

REVISION ARTICLES

AGING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This study consists of an integrative literature review whose aim was identifying characteristics of the Brazilian scientific production on the elderly person's psychological well-being. The databases BDEnf, LILACS, MEDLINE, and SciELO were accessed and 5 papers which met the inclusion criteria were selected. One observed that the main authors of the publications are psychologists, but other health professionals work in an interdisciplinary way. All selected papers were published from 2003 on, 3 of them were quantitative researches with application of scales, 2 were literature reviews, and 1 was a case study. The scales used were: Emotional Intelligence Measure (EIM); Personal Development (PDES); and Psychological Well-Being. The results indicate relations between psychological well-being and essential aspects which assist in coping with the challenges posed by aging. The literature analyzed shows that effective social support, the fact of being married, and self-motivation are factors which contribute to a positive psychological well-being. One finds out that knowledge production on the theme is still incipient and there's no consensus with regard to the most important elements to obtain an elderly person's psychological adjustment.

Keywords: Elderly person. Psychological adaptation. Literature review.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, researches on human aging were associated only to decrepitude, to declines and losses which occur at this stage of the life cycle, and they neglected numerous studies in favor of other phases traditionally regarded as more important from the human development point of view. Nevertheless, during the 20th century new formulations were made and aging started being studied from a broad and multidimensional perspective, combining many sciences.

From this perspective, old age may be understood as resulting from a process which involves the biological, psychological, and social dimensions that begins in the embryo's life and it culminates in the heterogeneity of

the aging process. That's why singularity is regarded as a characteristic of every human being. Each being perceives her/himself in accordance with her/his reading of the world, according to the look she/he has with regard to her/his life and the way how to live it, which translates itself in daily life coping⁽¹⁾.

Then, one regards that obtaining a satisfactory old age still isn't an attribute only of the biological, psychological, or social realm, but it results from the interaction between the three realms. This way, the new conceptions of aging originated from biological, psychological, and social disciplines, which nowadays make up the field of gerontology, have introduced new insights to their study, and these contradict linear and one-dimensional visions with regard to the meaning of time and evolutionary changes⁽²⁾.

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Among the indicators of great importance for determining that the aging process is experienced in a positive way there're the factors associated to well-being. Studies on well-being emerged in late 1950, when researchers sought to know variables indicating the quality of life to monitor social changes and the implementation of social policies⁽³⁾. From this, different perspectives emerged, giving rise to the concept of subjective well-being (SWB).

The concept of SWB was initially approached from two perspectives: *Bottom-Up* means that immediate satisfaction of needs produces happiness, while the persistence of needs causes unhappiness; and *Top-Down* determines that the satisfaction degree required to produce happiness depends on adaptation or the individual's aspiration level and it's influenced by past experiences, personal values, and other factors⁽⁴⁾. Thus, in order to report an adequate SWB level it's needed that the individual knows how to keep in a high level her/his life satisfaction, her/his frequency of positive emotional experiences, and in a low level her/his negative emotional experiences⁽⁵⁾.

SWB is an area which has grown a lot, comprising studies that have used various designations, such as happiness, satisfaction, mood, positive affection, quality of life, and others. According to some authors⁽²⁾, it's one of the most studied themes in gerontology since the 1960s, and it stands out as a measure/criterion in the field of aging; however, the definitions of these concepts are still somehow confuse, since there's no consensus among scholars studying the subject.

In the late 1980s, Carol Ryff outlined new pathways for the study of well-being. Based on the Aristotelian concept of *eudaimonia*, which refers to the idea of fulfillment of each one's actual potential, in the pursuit of being's development⁽⁶⁾, Ryff formulated a model named Psychological Well-Being (PWB), which allows describing a set of dimensions, namely: self-acceptance, positive relations to others, autonomy, mastery of the environment, purposes in life, and personal growth. According to this model, people try feeling

good about themselves, even though they are aware of their limitations (self-acceptance); they seek developing and maintaining warm and reliable interpersonal relationships (positive relations to others); they aim controlling their environment in order to be able to meet their needs and fulfill their wishes (mastery of the environment); seek to develop self-determination and personal authority (autonomy); they try making sense of their efforts and challenges (purpose in life); and they try making the best out of their talents and capabilities (personal development)⁽⁷⁾.

The model of PWB developed by Ryff consists of a sensitive approach to the aging process which differs from SWB. The emphasis on the dimensions proposed by Ryff enables a greater understanding of the way how individuals, as they get older, become active agents of changes occurred to themselves and their environment⁽⁸⁾.

