Sexuality in the quality of life of the elderly: an integrative review of the literature

Aniedja Kaline da Silva Andrade¹; Bruna Rafaela Dornelas de Andrade Lima Monteiro^{*2}; Sâmia Dayana Lemos de Lacerda³; Iza Paula de Deus e Mello Albuquerque Arruda⁴; Anny Karolainy Silva de Lima⁵; Danielly Alexandrina de Santana Cavalcanti⁶; Erivaldo Gomes da Silva⁷

1. Postgraduate in Physiotherapy Gerontological and Geriatric at the FAVENI
2. Physiotherapist, UNIFACOL, master in human health and the environments in health public and pediatric and neonatal ICU, PhD in Therapeutic Innovations - UFPE
3. Nurse, coordinator of the nursing course UNIFACOL, master in human health and environment, PhD student in Therapeutic Innovations - UFPE, nurse at the Hospital das Clinics EBSEH/UFPE
4. Physiotherapist, Coordinator of the Physiotherapy Course of UNIFACOL - University Center FACOL Faculty Writer Osman Lins, Vitória de Santo Antão, Pernambuco, Brazil
5. Graduate Program in Neonatal and Pediatric Intensive Physiotherapy; CEFFAP Group - Center for Training and Professional Improvement, Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil
6. Graduate student in orthopedic trauma from Novo Horizonte Faculties
7. Graduate Program in Neonatal and Pediatric Intensive Physiotherapy; CEFFAP Group - Center for Training and Professional Improvement, Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil

E-mail addresses: aniedja_andrade@hotmail.com (Aniedja Kaline da Silva Andrade), brunadornelas@gmail.com (Bruna Rafaela Dornelas de Andrade Lima Monteiro), samia.lacerda@ufpe.br (Sâmia Dayana Lemos de Lacerda), fisioterapia@unifacol.edu.br (Iza Paula de Deus e Mello Albuquerque Arruda), annykarolainy1@gmail.com (Anny Karolainy Silva de Lima), erivaldo-gs@hotmail.com (Erivaldo Gomes da Silva)

*Corresponding author

To cite this article:

Andrade, A.K.S.; Monteiro, B.R.D.A.L.; Lacerda, S.D.L.; Arruda, I.P.D.M.A.; Lima, A.K.S.; Cavalcanti, D.A.S.; Silva, E.G. **Sexuality in the quality of life of the elderly: an integrative review of the literature.** *International Journal of Sciences*. Vol. 2, No. 2, 2021, pp. 39-43. ISSN 2763-5392.

Received: 08 28, 2021; **Accepted:** 08 30, 2021; **Published:** 09 06, 2021

Abstract: To analyze in the literature the context of sexuality in quality of life during the aging process. This is an integrative literature review, searches were performed in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (MedLine/Pubmed), Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS) and Cochrane Library databases in the period of February to July 2021. As inclusion criteria, articles without language restrictions and whose methodology allowed obtaining evidence on sexuality in the quality of life of the elderly were adopted. Articles that related the elderly and AIDS or HIV and other types of publications other than articles were excluded. A total of 2,041 articles were found in the databases, 63 were excluded due to duplicity and 1,910 per title and/or abstract, leaving 68. Of these, after analysis, 04 were included in the review for meeting the eligibility criteria. This review shows that despite the taboos involving sexuality during aging, it is evident that the subject can positively impact the quality of life of the elderly. New studies are needed for this theme to be strengthened.

Keywords: Aging. Quality of life. Sexuality

1. Introduction

According the World Health Organization, in Brazil, elderly people understand people who are over 60 years of age. Although culturally the aging process is full of negative stigmas, taboos and prejudices, aging is not synonymous with fragility, decay or sadness (GRADIM *et al.*, 2007).

According to Bastos *et al.*, (2012), we have come across in recent years with a reduction in the birth rate and

an increase in the life expectancy of the population, resulting in an inversion of the Brazilian age pyramid and consequent increase in the amount of elderly. However, constant taboos are evident when it comes to the third age, and one of these refers to sexuality.

This reality implies little attention to this theme when focused on this public, being often neglected by health professionals. Sexuality is a human need that contributes to

quality of life and needs attention and respect in all phases lived (RODRIGUES *et al.*, 2018).

