

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36489/saudecoletiva.2020v10i59p4314-4325>

Violence against the elderly population during the COVID-19 pandemic

Violencia contra la población anciana durante la pandemia de COVID-19

Violência contra a população idosa durante a pandemia da COVID-19

ABSTRACT

Objective: The study aims to understand and address the phenomenon of violence against elderly people during the Covid-19 pandemic, highlighting the new ways of confronting this problem. **Method:** To this end, an Integrative Literature Review was conducted using the PubMed, Medline and Europe PubMed Central databases, with the following descriptors: Coronavirus Infections, violence and aged, accompanied by Boolean keywords "AND" and "OR". The combination of descriptors and keywords revealed 379 studies, of which only 5 met the inclusion criteria for analysis. **Results:** It was observed that isolation and social distancing are risk factors for violence against the elderly population, which had a significant growth during the Covid-19 pandemic. As one of the coping strategies, it is understood that social protection services can perform actions through remote contact, especially with elderly people who were already vulnerable and at risk, in order to monitor them and avoid the occurrence or aggravation of cases. **Conclusion:** This study allows to reflect on possible strategies to combat violence against the elderly in the period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

DESCRIPTORS: Coronavirus Infections; Violence; Aged.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: El estudio tiene por objeto comprender y abordar el fenómeno de la violencia contra los ancianos durante la pandemia de Covid-19, destacando las nuevas formas de hacer frente a este problema. **Método:** Con ese fin, se realizó una revisión bibliográfica integradora utilizando las bases de datos PubMed, Medline y Europe PubMed Central, con los siguientes descriptores: Infecciones por Coronavirus, violencia y anciano, acompañado de palabras clave booleanas "AND" y "OR". La combinación de descriptores y palabras clave reveló 379 estudios, de los cuales solo 5 cumplieron los criterios de inclusión para el análisis. **Resultados:** Se observó que el aislamiento y el distanciamiento social son factores de riesgo para la violencia contra los ancianos, que creció considerablemente durante la pandemia de Covid-19. Como una de las estrategias para hacer frente a la situación, se entiende que los servicios de protección social pueden tomar medidas mediante el contacto a distancia, especialmente con las personas de edad que ya eran vulnerables y estaban en situación de riesgo, a fin de vigilarlas y evitar que se produzcan o empeoren los casos. **Conclusión:** Este estudio permite reflexionar sobre posibles estrategias contra la violencia contra las personas mayores en el período pandémico del Covid-19.

DESCRIPTORES: Infecciones por Coronavirus; Violencia; Anciano.

RESUMO

Objetivo: O estudo pretende compreender e abordar o fenômeno da violência contra pessoas idosas no período da pandemia da Covid-19, destacando as novas formas de enfrentamento para essa problemática. **Método:** Para isso, realizou-se uma Revisão Integrativa da Literatura, utilizando as bases de dados PubMed, Medline e Europe PubMed Central, com os seguintes descritores: Infecções por Coronavírus, violência e idoso, acompanhados de palavras-chave complementadas pelos operadores booleanos "AND" e "OR". A combinação revelou 379 estudos, dos quais, apenas 5 atenderam aos critérios de inclusão para análise. **Resultados:** Observou-se que o isolamento e distanciamiento social são fatores de risco para violência contra a população idosa, a qual teve um crescimento expressivo durante a pandemia da Covid-19. Como uma das estratégias de enfrentamento, entende-se que os serviços de proteção social podem realizar ações através do contato remoto, principalmente com as pessoas idosas que já estavam em vulnerabilidade e situação de risco, a fim de monitorá-las e evitar a ocorrência ou agravamento dos casos. **Conclusão:** Este estudo permite a reflexão sobre possíveis estratégias contra à violência à pessoa idosa no período de pandemia da Covid-19.

DESCRITORES: Infecções por Coronavírus; Violência; Idoso.

