispensation of antidepressants in primary health care in the city of Santiago – RS

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The Coronavirus disease-19 (COVID-19) pandemic has generated significant impacts both economically and socially, as well as on the physical and mental health of the general population, causing an increase in depression, anxiety and stress. Depression is considered a multifactorial disorder that involves biological, psychological and social aspects and has become a relevant and growing public health problem. It is noteworthy that the pharmacological treatment for this pathology includes the use of antidepressant drugs, many of which are available in the Unified Health System (SUS). In this sense, it is worth mentioning that, in Brazil, there are still few studies evaluating the impact of the pandemic on the consumption profile of antidepressant drugs in the

population. **Objective:** The objective of this work was to analyze the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the distribution of antidepressants in primary care in the municipality of Santiago, in Rio Grande do Sul. **Methodology:** To carry out this research, a survey of antidepressant drugs dispensed at the Basic Pharmacy of SUS in the city was carried out. Based on information contained in the Integrated Health Services Management System (SIGSS), used in the distribution management and stock control of the Basic Pharmacy, data referring to the three-year period, from March 2019 to March 2019, were analyzed. **2022. Results and Discussion:** It was possible to observe an increase of 38.10% in 2020 and 115.47% in 2021 in the dispensation of antidepressant drugs, in relation to the year 2019. In addition, it was verified that the female gender presented higher rate of consumption of antidepressants, corresponding to the percentage of 77.59% in relation to males. The drug fluoxetine 20 mg was the most used drug, totaling 50.89% of dispensations during the three years, where predominantly users are aged between 46 and 60 years. Amitriptyline 25mg corresponded to 30.28% and Imipramine 25mg represented 9.33% of dispensations, both from the tricyclic antidepressant class. It is noteworthy that users of this class of medication are mostly elderly people over 61 years old. Furthermore, it was possible to observe an increase of 134.68% in the dispensations of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), 78.15% in tricyclic antidepressants and 1002.5% in atypical antidepressants during the pandemic period compared to the year 2019, pre-pandemic period. **Conclusion:** It can be concluded that the pandemic had an impact on the consumption of antidepressants by the Santiaguense population served by the Basic Pharmacy. Still, the results found in this work may help in the planning of strategies that can collaborate with issues related to the mental health of the population and the consumption of antidepressants, seeking the rational use of this class of medication.

Keywords: Coronavirus, Depression, Pandemic, SUS.

1 INTRODUCTION

In early 2020, COVID-19 was characterized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a pandemic. In order to contain the spread of the disease, some strategies adopted by several countries, such as distancing and social isolation, demanded a change in the habits of the world's population, directly affecting the physical and mental health of individuals (PAHO, 2020).

Currently, there are still few studies that have investigated the impacts of COVID-19 on health, especially regarding levels of depression, anxiety and stress (MAIA; DIAS, 2020). However, some research shows the occurrence, especially in people who remained in quarantine, of psychological symptoms, emotional disorders, depression, stress, depressive mood, irritability, insomnia and post-traumatic stress symptoms (HUANG; ZHAO, 2020).

According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), depression is a frequent mental disorder, being the main cause of disability worldwide and contributing significantly to the global burden of disease. It is estimated that more than 300 million people, of all ages, suffer from this disorder, mainly affecting women and, in the most serious cases, it can lead to suicide (PAHO, 2020).

Treatment for depression involves both pharmacological and non-pharmacological measures. The first is performed with the use of antidepressant drugs, and the main classes used clinically are: tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs), selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SARIs), serotonin and noradrenaline (SNRIs) and atypical antidepressants (BELMAKER; AGAM, 2008).

With the approval of Law nº 8.080/90 that regulates the Unified Health System (SUS), it was determined that health should be universally accessible, covering all aspects necessary for the promotion, protection and recovery of health, including Pharmaceutical Assistance (AF). Thus, the Ministry of Health created the National List of Essential Medicines (RENAME), a list that comprises the selection and standardization of medicines indicated for the treatment of diseases or injuries within the scope of the SUS (BRASIL, 1998; BRASIL, 2004).