Discussing about sex and sexuality is still a delicate thing, socially this subject has always been treated as something secretive and repressive. Often health professionals do not interact with the patient on this subject, resulting in the non-prevention of diseases such as *dyspareunia*, vaginismus, erectile dysfunction, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, contributing to the non-effectiveness of the health promotion of the elderly (CUNHA *et al.*, 2015).

In addition to biological problems that can generate sexual dysfunctions, there are also psychosocial factors such as repressions often suffered by older women since adolescence, having their sexuality repressed by spending most of their lives living in the face of a male vulnerability and facing sex as a feeling of guilt and oppression, directly affecting their quality of sexual life (FERNANDES, 2009).

According to Cavalcanti *et al.*, (2014), sexual changes can occur at any stage of the reproductive period, but by a set of factors such as the postmenopausal period leading to hypoestrogenism, decreased testosterone levels, sexual dysfunctions, previous repressions, non-acceptance with aging and emotional and social difficulties may be accentuated in this age group.

Expressing sexual desire at this stage of life often becomes complex because it is carried by biopsychosocial, religious and spiritual factors. Sexual health does not refer only to the absence of disease or sexual dysfunction, but to a state of well-being that leads to the elderly pleasure, satisfaction and safety, it is an act that should not involve shame, violence or fear (BASTOS *et al.*, 2012).

According to Marques *et al.*, (2018), socially the changes experienced by the elderly are seen as obstacles to the continuation of their sexual experiences when they should be seen as a biological process that does not influence their sexuality. However, it depends on factors such as well-being, health, cultural habits, existence of a partner, as well as their health, and quality of the relationship (NASTRI *et al.*, 2013).

Although some elderly couples decrease the frequency of sexual relations with age, sexual function continues in most of the elderly who remain with their active sexual life, being of total importance for quality of life, regardless of sexual orientation (FLEURY and ABDO, 2012).

Thus, we cannot neglect the sexuality of the elderly and see him as an "asexual" individual, considering that aging is a natural process that, despite resulting in physical, psychic and social changes, does not prevent the continuation of their experiences (KAYA *et al.*, 2017).

In view of the above, the present study aimed to analyze in the literature the context of sexuality during the aging process and its influence on the quality of life of the elderly.

2. Methodology

This is an integrative review of the literature. This method aims to synthesize research results on a given theme or question, contributing to the improvement of knowledge of the investigated theme (ROMAN And FRIEDLANDER, 1998).

To survey the articles in the literature, a search was conducted in the databases: Scientific Electronic Library Online (MedLine/ Pubmed) and Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS). The main question of the study was: What is the relevance of sexuality in the quality of life of the elderly?

Descriptors and keywords were used in Portuguese and their correspondents in English: elderly (Aged), sexuality (Sexuality), aging (Elderly), quality of life, acquired immuno deficiency syndrome (SYNDROME) and HIV (Human immune deficiency virus).

These descriptors and their English correspondents were combined by the Boolean operator AND and in two cases NOT, when it was necessary to exclude the term acquired immunodeficiency syndrome and AIDS, in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (Medline/ PubMed) database.

The search of the databases was carried out from February 2019 to July 2021. The inclusion criteria were: articles without language restriction, with the abstracts available in the selected databases, published articles whose methodology adopted to obtain evidence about sexuality in the quality of life of the elderly. Articles relating the elderly and AIDS and HIV, articles whose population was institutionalized elderly, which were associated with cognitive and sexual disorders, other types of publications other than articles (books, chapters, monographs, dissertations, theses, reviews and editorials) and literature reviews were excluded.

3. Results and discussion

The search was carried out, according to the established criteria, 2010 articles were found in the Scientific Electronical Library Online (Medline/ PubMed) database and 31 articles in Latin American literature and Cariband in Health Sciences (LILACS). Of this total, 63 of the studies were duplicated, being rectitude from their search, leaving 1978, of these 1910 were excluded by reading the title and/or abstract, leaving 68 articles.

Of the 68 remaining studies, 27 were read and excluded because they did not refer to the quality of life of the elderly, 15 because they were institutionalized elderly, 13 because they linked sexuality to cognitive and sexual disorders, 4 because they are representation of films, 2 because they are editorial and 3 because they are reviews of the literature, leaving 4 articles for the performance of this review.

Figure I show the identification, selection, screening through the eligibility criteria and completion of the analysis of the bibliographic research.

Figure 1. Flowchart demonstrating the bibliographic search.

Source: The author (2021)

Table 1. Identification of articles according to authors, year, country, population, evaluation model and main results.

