

# Tourism and health vulnerability: the COVID-19 pandemic from the see of the elderly

Turismo e vulnerabilidade em saúde: a pandemia da COVID-19 sob o olhar dos idosos

Turismo y vulnerabilidad sanitaria: la pandemia del COVID-19 desde la sede del anciano

## RESUMO

Objetivo: Conhecer as percepções dos idosos de Alcântara – MA, acerca das vulnerabilidades em saúde em relação ao turismo e à COVID-19. Método: A pesquisa caracterizou-se como descritiva com abordagem quantitativa. Utilizou-se como instrumento de pesquisa um questionário aplicado a 74 idosos, que constituíram a amostra por conveniência. Para análise dos dados, estes, foram tabulados utilizando-se distribuição por frequência, que foi apresentada por meio de porcentagens e analisadas de forma descritiva. Resultado: A maioria reconheceu ser motivo de preocupação, em relação à Covid-19, o fato de terem mais de 60 anos de idade e considerou a manutenção das atividades turísticas, uma situação de vulnerabilidade à sua saúde, os demais não identificaram essas correlações. Conclusão: O olhar dos idosos é sustentado em seus conhecimentos sobre as formas de contágio e prevenção à Covid-19, e revela que, quanto menos eles sabem, mais vulneráveis tendem a ficar diante do risco de infecção ao coronavírus.

**DESCRIPTORIOS:** Saúde do Idoso; Coronavírus; Turismo.

## ABSTRACT

Objective: To know the perceptions of the elderly in Alcântara - MA, about health vulnerabilities in relation to tourism and COVID-19. Method: The research was characterized as descriptive with a quantitative approach. A questionnaire applied to 74 elderly people was used as a research instrument, which constituted the convenience sample. For data analysis, these were tabulated using frequency distribution, which was presented as percentages and analyzed in a descriptive way. Result: Most recognized that they were over 60 years of age as a cause for concern in relation to Covid-19 and considered the maintenance of tourist activities a situation of vulnerability to their health, the others did not identify these correlations. Conclusion: The view of the elderly is supported by their knowledge of the ways of contagion and prevention of Covid-19, and reveals that the less they know, the more vulnerable they tend to be in the face of the risk of infection with the coronavirus.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Elderly Health; Coronavirus; Tourism.

## RESUMEN

Objetivo: Conocer las percepciones de los ancianos de Alcântara - MA, sobre las vulnerabilidades de salud en relación al turismo y al COVID-19. Método: La investigación se caracterizó por ser descriptiva con enfoque cuantitativo. Se utilizó como instrumento de investigación un cuestionario aplicado a 74 adultos mayores, los cuales constituyeron la muestra por conveniencia. Para el análisis de los datos, estos se tabularon mediante distribución de frecuencias, que se presentó como porcentajes y se analizó de forma descriptiva. Resultado: La mayoría reconoció tener más de 60 años como motivo de preocupación en relación al Covid-19 y consideró el mantenimiento de las actividades turísticas una situación de vulnerabilidad para su salud, los demás no identificaron estas correlaciones. Conclusión: La visión de los adultos mayores se sustenta en su conocimiento sobre las vías de contagio y prevención del Covid-19, y revela que cuanto menos saben, más vulnerables tienden a ser ante el riesgo de contagio del coronavirus.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Salud del Anciano; Coronavirus; Turismo.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The World Health Organization (WHO) and Brazilian legislation define elderly individuals as those aged 60 or over. As <sup>1</sup> aging is a natural phenomenon and occurs in all species. In 2050, Brazil will occupy the sixth position in the number of individuals aged 60 years or older, this perspective brings with it a change in the distribution profile of diseases, with a reduction in the frequency of deficiency and infectious diseases, and an increase in the prevalence of chronic-degenerative diseases. <sup>2</sup>

Covid-19 is a disease with a very broad clinical spectrum, ranging from asymptomatic patients with mild respiratory symptoms to patients with severe pneumonia, among others. This disease was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a pandemic on March 11th, 2020. <sup>3</sup> Initially, high lethality was observed in the elderly and in people who had a chronic disease.