Medications for the treatment of depression are part of the Basic and Specialized Component of Pharmaceutical Assistance of the SUS, which is considered the first line of medication care in the system (BRASIL, 1998; BRASIL, 2004). Among the drugs on this list, antidepressants can be mentioned as an example: amitriptyline, fluoxetine and nortriptyline (BRASIL, 2018).

Due to the difficult times that the pandemic brought, such as unemployment, reduction in family income, loss of life and social isolation, it is believed that there was a significant impact on the consumption of antidepressant drugs by the general population. However, in Brazil, there are still few studies evaluating the impact of the pandemic on the consumption profile of antidepressant drugs in the population.

In view of this, it becomes extremely important to know the profile of users of antidepressant drugs in primary care, as well as to analyze how the consumption of these drugs has changed due to the COVID-

19 pandemic, thus enabling the planning of strategies to intervene in this context, seeking the rational use of this class of drugs, in addition to improvements for users and the health team.

Thus, the objective of this study was to evaluate the dispensation of antidepressants in primary health care in the city of Santiago, in Rio Grande do Sul, by characterizing the patients who use these drugs in relation to gender and age, determining the class and antidepressant drugs dispensed more in the period and analyze the consumption profile over time.

2 METHODOLOGY

This study is descriptive in nature, with a quantitative, cross-sectional and documental approach. Furthermore, it is also classified as a field research, succeeding by the observation of phenomena and facts that occur spontaneously, through data collection (MARCONI; LAKATOS, 2010).

The city of Santiago is located in the center of the state of Rio Grande do Sul and, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) for the year 2021, has an estimated population of 49,298 inhabitants (BRASIL, 2021). The municipality has 16 Basic Health Units (UBS), however, the antidepressants made available by the SUS are dispensed only at the Basic Pharmacy of the municipality, where there is a pharmaceutical professional, as determined by Ordinance No. 344, of May 12, 1998. The choice of location for data collection was due to the fact that the researchers resided in the municipality (BRASIL, 1998).

The work was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of the Integrated Regional University of Alto Uruguai e das Missões - Campus de Santiago and approved under the Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Appreciation (CAAE) nº 55139521.00000.5353. It is worth noting that the collection and analysis of information took place with the authorization of the pharmacist responsible for the establishment.

The personal data of the users served at the Basic Pharmacy were not used at any time during the study, maintaining the guarantee of secrecy that ensures the privacy of the subjects regarding confidential data, as determined by Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council (CNS) (BRASIL, 2012).

Data collection for the research was carried out between March and April 2022 and based on information contained in the Integrated Health Services Management System (SIGSS), used in the management of distribution and stock control of the Basic Pharmacy, in the period of three years, from March 2019 to March 2022. For a better understanding and analysis of the results, the year 2019 comprises the period from March 1, 2019 to February 28, 2020, the year 2020 from 1st March 2020 to February 28, 2021 and the year 2021 comprises from March 1, 2021 to February 28, 2022.

The period for analysis was stipulated so that it was possible to analyze the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the municipality, evaluating the dispensation of antidepressant drugs before and during the pandemic period.

From the reports obtained from the SIGSS, antidepressant drugs and the respective classes most dispensed in the pharmacy were evaluated, in addition to investigating the age group and gender of the consumers of these drugs. In addition, the variation in the consumption of antidepressant drugs in that period was analyzed.

Data were analyzed descriptively, quantitative variables were analyzed using descriptive statistics: mean and percentage, and data processing was performed using Microsoft Excel® spreadsheets (2013 version).