Electing well-being as the study target results from the recognition that for promoting health there's a need for going beyond attempts to cure disorders or pathologies or decrease their effects. There's also a need for promoting the appreciation of the development of individual potential, assuming that the continuous and balanced human, social, and cultural development allows facing the requirements of societies with higher earnings and lower individual and societal costs⁽⁶⁾. This way, aging and well-being of the elderly person are inseparable from the human development process and investing in their understanding means a contribution to the country's development.

Within this context, studying PWB allows knowing and understanding the needs of the elderly people to experience the aging process and helping them to trigger personal resources which enable them to live well old age according to their own conditions. The focus of PWB in old age becomes relevant, because the dimensions addressed provide the elderly person with a better adaptation to old age.

Given the above, this study aims to identify characteristics of the Brazilian scientific production on the elderly person's psychological well-being, according to Carol Ryff's model.

METHODOLOGY

The study consists of an integrative literature review, which is part of the process of creating and organizing a body of literature⁽⁹⁾. The development of studies using this method of literature review enables gathering and synthesizing research results, contributing to critically deepen and analyze knowledge on the theme investigated⁽¹⁰⁾.

During the integrative review, the following methodological steps were adopted⁽¹⁰⁾: 1) select questions for the review; 2) establish criteria for the sample selection; 3) present the primary research characteristics; 4) analyze data; 5) interpret the results; and 6) present the review.

One established for this study the following guiding question: "What are the characteristics of the Brazilian scientific production on the elderly person's psychological well-being, according to Carol Ryff's model?".

The identification of papers was conducted through bibliographic search in indexed national journals, through the Bireme website, where the following databases were accessed: Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature (LILACS), Nursing Databases (BDEnf), Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System (MEDLINE), and Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO).

The papers were selected according to the following inclusion criteria: descriptors included in the title or abstract; national production; full paper published and available on the internet or in the library of Universidade Federal do Parana. After reading of the full papers, only those which worked with the theme of PWB according to Carol Ryff's model were selected for this study.

One used the following Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS): "elderly person"; "elderly person/psychology"; "psychology in health"; "behavioral medicine"; "intelligence"; "psychological adaptation"; "life/psychology quality"; "aging/psychology"; "psychological tests" and their combinations.

For data collection an instrument was created with the following items: title, authors, professional category of authors, journal (year, volume, number, pages), descriptors used,

objectives, methodology, instruments, results, and final remarks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With the descriptors used one found 264 papers in LILACS, 32 papers in BDeNF, 74 papers in MEDLINE, and 10 papers in SciELO. Out of these, only 5 papers met the inclusion criteria.

Data from Box 1 show characteristics of the studies included in the research related to authors, title, journal, and publication year. Regarding the publication year, one observes that all were published from 2003, and the last study was conducted in 2009. These data indicate that the theme of elderly person's PWB has been poorly explored, since the selected studies are within the time interval of seven years (2003-2009). This calls attention due to the fact that the concept of PWB emerged in the 1980s, something which means that the interest in the theme is recent in Brazil.

One observes in Box 1 that the journals presenting studies on the elderly person's PWB were: *Revista Brasileira de Ciência e Movimento* (1); *Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica* (1); *Estudos de Psicologia* (1); *Psicologia Clínica* (1); and *Psicologia em Estudo* (1).

The professional categories to which belong the authors of the selected studies are: psychologist (8); gerontologist (1); educator (2); and physical education professional (1); i.e. most of them are psychologists. Nevertheless, the authors from other professional categories show it's possible to work with the theme from an interdisciplinary perspective. This finding corroborates the gerontology view of address aging in a multidimensional and interdisciplinary way, due to the fact that no knowledge source is complete in itself.

One observes that all studies (5) were developed in the Brazilian Southeast Region. The lack of data from the other regions is worrisome, since PWB may vary according to the culture, limiting the generalization of research results, since the values and assumptions should be carefully evaluated, including a cultural notion of the self, which is a notion of what a good or accomplished life means⁽¹¹⁾.

Box 1 – Characteristics of published studies addressing the theme of the elderly person's psychological well-being.

Authors	Title	Journal	Publication year
Miranda MLJ, Godeli MRCS	Music, physical activity and psychological well-being for the elderly	Revista Brasileira de Ciência e Movimento	2003
Queroz NC, Neri AL	Emotional Intelligence and Psychological Well-being among Middle-aged and Old Men and Women	Psicologia: Reflexão e Crítica	2005
Rabelo DF, Neri AL	Subjective well being and perceived psychological adjustment among old people affected by stroke: a review	Estudos de Psicologia	2006
Resende MC, Santos FA, Souza MM, Marques TP	Psychological treatment for patients with chronic kidney disease: searching for psychological adjustment	Psicologia Clínica	2007
Resende MC, Neri AL	Psychological adjustment and personal aging perspective in adults and older adults with physical disability	Psicologia em Estudo	2009