Author/year/ country	Sample	Population	Evaluation model	Findings
Ariane Andressa Polizer; Tânia Maria Bérغامo Alves/2009/ Brazil	38 women	Women between 60 and 78 years.	Sexual Quotient Questionnaire - Female Version (QS-F)-A questionnaire with 10 questions, grouped into: desire and sexual interest, foreplay, Personal excitement and harmony with the partner, comfort, orgasm and satisfaction.	The results showed that the performance/satisfaction standard chosen by the women interviewed was regular too good, while the bad to unfavorable and null to bad patterns, had samples of 10.5 %.
SkłACKA Katarzyna; Rafał GERYMSKI/ 2018/ Poland	83 participants- (33 men and 50women).	Elderly between 60 and 81 years.	Two structured questionnaires. Overall life satisfaction - Diener's Life Satisfaction Scale, and sexual satisfaction	The level of sexual activity of the elderly was positively associated with sexual satisfaction
Linda Roney; Meredith Wallace Kazer;/ 2015/ Amsterdam	08 elderly (six women and two men).	Elderly between 62 and 95 years.	Interview on sexual aging, health experiences and concerns of participants	Participants commented that the expression of sexuality changed due to the health of the partner. Some identified less frequency and spontaneity, while others stated that they were now more open to sexual relationship. Participants stated that they wanted their partners' doctors

				to discuss their sexual needs.
Lucile Meyrignac; Nouredine Bouati; Alain Sagne; Gaëtan Gavazzi; Anne; Zipper/2017/ France	15 participants (9 women and 6 men).	People and 66 to 90 years.	Interview in-depth - comprehensive and reflective approach based on representations of individual subjects and their experiences.	For the elderly, sexuality is taboo and is linked to reproduction. It has no place in aging and the body is perceived as degraded. The acceptance of the transformed body is not always simple, mainly because of accomplishment pressure due to current social norms that reserve sexuality for and conveys a "dirty" image of sexuality to the elderly.

Source: The author (2021)

Sexuality is influenced by cultural, religious and spiritual factors, and is often seen as something unclean or related only to reproduction and not to pleasure. These beliefs can often

influence the lack of dialogue between parents and children who grow up considering this theme a taboo, and extend even when it is not addressed among patients and health professionals (UCHÔA *et al.*, 2016).

Difficulties during aging with regard to sexuality can appear by numerous factors, among them, the lack of information or the restriction of sexuality to genitalia. The prejudice of sexuality in old age is often caused by the elderly themselves conditioning sex to youth or because they do not find their body attractive as before, portraying a decline in sexual function especially in elderly women (ALENCAR *et al.*, 2014).

Research relating to sexual activity, overall satisfaction in the elderly showed that sexually active elderly people had higher satisfaction with global life than sexually inactive ones. In addition, some of the participants scored more subtle forms of sexuality such as hugging and kissing, with no difference in satisfaction over those who preferred penetrative sex or more subtle displays of intimacy (SCKALACKA and GERIMSKY, 2018).

It is considered that during aging textuality is not abolished, but internalized, a study conducted with 38 women aged 60 to 78 years, demonstrated that in general the older women have desire and interest in sex reporting a standard of regular and good sexual performance in most participants (POLIZER and ALVES, 2009).

It was also found in a study composed of 37 elderly aged between 60 and 89 years, that 51% of the participants considered sex important for their lives, being a factor that causes physical and psychological well-being, besides contributing to the reduction of physical or mental health problems associated with the aging process (OLIVEIRA *et al.*, 2015).

The statement was that the majority of the elderly participants in a study conducted with 15 elderly people between 66 and 90 years old through semi-structured interviews complained about the lack of dialogue between them and their physicians about sexuality, making them not comfortable to enter on the subject (MEYRIGNAC *et al.*, 2017).

Corroborating these results, a study with 8 elderly people between 62 and 95 years old, showed that the participants expressed the desire about the doctor to talk to the partner about their sexual needs, in addition, they commented on the lack of information and the lack of content in the media about sexual expression when it comes to this age group (RONEY and KAZER, 2015).

Another important aspect discussed in a quantitative observational study conducted with 200 elderly people revealed that most participants reported that they were not aware of about sexually transmitted diseases at the beginning of their sexual life, with the increase in STDs over the years in this age group due to the precariousness of information on this subject (UCHÔA *et al.*, 2016).