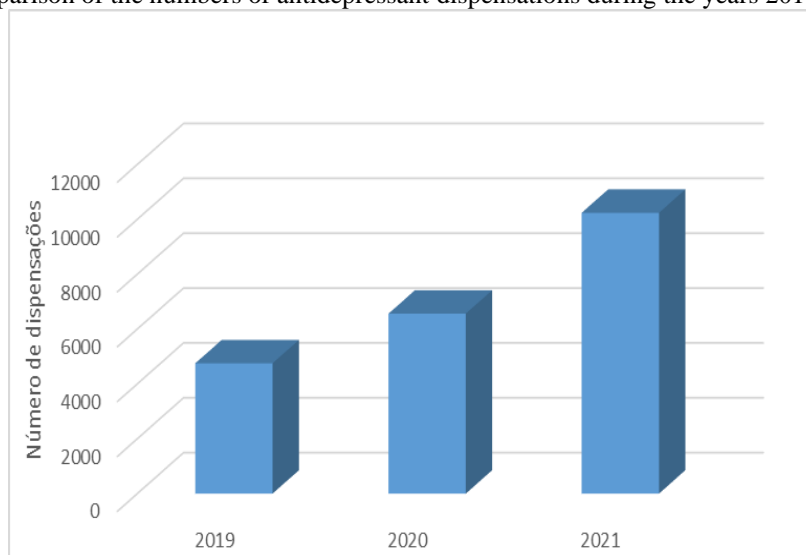
3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of antidepressant dispensations showed that, between March 2019 and March 2022, there was an increasing consumption of this class of medication by the population served by the Basic Pharmacy in the municipality.

When evaluating the three years together, there were a total of 21,549 dispensations of antidepressant medication, totaling 1,293,965 units in number of pills or capsules, as shown in figures 1 and 2.

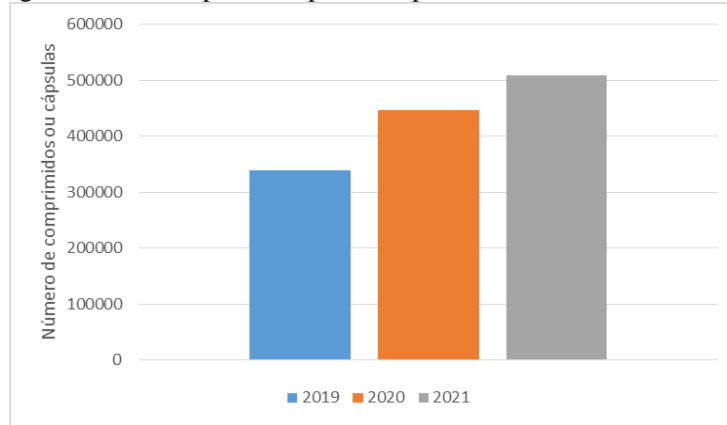
Furthermore, it was possible to detect a significant increase in the dispensing of antidepressants during the COVID-19 pandemic period in the municipality, with a growth of 38.10% in 2020 and 115.47% in 2021 compared to 2019 (Figure 1 and 2).

Figure 1 - Comparison of the numbers of antidepressant dispensations during the years 2019, 2020 and 2021.



Source: survey data (2022)

Figure 2 - Units of pills or capsules dispensed between 2019 and 2021.



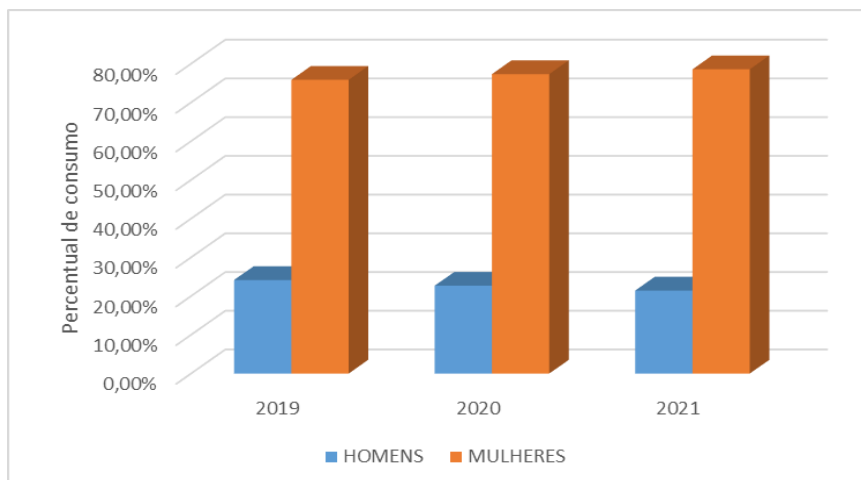
Source: survey data (2022)

As observed in this study, data obtained in the survey carried out by Lima et al., 2020, in the city of Feira de Santana - BA, the number of dispensations of special control drugs, regulated by Ordinance No. 344/1998, grew during the period pandemic. Factors such as social isolation, financial insecurity as a result of lockdown and fear of death caused by the virus, may be precedents associated with this growth.