Regarding the study type, 3 of them are quantitative with application of scales, 2 are literature reviews, and 1 is case study. Regarding the composition of samples, in 1 study⁽¹²⁾ an intentional and systematic sample was used, made up of 90 people aged between 25 and 84 years, from the Paraplegics Association of Uberlandia (69 people) and the Assistance Program for the Disabled Person, from the College of Physical Education of Universidade Federal de Uberlandia (21 people); another study⁽¹³⁾ used a convenience sample consisting of 120 individuals living in the community, aged between 45 and 69 years; another quantitative study identified⁽¹⁴⁾ had a sample of 26 people with chronic renal failure, who used the service of a particular hemodialysis clinic and they were aged between 15 and 80 years. It was also noticed that no study used a sample only consisting of elderly people, something which demonstrates that the Brazilian literature presents a deficit with regard to this issue

Regarding the scales used, one notices in Box 2 that in 1 study⁽¹³⁾ two scales were used,

the Emotional Intelligence Measure (EIM)⁽¹⁵⁾ scale, which evaluates 5 dimensions: empathy, sociability, self-motivation, self-control, and self-awareness, and the Personal Development Scale (PDES)⁽¹⁶⁾, which presents the following dimensions: positive relations to others, autonomy, purpose in life, personal growth, self-acceptance, mastery of the environment, besides 12 items included that evaluate generativity and its dimensions create, maintain, and provide, totaling a scale with 30 5-point items (from very little to very much). In midlife and old age generativity is associated to an internal need to ensure and maintain existence from the perspective of symbolic immortality, expressed in leaving a personal legacy for the next generation⁽¹⁷⁾.

Only 1 study⁽¹⁴⁾ used the Psychological Well-Being Scale⁽¹⁸⁾, in its reduced version, with 18 items which evaluates the 6 dimensions of PWB: self-acceptance, positive relations to others, autonomy, mastery of the environment, purpose in life, and personal growth.

Box 2 – Evaluation scales used in papers addressing the theme of the elderly person's psychological well-being.

Papers	Scales used
Queroz NC, Neri AL (2005)	Emotional Intelligence Measure (EIM) and Personal Development Scale (PDES)
Resende MC, Santos FA, Souza MM, Marques TP (2007)	Psychological Well-Being Scale, reduced version
Resende MC, Neri AL (2009)	Personal Development Scale (PDES) and Sheppard's Inventory of Attitudes Toward Own Aging

Another paper⁽¹²⁾ used the Sheppard's Inventory of Attitudes Toward Own Aging⁽¹⁹⁾, which evaluates attitudes with regard to old age through 20 statements, whose answers must be provided on a four-point Likert scale (from "I disagree very much" to "I agree very much"), and the Personal Development Scale⁽¹⁶⁾, which consists of 30

questions, whose answers must be provided in a five-point scale (very little to very much).

In Box 3 one observes the distribution of papers according to the objectives. It may notice that 4 of them relate PWB to other factors (music, physical activity, emotional intelligence, gender, cerebrovascular accident, chronic renal failure, and physical disability).

Box 3 – Objectives of papers addressing the theme of the elderly person's psychological well-being.

Objectives	Paper
To analyze the association between music and physical activity, with regard to the elderly person's psychological well-being.	Miranda MLJ, Godeli MRCS (2003)
Identify and describe relationships between the constructs of emotional intelligence and psychological well-being in people who are in the midlife and old age; b) verify the similarities and differences between age and gender groups with regard to the psychological well-being and emotional intelligence; and c) describe characteristics and psychometric relations of two instruments for psychological evaluation.	Queroz NC, Neri AL (2005)
Identify mediating variables between subjective well-being, psychological adjustment sense, and cerebrovascular accident.	Rabelo DF, Neri AL (2006)
Identify PWB in patients with chronic renal failure.	Resende MC, Santos FA, Souza MM, Marques TP (2007)
Identify relations between psychological adjustment sense and old age prospect in adults and elderly people with physical disability.	Resende MC, Neri AL (2009)

According to some studies selected⁽¹²⁻¹⁴⁾, one found out that participants perceive themselves as psychologically adjusted people and with positive development. The results also

demonstrate the importance of effective social support for well-being, because, for the human being, lose contact to other people is a synonym of reclusion and loss of interest in life. For an

adequate adaptation, it's indispensable that there's an environment in which the elderly person can feel she/he is a member of a social group⁽¹²⁻¹³⁾.

One also found out that being married is usually related to a better quality of life and more independent life arrangements. Moreover, living a stable marriage usually implies greater availability of instrumental help and emotional support⁽¹²⁻¹³⁾.