RECEIVED ON: 10/15/2020 APPROVED ON: 10/26/2020

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INTRODUCTION

In December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) was notified of the occurrence of a more severe pneumonia outbreak, of unknown etiology, in the city of Wuhan, Hubei province, People's Republic of China. Scientists mobilized and soon the etiologic agent, a new coronavirus, was identified: SARS-COV-2, and the disease resulting from this new etiologic agent was called coronavirus disease (COVID-19).¹ The growth in the number of new cases and deaths as a result of COVID-19 led WHO to declare a Public Health Emergency of International Interest on January 30th, 2020, and characterize it as a pandemic on March 11th of the same year.^{2,3}

The COVID-19 pandemic has garnered increasing attention worldwide, and has placed users of healthcare systems, healthcare professionals and the general public under severe psychological pressure, triggering several psychological problems, such as anxiety, fear, depression and insomnia.⁴

This is because, the main preventive and control measure is social isolation, which in turn is a stressor in a globalized society, bringing impacts to social

... healthcare professionals and the general public under severe psychological pressure, triggering several psychological problems, such as anxiety, fear, depression and insomnia.

groups in different ways. In elderly people, this distress can be heightened, since the risk of cardiovascular, autoimmune, neurocognitive and mental health problems is evident.⁵

The pandemic exposed and intensified the context of previously existing social and economic inequalities in the countries, as well as, the social distance has reduced the difficult access to health and social protection services. In this scenario, it is important to bring to the discussion the possibility of increasing violence against the elderly (violência contra a pessoa idosa - VCPI), which refers to violence against people aged 60 or over, and which manifests itself in the forms of psychological, physical, sexual violence, patrimonial and institutional, negligence and financial abuse.⁶

In Brazil, three thousand complaints were registered in March, eight thousand in April and seventeen thousand in May - months with the highest rates of social isolation. In addition, the number of complaints referring to the period of social isolation until the month of June 2020, exceeds 60% of the total number registered in 2019, with family members responsible for 83% of the assaults⁷, which makes these cases even more har-

mful. Violence against the elderly population, in its vast majority, is suffered in silence and covered up by the close and dependent relationships between the victim and the perpetrator of the aggression, as well as by the fear of retaliation and abandonment.

Therefore, in order to work on the prevention of violence and the promotion of an education geared to the awareness of society about violence against the elderly, it is essential that the health professional understands the types of violence and the consequences that these can have in life following the population. According to Moreno ⁸, such knowledge implies the preparation to detect and deal with the violence suffered, facilitating the possible consequences and ways to face it.

Despite the relevance of the topic, the discussion on possible strategies for coping with VCPI during the COVID-19 pandemic is still meaningless worldwide. ⁹ In Brazil, there are few studies that relate the increase in violence to the current health context. The federal government's pronouncement on the increase in the number of cases of IPV occurred just four months after the first confirmation of the disease in the country, when in the first three months there was already a growth of 567% of the cases of violence. ⁹

These data reinforce the relevance of discussing the theme through collective reflections on the violence practiced against the elderly, numerical data that point to their expressive growth and coping strategies. Thus, this article intends to fill one of these gaps, with the aim of understanding and addressing the phenomenon of violence against elderly people

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in the Covid-19 pandemic period, in its different forms, highlighting the new ways of coping with this problem.

METHOD

It is a study characterized as an Integrative Literature Review (ILR), whose methodology allows it to include research with different methodological approaches to the study. ¹⁰ Thus, the review was constructed according to the following steps: (1) definition of the theme, objective and research problem; (2) structuring the search and survey strategies for the bibliographic material found in the scientific literature; (3) analysis and critical evaluation of the bibliographic materials found; exposure and discussion of the results achieved; (4) presentation of the integrative literature review in its entirety. ¹¹

The searches were carried out in October 2020. Articles made in 2020, published in the databases PubMed, MEDLINE and Europe PubMed Central (Europe PMC), in English, Portuguese and Spanish, were used as a time limit.

For the bibliographic survey in the databases of PubMed, MEDLINE and Europe PMC, Descriptors in Health Sciences (DeCS) and Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) were used accompanied by keywords and, combined among themselves by the Boolean operators "AND" and "OR". It should be noted that the search for all descriptors was specified by "Title". Chart 1 illustrates the search strategies used in each database for the location of scientific studies.

In order to achieve the scientific studies corresponding to the objectives of this IR, the following inclusion criteria were established: research carried out with individuals aged 60 or over, regardless of gender and socioeconomic status; to address violence and its nuances against elderly people in the COVID-19 pandemic period as an object of study; research developed with different age groups, but that included the elderly in their sample; and available for reading in full. Thus, studies that did not present a well-defined classifi-

Chart 1. Search strategies used by databases.