Still, according to studies carried out by Wang et al., 2020, in China, when assessing the psychological impacts of COVID-19, the authors indicate that 53.8% of respondents classified these impacts as moderate or severe. Through this information, it is possible to suggest that the increase in antidepressant drug dispensations may be a reflection of the impacts of the pandemic on mental health.

When assessing the gender of antidepressant consumers, figure 3 shows that females stand out in the number of dispensations. In 2019, 24.15% of antidepressant drug withdrawals were for males, while 75.85% for females. In 2020, 22.68% for males and 77.32% for females. And finally, in 2021 21.43% for males and 78.57% for females.

Figure 3 - Percentage of antidepressant medication consumption (pills or capsules) between men and women between the years 2019 and 2021.



Source: survey data (2022)

Depression is considered a public health problem, being able to lead individuals to incapacitation and even lead to suicide. Studies demonstrate a higher occurrence of anxiety disorders, depression and use of antidepressants in females (BARROS et al., 2008). Equally to the results found in the present research, Prevedello (2017) showed that 89.3% of antidepressant drug users are women.

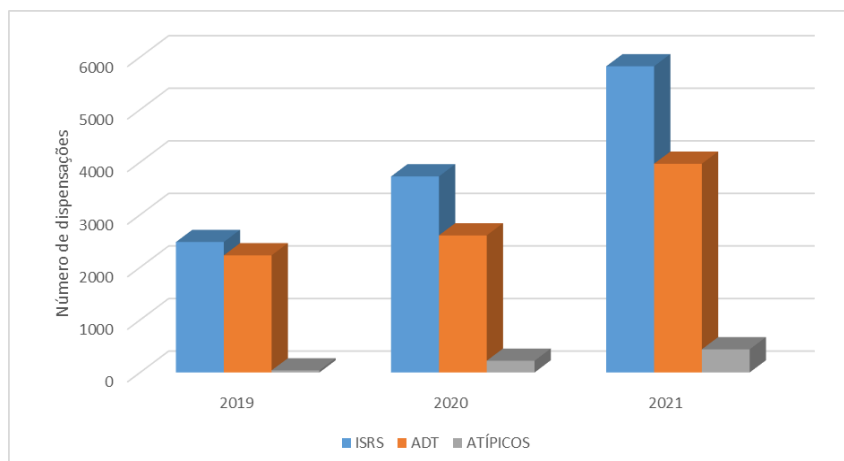
A study carried out by Kich and Hofmann (2013), shows the fact that women present depressive conditions up to twice as often as men. The occurrence is explained by the natural hormonal variation of the female body and the influence of cultural, social and physiological factors, such as working hours, marital status and number of children.

In addition, females have higher levels of concern about health and self-care, making them seek medical services more frequently and, as a result, have better adherence to pharmacological treatments (DE QUEIROZ NETTO et al., 2012) .

With regard to drug classes, it was possible to observe that the SSRI class was the most dispensed in the analyzed period, showing an increase of 58.28% in 2020 and 134.68% in 2021, when compared to the year 2019 , followed by ADT's, with a percentage increase of 17% in 2020 and 78.15% in 2021 when compared to the same period.

Furthermore, in sales of atypical antidepressants, there is evidence of growth of 457.5% and 1,002.5% in 2020 and 2021, respectively, in relation to the pre-pandemic period, as shown in the figure below (Figure 4).

Figure 4 - Dispensing of antidepressants in the Basic Pharmacy of the Municipality of Santiago/RS between the years 2019 and 2021.