The World Health Organization, the British Medical Journal Lancet and the

China Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CCDC) indicated that the new coronavirus most often killed people aged 80 and over (14.8% of those infected died). In the 70-79 age group, the mortality rate was 8%. If only the group over 60 years were analyzed, the mortality rate would reach 8.8% (rate 3.82 times higher than the general average). Therefore, adults over the age of 60 were at greater risk of developing the most severe forms of Covid-19. <sup>4</sup>

Therefore, measures were taken by governments to reduce the spread of the disease and thus preserve, mainly, people who were in risk groups, one of these measures was through the reduction/blocking of travel in travel. Especially when dealing with cities where the main economic activity is tourism, the importance of this blockade for health is perceived, as this activity stimulates the agglomeration of people from the most diverse parts of the world.

That said, it is worth mentioning that the interest in this research arose because the city under study is a small town with

7.2% of elderly people, which has in the figure of the tourist a character usually present in its historic streets. In view of this reality, considering that until the present moment, no academic work was found that evidenced the relationship between tourism, vulnerability in health from the perspective of elderly people, in time of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was necessary to carry out this research, which raised the following question: the elderly in the tourist city of Alcântara - Maranhão (MA) perceive tourist activities, regarding your knowledge of the new coronavirus (Covid-19), as a situation of vulnerability to your health? In view of the above, the objective of this research was to know the perceptions of the elderly in Alcântara, about health vulnerabilities in relation to tourism and Covid-19.

## **METHOD**

As for the research scenario, this took place at the headquarters of the city of Alcântara - MA, which has great potential for various types of tourism, for example,

cultural, historical, pedagogical, adventure, contemplation, ecotourism, religious, among others.

This research was based on scientific articles and websites to build the theoretical framework. It was developed in the second half of 2020 through the Voluntary Institutional Program for Scientific Initiation - PIVIC of the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Maranhão - IFMA Campus Alcântara.

Therefore, it was a cross-sectional study with a quantitative approach with a descriptive purpose, which used questionnaires as a data collection instrument, containing closed and open questions, related to the knowledge of the elderly about health vulnerabilities in relation to tourism in the period of the Covid-19 pandemic. The descriptive search 5 aims to verify the characteristics of a population, with emphasis on studying the characteristics of a group. The study sample was obtained by convenience consisting of 80 of the 1,574 elderly 6 residents of Alcântara - MA, being considered after processing the data a total of 74 valid questionnaires for analysis.

For access and selection of participants, a visit was made to the Social Assistance Department of the city of Alcântara. For the choice of the elderly, inclusion criteria were defined as being elderly residents of the city of Alcântara, of both sexes, over 60 years of age, that they were lucid and demonstrated ease in verbal expression during the data collection period, in addition to voluntary acceptance.

As for the exclusion criteria, being elderly residents in the city of Alcântara, of both sexes, over 60 years of age, who were lucid and demonstrated ease in verbal expression during the data collection period and who were health professionals. Only the elderly who were in the residence at the time of the home visit were interviewed. In the absence of the elderly, the household was visited again, at another time; in case of repetition of this absence, the domicile was replaced.

For data analysis, a database was built in Microsoft Excel 2010. Data were analyzed

using descriptive statistics (absolute frequency and relative frequency) and presented through tables for better visualization. From the data generated, a brief discussion was made about the aspects that the elderly considered when referring to the perception and vision of the ways of preventing and contagion of the new coronavirus and facing the vulnerability of their health in relation to tourist activities in time of a pandemic.

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the UNICEUMA University and received the Certificate of Presentation of Ethical Appreciation - CAAA with number 35135620.6.0000.5084 and opinion 4,204,524. The application of the questionnaires was initiated after the interviewees had signed the Free and Informed Consent Term. This research followed the current guidelines and regulatory standards for research involving human beings, Resolution 466 of 12/12/12 and Resolution 510 of 04/07/16. During the application of the questionnaires, the na-

mes of the subjects were not identified, in order to guarantee the confidentiality of their content.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results of the data collection carried out with 74 elderly people will be presented and discussed. In the survey, there was a representation rate of approximately 4.7% of the total elderly population in Alcântara.