BASES DE DADOS	ESTRATÉGIA DE BUSCA
PubMed	COVID-19 AND AND elderly OR "older adults" OR geriatrics OR aging AND violence OR "Elder Abuse"
Medline	Infecções por coronavírus OR COVID-19 AND Violência AND Idoso OR geriatria
Europe PMC	Violence AND Aged AND Coronavirus infections

Source: Authors (2020).

cation on violence, that did not involve elderly people in their sample, that were not developed in the context of the pandemic of COVID-19 and letters to the editor were excluded.

To systematize the article selection process, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol was chosen. Thus, duplicate titles were initially excluded; then, the titles and abstracts were evaluated; and finally, publications that met the inclusion criteria were read in full. Data analysis was conducted by two reviewers, and when there was disagreement, a third reviewer was consulted.

RESULTS

The combination of descriptors and keywords revealed 379 studies, 74 of which were found in the PubMed database, 131 in MEDLINE and 174 in Europe PMC. Then, studies with duplicated title and abstract (n=42), whose theme and content were not compatible with the proposal of the present study (n=293) were excluded.

In total, 39 articles were selected for their full reading, of these, it was observed that only 5 met the inclusion criteria, thus becoming the corpus of analysis of the present research.

DISCUSSION

Violence against the elderly is a complex and multi-causal phenomenon, considered a serious public health problem, being associated with devastating consequences at the individual and collective levels.^{9,16} This violence is defined as the act or lack of appropriate action that causes harm or anguish to the elderly person, which can occur within any relationship in which there is an expectation of trust¹⁵, and is expressed in physical, emotional, financial, neglect or a combination of both.¹²

Studies show that in addition to the increased risk of mortality from CO-

Chart 2. Description of the studies included in the present review.

TÍTULO	AUTORES	INTERVENÇÃO ESTUDADA	PRINCIPAIS RESULTADOS E CONCLUSÕES
Abuso de idosos na era COVID-19	Han e Mosqueda ¹²	Apresentação de um Modelo de Intervenção/ Prevenção de Abuso (AIM).	O AIM considera 3 aspectos: o idoso vulnerável, o outro em quem confia e o contexto em que a violência ocorre. Intervenções que consideram esses aspectos contribuem para atenuar a VCPI no período de pandemia.
Abuso de idosos na época do COVID-19 - Aumento dos riscos para idosos e seus cuidadores	Makaroun, Bachrach e Rosland ¹³	Descrição de como a pandemia pode afetar os adultos mais velhos e seus cuidadores.	Os impactos da COVID-19 em adultos mais velhos e nos cuidadores; prestação de cuidados e enfrentamento do aumento do risco VCPI durante a pandemia. Pesquisas com cuidadores de idosos nesse contexto podem abordar os riscos do uso de comportamento abusivo ou negligente.
Violência contra idosos durante a pandemia de COVID-19 no Brasil: contribuições para seu enfrentamento	Moraes et al. ⁹	Discussões sobre as possíveis estratégias de enfrentamento da VCPI durante a COVID-19	Sugestões de iniciativas de promoção de saúde e prevenção da VCPI durante a pandemia da COVID-19. Atuação intersetorial e em rede para reduzir a ocorrência da VCPI, evidenciado nesse contexto de crise sanitária, política, econômica e ética.
Efeitos do surto de COVID-19 nos maus tratos e resposta aos idosos na cidade de Nova York: lições iniciais	Elman et al. ¹⁴	Explora o impacto da pandemia da COVID-19 nas pessoas idosas vítima de maus-tratos e em pessoas em risco de vitimização, e o impacto da pandemia nas organizações que protegem as pessoas idosas, fornecendo orientações	O isolamento social é fator de risco VCPI devido às pessoas idosas estarem restritas aos ambientes em que geralmente ocorrem os maus-tratos. Como soluções criativas, as organizações de proteção sugerem: reuniões por ligações; condução de investigações; mudanças nas estratégias de resposta à violência, dentre outros.
Uma crise invisível de direitos humanos: A marginalização dos adultos mais velhos durante a pandemia COVID-19 - Uma revisão de advocacy	D'cruz, Banerjee ¹⁵	Aborda sobre os fatores condicionantes pelos quais a população idosa está exposta no período de pandemia de COVID-19, tais como os diversos tipos de violência.	Aumento de 10 vezes da VCPI em países desenvolvidos durante a pandemia devido às pessoas idosas estarem isoladas e em contato direto com seus abusadores, aumentando a vulnerabilidade à violência, abuso e negligência.