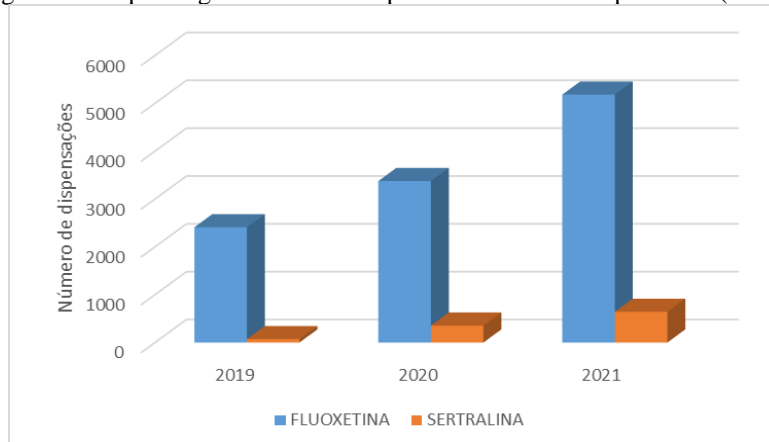
Source: research data (2022) Caption: SSRI - Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors; ADT - Tricyclic Antidepressants.

The highest percentage of SSRI class consumption is presumably related to the fact that they present better safety and tolerance results (MORENO, 1999), having adverse effects classified as mild and less intense when compared to the adverse effects caused by ADT's (RANG et al., 2012).

Within the SSRI class, it was possible to observe that Fluoxetine 20 mg showed an increase of 115.02% compared to 2019, while Sertraline 50 mg showed an increase of 793.05% when compared to the same period, as shown in figure below (Figure 5).

It is worth mentioning that Sertraline 50 mg is only available for the population assisted by the Psychosocial Care Centers (CAPS) in the municipality of Santiago-RS.

Figure 5 - Dispensing of serotonin reuptake inhibitor antidepressants (SSRIs).



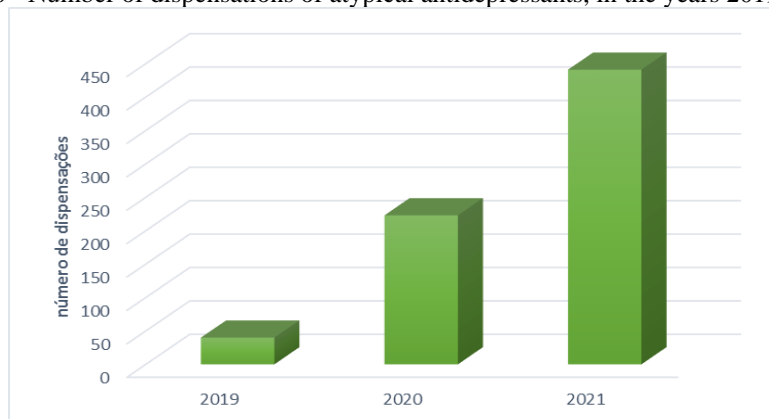
Source: survey data (2022)

Through the analysis of data belonging to Farmácia Básica de Rondon - PR, Piga and collaborators (2021) also observed a significant percentage increase referring to Sertraline prescriptions, when only the year 2020 totaled a 143% increase in the prescriptions fulfilled compared to 2020. year 2019.

With regard to atypical antidepressants, it is worth noting that the only representative of this class dispensed in Primary Care in the municipality is Bupropion 150 mg, which is only provided to the population undergoing psychological treatment at the CAPS in the city.

According to the figure below (Figure 6), it is possible to observe an increase of 457.5% in 2020 and 1,002.5% in 2021 in Bupropion 150 mg dispensations, when compared to 2019. In 2019, the total number of dispensations of this drug was related to 40 patients. Followed by the year 2020, with 223 patients and, finally, the year 2021 with 441 patients from the mental health of the municipality, showing that this increase is probably due to the number of new patients treated at the unit.

Figure 6 - Number of dispensations of atypical antidepressants, in the years 2019 to 2021.