Thus, in the tables and texts that follow, the perceptions of the participants regarding their view of the forms of prevention and contagion of the new coronavirus and the vulnerability of their health in relation to tourist activities in the time of a pandemic are presented.

In the data presented in Tables 1 and 2, we can observe the identification of the forms of contagion by the new coronavirus and the ways that the elderly were able to describe, respectively. In view of the results presented, it was found that 78.37% of the elderly population involved in this

Table 1- Percentage of elderly people who can or cannot identify the forms of infection by the new coronavirus.

You know the main forms of infection of the new coronavirus.	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency %
Yes	58	78,37
No	16	21,62
Total	74	100

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table 2 – Percentage of elderly people who can describe the forms of contagion by the new coronavirus.

If yes, what forms of contagion do you know?	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency %
Close contact with an infected person	51	87,93
They didn't know how to answer	05	8,62
Through the wind	01	1,72
Lack of cleanliness	01	1,72
Total of those who said yes	58	100

Source: Prepared by the authors.

study claimed to know the main forms of contagion of the new coronavirus, while 21.62% said they did not know. In Table 2, among the elderly who claimed to know, 87.93% considered close contact with an infected person as the main form of contamination, while 1.72% considered the lack of hygiene and another 1.72% considered that the main form of contagion occurs through the wind. Interestingly, 8.62% of the 78.37% who said they knew the main forms of contagion by the new coronavirus, when asked what these ways would be, did not know how to answer, revealing insecurity and/or lack of knowledge.

It is known that Covid-19 has an infectious cause of high transmissibility and high spread. According to Nunes et al.<sup>7(2)</sup> “The transmission of SARS-CoV-2 occurs mainly with the contact of respiratory droplets from infected patients [...]”. It can be concluded that, in relation to the forms of contagion that they know, an adequate perception prevailed by most members of this group, who, when considering close contact with infected people, as the main form of contamination, ended up revealing a real understanding of the infectious cause of this disease. However, the worrying issue was regarding the number of elderly people, 21.62% who said they did not know such forms of contagion, together with those, 8.62% who said they knew, but were unable to identify what these forms would be.

It is noted that of a total of 74 elderly people interviewed, 21 of them had no answers to give in the face of these questions,

even with 09 (nine) months of the Covid-19 pandemic (at the time the survey was carried out) being publicized in the various communication channels. It is noted here how necessary it is to provide these elderly people with more information about the forms of contagion, since access to information is directly related to the forms of prevention to be adopted, since the less they know, the more vulnerable they tend to be to the risk of a possible infection.

In view of the analysis of these data, we sought to relate the results described above with the results of the research by Araújo et al.<sup>8</sup> which aimed to estimate the level of knowledge and perception about the new coronavirus in elderly residents of the metropolitan region of Belém during the Covid-19 pandemic. The result of this research was that of the 758 elderly people evaluated, 96.6% declared they had knowledge about the new coronavirus. In view of the results of this research and that of Araújo et al, it appears that it is possible to correlate in the two studies that most of the elderly people evaluated themselves as knowing basic aspects about Covid-19.

When asked if they knew about Covid-19 prevention measures (Table 3), 94.59% of respondents answered yes and all of them said they had implemented some prevention measures in their daily lives (Table 4). However, there was still a percentage of 5.41% who said they did not know and did not implement any prevention measures. It is known that for greater safety, measures must be adopted by everyone, because if one does not adopt, it ends up compromising the health of

others, in case of close contact. During the execution of this study, the vaccines were still in the creation phase, however, even after their application in a large part of the population, it is still necessary to maintain all preventive measures to prevent the virus from spreading.