4. Conclusions

This review shows that despite the taboos involving sexuality during aging, it is demonstrated that the subject can positively impact the quality of life of the elderly, however it is still necessary to overcome some barriers, such as coping with dialogues on this subject, the acceptance of the aged body by the elderly and the deconstruction of social thought that still considers sexual activity something aimed at the young, thus, further studies on this theme are necessary so that sexuality as an interference factor in the quality of life of the elderly is strengthened.

References

- [1] ALENCAR, Danielle Lopes de *et al.*, Fatores que interferem na sexualidade de idosos: uma revisão integrativa. *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva*, v. 19, p. 3533-3542, 2014.
- [2] BASTOS, Carina Corrêa *et al.*, Importância atribuída ao sexo por idosos do município de Porto Alegre e associação com a autopercepção de saúde e o sentimento de felicidade. *Revista brasileira de geriatria e gerontologia*, Rio de Janeiro; v. 15, n. 1, p. 87-95, 2012.
- [3] CUNHA, Luana Miranda *et al.*, Vovó e vovô também amam: sexualidade na terceira idade. *Revista Mineira de Enfermagem*. Crato; v. 19, n. 4, p. 894-906, 2015.
- [4] ESGUERRA VELANDIA, Irene *et al.*, Sexualidad después de los 60 años. *Avances en Enfermería*; Vol. 25, núm. 2; 124-140 23460261 01214500, 2007.
- [5] FERNANDES, Maria das Graças Melo. Problematicando o corpo e a sexualidade de mulheres idosas: o olhar de gênero e geração. *Rev. enferm. UERJ*, Rio de Janeiro. v. 17, n. 3, p. 418-422, 2009.
- [6] FLEURY, Heloisa Junqueira; CHN, Abdo. Envelhecimento, doenças crônicas e função sexual. *Sexual Dysfunction*, São Paulo. v. 3, p. 09, 2012.
- [7] GRADIM, Clícia Valim Côrtes; SOUSA, Ana Maria Magalhães; LOBO, Juliana Magalhães. A prática sexual e o envelhecimento. *Cogitare enfermagem*, Minas Gerais; v. 12, n. 2, 2007.
- [8] KAYA, Eke *et al.*, Aging and sexual health: getting to the problem. *The Aging Male*. Estados Unidos; v. 20, n. 2, p. 65-80, 2017.
- [9] LOPES DE ALENCAR, Danielle *et al.*, Exercício da sexualidade em pessoas idosas e os fatores relacionados. *Revista Brasileira de Geriatria e Gerontologia*, Rio de Janeiro. v. 19, n. 5, 2016.
- [10] MEYRIGNAC, Lucile *et al.*, Représentations des personnes âgées de leur sexualité et de leur corps vieillissant: approche phénoménologique et psychodynamique. *Gériatrie et Psychologie Neuropsychiatrie du Vieillessement*, v. 15, n. 3, p. 319-328, 2017.
- [11] NASTRI, Carolina O. *et al.*, Hormone therapy for sexual function in perimenopausal and postmenopausal women. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*. Ribeirão Preto. n. 6, 2013.
- [12] OLIVEIRA, Ludmila Barbosa, *et al.*, Sexualidade e envelhecimento: avaliação do perfil sexual de idosos não institucionalizados. *Revista de Ciências da Saúde Nova Esperança*, vol.13, n.2, 2015.
- [13] POLIZER, Ariane Andressa; ALVES, Tânia Maria Bérnago. Perfil da satisfação e função sexual de mulheres idosas. *Fisioterapia em Movimento*, v. 22, n. 2, 2017.
- [14] RODRIGUES, Daysi Mara *et al.*, O percurso educativo dialógico como estratégia de cuidado em sexualidade com idosas. *Educação como cuidado em sexualidade com idosas*. Paraná; p. 01- 07, 2018.
- [15] RONEY, Linda; KAZER, Meredith Wallace. Geriatric sexual experiences: The seniors tell all. *Applied nursing research*, v. 28, n. 3, p. 254-256, 2015.
- [16] SILVA UCHÔA, Yasmim, *et al.*, A sexualidade sob o olhar da pessoa idosa. *Revista Brasileira de Geriatria e Gerontologia*, vol. 19, n.6, 2016.
- [17] SKAŁACKA, Katarzyna; GERYMSKI, Rafał. Sexual activity and life satisfaction in older adults. *Psychogeriatrics*, v. 19, n. 3, p. 195-201, 2019.