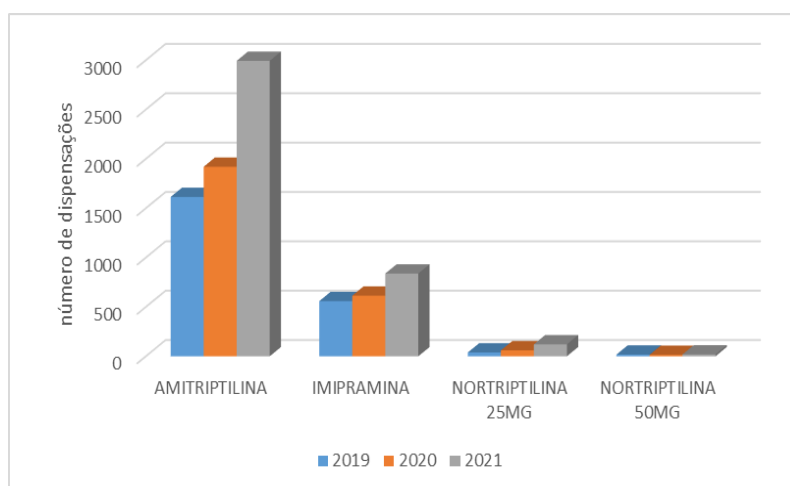


Fonte: dados da pesquisa (2022)

Santana, Paz and Amorim (2022) reported similar results during the COVID-19 pandemic period, they observed an increase in the demand for care at the Psychosocial Care Center in the municipality of Piatã - BA, as well as an increase in numbers of antidepressant pills dispensed compared to 2019, pre-pandemic period.

In the class of ADT's, it was also possible to observe an increase in dispensations, with Amitriptyline 25 mg being the most dispensed medication during the three consecutive years, with a percentage increase of 18.95% in the year 2020 and 85.43% in the year year 2021, when compared to the year 2019. Regarding Imipramine 25 mg, there was an increase of 9.83% in the year 2020 and 49.9% in the year 2021, when also compared to the year 2021. 2019. The drug Nortriptyline did not show significant variations in the number of dispensations in any of the presentations (25 and 50 mg), as seen in figure 7.

Figure 7 - Number of dispensations among drugs belonging to the tricyclic antidepressant class between the years 2019 and 2021.



Source: survey data (2022)

It is important to emphasize that the use of ADT's demonstrates efficacy in other psychiatric conditions, as well as in cases of bulimia, chronic pain and premenstrual tension (GUIMARÃES, 2001). Still, Moraczewski (2020) states that research shows promising results regarding the off-label use of ADT's for the treatment of migraine.

The use of Nortriptyline 50 mg probably remained stable, without significant variations due to the fact that, during the research, this drug was withdrawn from REMUME in the municipality in the year 2021.

Throughout the research, it was possible to observe that Fluoxetine 20 mg, from the SSRI class, was the most dispensed medication throughout the analyzed period, with a general average between the three years of 50.89% of dispensations in relation to all the antidepressants provided by the Basic Pharmacy in the municipality of Santiago-RS, corresponding to 46.5% when evaluating the number of dispensed pills.

Amitriptyline 25 mg was the second most dispensed drug, with an average of 30.8% of dispensations, corresponding to 32.9% in relation to the number of pills dispensed in the same period, and

Imipramine 25mg, the third most dispensed drug, presented an average of 9.33% of dispensations, corresponding to 12.2% of the number of pills, both belonging to the class of ADT's.

In table 1, it is possible to observe the data related to the number of pills and their respective percentage referring to each antidepressant medication dispensed between the years 2019 and 2021. The drugs Sertraline 50 mg, Bupropion 150 mg and Nortriptyline 25 mg and 50 mg presented lower dispensing percentages.

Table 1 - Pills dispensed in number of units and percentage between the years 2019 and 2021.

	2019	%	2020	%	2021	%
Fluoxetina 20 mg	155.158	45,77	211.710	47,4	236.461	46,51
Amitriptilina 25 mg	121.975	35,98	139.360	31,2	160.530	31,57
Imipramina 25 mg	49.790	14,69	53.970	12,09	49.920	9,82
Sertralina 50 mg	5.100	1,5	23.400	5,24	30.463	5,99
Nortriptilina 25 mg	3.150	0,93	3.030	0,68	5.940	1,17
Bupropiona 150 mg	2.840	0,84	14.350	3,21	24.378	4,8
Nortriptilina 50 mg	940	0,29	780	0,18	720	0,14
Total	338.953	100	446.600	100	508.412	100

Source: survey data (2022)

According to Vale (2013), as it belongs to the SSRI class, Fluoxetine becomes the first line of treatment for depression, with a more favorable pharmacokinetic profile and fewer adverse effects compared to older generations, providing greater safety and better therapeutic results. Furthermore, it is the only SSRI drug included in the REMUME in the municipality of Santiago - RS, justifying the reason for being the most dispensed drug.