Source: Authors (2020).

VID-19, older people are more vulnerable to situations of violence resulting from protective measures against this disease^{13,14}, besides the impact on mental health¹², which further weakens well-being and exacerbates the vulnerability of these individuals.⁹

The decline in health conditions leads to greater dependence and demand for care during the pandemic that, in many cases, fell on the family, overloading it. This pressure can make the family more likely to be abusive or negligent, and if there is an existence, it can aggravate the abuse.¹⁴ This overload also occurred in health services, leading to greater contempt and discrimination for the elderly at the expense of the younger population, since it constitutes a group with greater vulnerability for the development of the severe form of COVID-19 and, consequently, demand greater attention.⁹

Due to the need to suspend home care in order to reduce the exposure of the elderly to the new coronavirus and the measures of isolation and social distance, the elderly, instead of being removed from risky environments, were confined to them, along with their aggressors who, most of them are close relatives and the main caregivers.¹² This restriction on the risk environment can have potentially devastating results for victims.¹⁴

The presence of a professional caregiver in the home environment increases the possibility of witnessing potentially abusive or negligent behaviors; its absence, on the other hand, reduces the ability to prevent or detect ill-treatment.¹⁴

Thus, the adoption of strategies by the social protection services becomes extremely important in this scenario, and actions can be taken through the use of digital technologies for remote contact with these people, especially with those who were already at risk. In addition, the professional must be able to identify the signs of situations of insecurity, in addition to suspicious behavior, disorientation, increased sleep during the day or refusal to speak on the phone.^{13,9}

The challenges for implementing remo-

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te strategies are numerous. Many older people do not have the financial resources to access or are unaware of these digital technologies.¹³ One way to keep in touch and monitor them is through phone calls⁹, although the impossibility of being alone at the time of the call prevents the report of abuse or neglect.¹⁴ Despite the challenges, this contact must be continuous and regular and sometimes happen in an unscheduled way so that there is no disguise of the real conditions in which the elderly person is.^{12,13}

A population-based study carried out with elderly people in São Paulo found a prevalence of violence against them of 10%.¹⁷ This prevalence may not be real, since, according to Makaroun, Bachrach and Rosland¹³, only 1 in 24 cases are identified and reported, a fact that corroborates the increased difficulty in detecting cases of abuse against the elderly.

VCPI is in an upward movement, preliminary reports show that, in developed countries, there was a 10-fold increase in the number of abuses against the elderly population during the pandemic.¹⁵ The reduction in social support networks is one of the factors that contributed to this increase, caused by the interruption of social activities aimed at the well-being of these people, protection services and reduced access to health services. According to Moraes et al.⁹, these factors also contribute to the maintenance, aggravation and appearance of new cases of violence.

The distancing, in addition to making mistreatment feasible, makes it difficult to identify and report, which is often suffered in silence and covered up by the close relationships between the victim and the aggressor^{14,9}, problematic that highlights the importance of addressing this topic and the surveillance of these people in order to avoid the occurrence and the events resulting from it, since it directly interferes with the quality of life of the elderly person.

CONCLUSION

In the pandemic scenario of COVID-19,

it is essential to pay attention to the elderly population, as it can be seen, this population presents itself as one of the groups most vulnerable to severe forms of the disease, thus making it essential to apply protective measures of distance and social isolation. However, it is observed that these measures can bring risks to the integrity of the elderly person and expose them to various forms of violence, as they are confined to their family environment where, possibly, their aggressors are.

The changes in routine resulting from measures to contain the pandemic brought negative consequences for

all age groups, including the increase in violence practiced at home. The elderly population is one of the most susceptible groups due to the usual social discrimination against aging, insufficient public policies to guarantee their rights, greater dependence on third parties to carry out their activities, or even the loss of purchasing power of families in the context of economic crisis triggered by the pandemic.

It is observed as a limitation of the study the small amount of researches achieved for the development of research, due to the scarcity in the scientific literature on studies that evaluate violence against

the elderly in the pandemic period of COVID-19, making it difficult to elucidate with accuracy the causal relationships between these variables. Thus, it is encouraged to carry out additional longitudinal studies, such as cohort studies, in order to improve the existing scientific evidence on the subject. ■

FINANCING

This work was carried out with the support of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel - Brazil (CAPES) - Financing Code 001.

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