According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)<sup>9</sup> and World Health Organization (WHO)<sup>10</sup>, as well as other reference institutions have widely disseminated guidelines for the prevention of Covid-19 in the mass media. Among the main guidelines are: wash your hands with soap and water or sanitize with alcohol, keep at least 1 meter of personal distance; avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth, as hands touch many surfaces and can be infected by viruses; stay home if you feel unwell and follow the instructions of your national or local health authority because they will always have the most up-to-date information about the situation in your area.<sup>9</sup>

Regarding the question asked to the elderly about whether they considered the fact that they were 60 years of age or older to be of greatest concern in relation

Table 3 - Percentage of elderly people who are able to identify or not the prevention measures for Covid-19.

Do you know of any preventive measures for COVID-19?	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency %
Yes	70	94,59
No	04	5,41
Total	74	100

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table 4 - Percentage of elderly people who implemented prevention measures for Covid-19.

Have you implemented any preventive measures for COVID-19 in your daily life?	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency %
Yes	70	94,59
No	04	5,41
Total	74	100

Source: Prepared by the authors.

to Covid-19, most of them (Table 5), 85.13% said yes, while 14.86% said they did not consider age a factor of greatest concern in relation to this disease. These results revealed that the majority of the elderly involved in this research had an appropriate perception, considering the correlation between older age and vulnerability. However, the need to reach others who disregard age as a factor that increases vulnerability to the effects of Covid-19 is still revealed here.

The mainstream media since the beginning of the pandemic has warned the population about the danger of the effects of Covid-19 on the elderly, and has often presented recommendations for the elderly to avoid contagion by the new coronavirus, due to their greater vulnerability to this disease. This vulnerability is justified by the fact that this group of people has a more fragile immune system, in addition to other more age-specific health issues. Regarding the number of deaths of elderly people with Covid-19, the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ) <sup>11</sup> announced on its website in 2020 that the elderly were representing 73% of deaths from Covid-19 in Brazil, making the elderly the most vulnerable group in the pandemic.

Borges and Crespo <sup>12</sup> when carrying out a survey that addressed the demographic and socioeconomic aspects of Brazilian adults and Covid-19, among other objectives, it sought to characterize the risk groups for Covid-19 in Brazil, and the results showed that age was the main risk factor for comorbidities associated with Covid-19, but there is also a greater risk for people in more vulnerable categories, such as the least educated and blacks and browns. There is no doubt based on the numerous studies that have already been carried out that the elderly are more vulnerable and need to be zealous in the forms of prevention in relation to Covid-19.

Given the above, we sought to continue the correlation of the results of this research with the results of the research by Araújo et al. <sup>8</sup>, that in relation to the level

of concern about the pandemic, most elderly people were very concerned. Of the 758 elderly people evaluated, 66% revealed the level of concern to be very worried, 22% little worried and 12% not worried. Although the question of this research is whether the elderly person considers that because they are 60 years of age or older, they are a cause of greater concern in relation to Covid-19 and the research carried out by Araújo et al. <sup>8</sup> To assess the level of concern about the pandemic, these two surveys are closely correlated, and from

the results of these questions, the conclusion is drawn that, in both, most elderly people said they were concerned about the disease in question.

In order to understand the relationship between tourism, Covid-19 and the elderly, questions were asked about the understanding of this relationship, as well as, an analysis of this situation in the city of Alcântara, considering that it is a tourist and historical city that receives many tourists on a daily basis.

Table 6 shows that 77.02% of the el-

Table 5 – Percentage of elderly people who consider being 60 years of age or older a reason for greater concern or not regarding Covid-19.

Do you consider that the fact that you are 60 years of age or older is a reason for greater concern in relation to Covid-19?	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency %
Yes	63	85,13
No	11	14,86
Total	74	100

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table 6 – Percentage of elderly people who evaluated the forms of suspension of tourist activities in more serious times of pandemic, in Alcântara-MA.