Likewise, a study carried out by Silva and Amaral (2017), in the city of Teresina - PI, also observed that Amitriptyline 25 mg had one of the highest dispensations among antidepressants, a fact that may be associated with its use as an analgesic adjuvant for multiple purposes and for use in neuropathic pain, being considered the gold standard of antidepressant analgesics (MICÓ et al., 2006).

To assess the most prevalent ages of antidepressant users, data were computed and tabulated according to their class. According to Table 2, it is possible to verify the arrangement of age groups and gender of patients who used drugs belonging to the SSRI class during the years 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Chart 2 - Analysis of the age range of patients using SSRIs.

Idade	2019		2020		2021	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
9 a 17	0,30%	0,64%	0,40%	0,88%	0,81%	1,25%
18 a 30	3,14%	6,00%	1,47%	10,91%	2,57%	8,36%
31 a 45	3,55%	17,16%	4,45%	16,84%	4,55%	17,70%
46 a 60	7,21%	31,60%	6,43%	27,67%	5,85%	30,02%
61 a 80	6,45%	20,50%	6,86%	21,10%	5,84%	20,41%
81+	1,20%	2,25%	0,99%	2,00%	0,79%	1,85%
Total	21,85%	78,15%	20,60%	79,40%	20,41%	79,59%

Source: survey data (2022)

Similar data were found in a survey carried out at Farmácia Básica de Baldim - MG, where SSRI dispensation prevailed in the age group of 31 to 40 years (RODRIGUES; NEGRI, 2018); in the present study, the prevalence of dispensing was in individuals in the age group aged between 46 and 60 years.

According to data released by the University of São Paulo (USP), Brazil is the country with the highest prevalence of depressive episodes during the pandemic period, in addition to the consequences of social isolation, such as unemployment and delayed personal and professional development (COLTRI, 2019).

Research carried out by Giordani et al. (2020) investigated the prevalence of fear of COVID-19 among individuals and found that the level of fear was predominantly higher among females. In this same study, more than half of the participants felt uncomfortable when thinking about COVID-19, being afraid or very afraid of losing their lives as a result of the disease.

Regarding the class of ADT's, it was possible to detect a higher prevalence of dispensations in elderly individuals, belonging to the range of 61 to 80 years. Furthermore, it was noted that, of all classes, ADT's have a greater use in patients aged 81 years or more (Chart 3).

Chart 3 - Analysis of the age range of patients who use ADT's.

Idade	2019		2020		2021	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
9 a 17	1,66%	1,26%	1,15%	1,34%	1,20%	1,81%
18 a 30	2,60%	3,23%	2,07%	2,87%	1,81%	3,12%
31 a 45	6,86%	7,72%	4,03%	9,55%	2,44%	10%
46 a 60	6,15%	28,08%	7,67%	27,11%	6,97%	29,61%
61 a 80	7,99%	30,06%	9,16%	30,87%	8,74%	29,26%
81+	1,03%	3,36%	0,88%	3,30%	0,91%	4,13%
Total	26,29%	73,71%	24,96%	75,04%	22,07%	77,93%

Source: survey data (2022)

According to Grassi and Castro (2014), the significant number of dispensations of ADT's is justified by the fact that it is a class that is part of REMUME, such as Amitriptyline 25 mg, in addition to being effective and low-cost drugs.

The occurrence of depressive disorder in the elderly can be triggered by several factors, and the physiological changes caused by senescence can be evidenced, as well as physical and social changes. In addition, age can trigger some diseases, such as hypertension, arthrosis, arthritis, osteoporosis, among others (VIANA; JUNIOR, 2017). Still, mourning the loss of friends or a spouse, financial problems, retirement and the loss of social roles, end up making the elderly unable to formulate their perspectives on life anymore, leading them to believe that death is not too far away and , consequently, leading to depression (MARTINELLI, 2016).