Correlations were found regarding self-motivation and the dimensions of self-acceptance, purpose in life, personal growth, mastery of the environment, create and offer, i.e. self-motivation was regarded as an important predictor of PWB, since it provides the planning and fulfillment of life goals and facilitates coping with adversities⁽¹³⁾.

FINAL REMARKS

The results allow one to find out the lack of studies addressing the theme of the elderly person's PWB in Brazil, since only 5 publications were identified, although they're regarded as updated, since they refer to the period within the last 10 years. One believes that the scarcity of studies on PWB is related to the fact that this is more traditional in the scientific study on well-being, because it was developed from the 1960s on, i.e. 2 decades before the construction of the PWB; however, it's also verified that one of the main reasons why studies on PWB still hasn't prospered is the scarcity of good measuring instruments⁽²⁰⁾.

Although there's no consensus on the most important elements for obtaining a psychological adjustment, in the literature analyzed one observed that the high education level, effective social support, religiosity, being married, having a stable relationship, and having self-motivation are factors which contribute to a positive psychological well-being.

The elderly people who participated in the studies found regarded themselves as being psychologically adjusted and having a positive development, confirming data from the literature. This way, one finds out that aging doesn't necessarily imply lower psychological well-being.

Further studies shall fill the current gaps on the theme, with comparative researches using larger samples and specific to elderly people, also involving different age groups within the older population, having in mind that the population over 80 years presents great heterogeneity, enabling to established connections which explain the variations in well-being observed. There's also a need for encompassing different cultures, as the studies were conducted only in the Brazilian Southeast region.

This discussion brings new possibilities so that health professionals construct, on their practice, more effective strategies and structure programs which enable the strengthening of internal resources of the protective factors and coping strategies to manage their experiences during the elderly person's life course.

ENVELHECIMENTO E BEM-ESTAR PSICOLÓGICO: UMA REVISÃO INTEGRATIVA

RESUMO

Este estudo consiste em uma revisão integrativa da literatura cujo objetivo foi identificar as características da produção científica brasileira sobre o bem-estar psicológico do idoso. Foram consultadas as bases de dados BDeF, Lilacs, MedLine e SciELO e foram selecionados 5 artigos que atenderam aos critérios de inclusão. Observou-se que os principais autores das publicações são psicólogos, porém, outros profissionais da saúde trabalham de maneira interdisciplinar. Todos os artigos selecionados foram publicados a partir de 2003, 3 deles eram pesquisas quantitativas com aplicação de escalas, 2 eram revisões de literatura e 1 era estudo de caso. As escalas utilizadas foram: Medida de Inteligência Emocional (MIE); Desenvolvimento Pessoal (EDEP); e Bem-Estar Psicológico. Os resultados indicam relações entre o bem-estar psicológico e aspectos essenciais que auxiliam no enfrentamento dos desafios impostos pelo envelhecimento. A literatura analisada mostra que suporte social efetivo, o fato de ser casado e a automotivação são fatores que contribuem para o bem-estar psicológico positivo. Constata-se que a produção de conhecimento sobre a temática ainda é incipiente e não há consenso acerca dos elementos mais importantes para obter um ajustamento psicológico do idoso.

Palavras-chave: Idoso. Adaptação psicológica. Revisão de literatura.

ENVEJECIMIENTO Y BIENESTAR PSICOLÓGICO: UNA REVISIÓN INTEGRADORA

RESUMEN

Este estudo consiste em uma revisão integradora de la literatura cuyo objetivo fue identificar las características de la producción científica brasileña acerca del bienestar psicológico del anciano. Fueron consultadas las bases de datos BDeinf, Lilacs, SciELO y MedLine y fueron seleccionados 5 artículos que cumplieron los criterios de inclusión. Se observó que los principales autores de las publicaciones son psicólogos, sin embargo, otros profesionales de la salud trabajan de manera interdisciplinaria. Todos los artículos seleccionados fueron publicados desde 2003, 3 de ellos eran investigaciones cuantitativas con aplicación de escalas, 2 eran revisiones de literatura y 1 era estudio de caso. Las escalas utilizadas fueron: Medida de Inteligencia Emocional (MIE); Desarrollo Personal (EDEP); y Bienestar Psicológico. Los resultados indican relaciones entre el bienestar psicológico y aspectos esenciales que auxilian a hacer frente a los desafíos impuestos por el envejecimiento. La literatura analizada muestra que soporte social efectivo, el hecho de ser casado y la auto-motivación son factores que contribuyen al bienestar psicológico positivo. Se constata que la producción de conocimiento acerca de la temática aún es incipiente y no hay consenso sobre los elementos más importantes para obtener un ajuste psicológico del anciano.

Palabras clave: Anciano. Adaptación psicológica. Revisión de literatura.

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