How do you evaluate the suspension of tourist activities in more serious times of a pandemic, in Alcântara-MA?	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency %
The suspension of tourist activities in serious times of a pandemic was necessary to reduce the health vulnerability of the elderly.	57	77,02
The suspension of tourist activities in serious times of a pandemic harmed local trade and festivities, but it was necessary to reduce the health vulnerability of the elderly.	10	13,51
The suspension of tourist activities in serious times of a pandemic has no influence on the health vulnerability of the elderly, so there was no need to suspend such activities.	05	6,75
They didn't know how to answer	02	2,70
Total	74	100

Source: Prepared by the authors.

derly considered that the suspension of tourist activities in serious times of pandemic was necessary to reduce health vulnerability. Simonetti<sup>13</sup> states that in order to contain the coronavirus pandemic, several measures were adopted, such as: borders were blocked and people went into quarantine to maintain social distance. These measures taken were relevant to contain the contagion curve of the new coronavirus, being one of the alternatives adopted by the federal and local government.

Also according to the same table, 13.51% mentioned that the suspension of tourist activities in serious times of a pandemic harmed local commerce and festivities, but it was important to reduce the vulnerability in health of the elderly. This means that the elderly recognized that the suspension of tourism was a way of minimizing the risks to their health, since, as Alcântara is a tourist city and, consequently, receives many tourists, certainly, the cases of infected people would increase. For this reason, it can be said that the suspension was an important factor to minimize this situation, revealing an adequate perception of the elderly in this matter.

On the other hand, there was a group of elderly people, 6.75%, who considered that the suspension of tourist activities in serious times of a pandemic had no influence on the vulnerability in health of the elderly person, so there was no need to suspend such activities. This perception was possibly due to the closure of inns, restaurants, boats were prohibited from docking at the city's port, professional guides and tour conductors were unable to work. The entire tourism production chain had to stop its activities, so there was a negative impact so that many had their income compromised. In this aspect, the elderly disregarded the health risks with the maintenance of tourist activities.

The elderly, as they are a risk group for the disease and, especially, if they have comorbidities, actually become a concern when it comes to tourists traveling around the city. In this context, according to

Hammerschmidt and Santana<sup>14</sup> distancing and hygiene care are one of the main tools to avoid contagion of the disease.

Every year in the city of Alcântara,

**Regarding the question asked to the elderly about whether they considered the fact that they were 60 years of age or older to be of greatest concern in relation to Covid-19, most of them (Table 5), 85.13% said yes, while 14.86% said they did not consider age a factor of greatest concern in relation to this disease.**

one of the largest religious festivals in the state takes place, which is the Festejo do Divino Espírito Santo, which usually takes place between the months of May or June. During this period, the city receives many tourists and thus it is a time to strengthen the local economy, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the celebration was canceled in 2020 and 2021 and, con-

sequently, there was a slowdown in the economy.

According to the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV - Fundação Getúlio Vargas)<sup>15</sup> The travel market was one of the sectors most affected by the crisis, as the measures adopted to combat Covid-19 affected the dynamics of the sector, in view of,

which is an area that generates direct and indirect jobs and its downsizing has significant consequences for the country. Also in this context, FGV<sup>12(4)</sup> stated that "[...] the economic losses, compared to the sector's GDP in 2019, will total R\$ 116.7 billion in the 2020-2021 biennium, which represents a loss of 21.5% in the total production of the period".

This scenario, in fact, became worrying, as the sector had to find alternatives to minimize this impact on the Brazilian economy in 2020 and 2021, but that despite this, it is emphasized that the temporary closure was one of the alternatives to stop the contagion of the new coronavirus and in this way, protect the health of the elderly and the entire population.

In the table in relation to the group of elderly people who did not know how to give an opinion on the issue of tourist activities, there was a percentage of 2.70%, revealing difficulty in understanding the issue under discussion: the elderly, tourism and Covid-19.

## CONCLUSION

The study made it possible to have an overview of aspects of Covid-19, the elderly and tourism in the city of Alcântara, as well as an understanding of several points involving the topic. The view of the elderly reveals that most of them perceive the maintenance of tourist activities as a situation of vulnerability in health, but some cannot identify this correlation, believing that such activities in the time of a pandemic would have no influence on the situation. It is noted that the thinking of the majority was supported by their basic knowledge about the forms of contagion and prevention of Covid-19, presented in this research.

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