It is appropriate to highlight the fact that social isolation caused suffering in many individuals, because many live alone, they were concerned about family members who lived far away. In addition, there was the fear of being contaminated by the virus and suffering the consequences of the disease. The number of deaths from the coronavirus aroused great alertness in the population, which was mainly concerned with the elderly (HOSPITAL SANTA MÔNICA, 2020).

Regarding the class of atypical antidepressants, in addition to the significant increase in the percentage of dispensations, which was 1,002.5%, it was possible to observe the prevalence of consumption in individuals belonging to the age group of 31 to 45 years, with an increase in the other ranges, according to the table below (Table 4).

Chart 4 – Analysis of the age range of individuals who use atypical antidepressants.

Idade	2019		2020		2021	
	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.	Masc.	Fem.
9 a 17	0%	0%	4,03%	4,03%	3,63%	2,04%
18 a 30	2,50%	2,50%	7,17%	8,98%	4,99%	7,48%
31 a 45	15%	20%	9,86%	29,15%	8,16%	31,07%
46 a 60	22,50%	27,50%	6,73%	22,42%	7,48%	22,90%
61 a 80	7,50%	2,50%	2,70%	4,03%	5,22%	5,90%
81+	0%	0%	0%	0,90%	0%	1,13%
Total	47,50%	52,50%	30,49%	69,51%	29,48%	70,52%

Source: survey data (2022)

Data concerning the age group are similar to the study carried out at the CAPS in Guaraciaba do Norte - CE, where the age group with the greatest evidence was 31 to 50 years (NARCISO et al., 2020).

Furthermore, it should be noted that this class of medication is available specifically for mental health patients in the municipality of Santiago-RS, that is, it is not included in REMUME. In addition, it is

important to emphasize that, according to Lange (2021), problems related to mental health are increasing rapidly, becoming a reflection of the increase in patients treated with depressive symptoms.

Research has shown that the increase in confirmed and suspected cases of coronavirus is linked to increased feelings of anguish, suffering, fear, post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, among others (CAMOZZATO et al., 2020).

In agreement with Cebri (2014), the significant consumption of psychotropic drugs is related to their characteristic of being one of the main current care technologies, ensuring the reduction of symptoms of suffering in society, such as depression, anxiety, psychotic disorders, loneliness, economic crises and sadness, just with the administration of an effective chemical substance in the organism.

Furthermore, Shigemura et al. (2020) and Brooks et al. (2020) stated in their research that part of the patients diagnosed with COVID-19 or who had some suspicion of the disease could experience intense emotions and symptoms of fear, loneliness, anxiety, insomnia and guilt. However, these symptoms appeared with greater intensity in patients inserted in social isolation, manifesting, predominantly, stress.

Therefore, it is clear that the increased consumption of antidepressants may be related to the impacts caused by the pandemic and social isolation.

4 CONCLUSION

Through the present study, it was possible to investigate the impacts generated by the COVID-19 pandemic regarding the dispensation of antidepressants in the Basic Pharmacy of Santiago/RS. Furthermore, it was possible to observe the discrepancy between users, revealing that the female sex represented the vast majority of consumers of this class of medication, in line with other works that indicate women as the most affected by depressive disorders and, consequently, being those who consume the most antidepressant drugs as well.

Furthermore, it was possible to state that the SSRI class is the most used by the population and the drug most commonly dispensed was Fluoxetine 20 mg, presumably due to the tolerability and safety profile of this class of medication, noting also that in this class the age range most prevalent was from 46 to 60 years.

It is worth noting that the number of antidepressant dispensations increased significantly after the start of the pandemic, considering the years 2020 and 2021, compared to the year 2019, the pre-pandemic period.

In view of the above, it was concluded that the pandemic had a direct impact on the consumption of antidepressants by the population of Santiago, assisted by the Basic Pharmacy. In addition, it is possible to say that the results found in this work may help in the planning of strategies that can intervene in issues related to the mental health of the population and the consumption of antidepressants, seeking the rational use of medicines, in addition to improvements for users and for the healthcare team.

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