

# The Quality Of Aging Of Transgender Individuals In Brazil

A Qualidade Do Envelhecimento De Indivíduos Transexuais no Brasil

La Calidad Del Envejecimiento De Las Personas Transgénero En Brasil

## RESUMO:

Objetivo: coletar dados acerca das condições de vida que cerceiam o envelhecimento dos indivíduos transexuais. Método: trata-se de uma revisão integrativa da literatura, realizada no período de fevereiro a julho de 2024, com busca de estudos nas bases de dados PubMed e Lilacs, cujo corpus de análise foi de 12 artigos. Resultados: a pesquisa levantou uma série de empecilhos que os transexuais precisam enfrentar diariamente para sobreviver e que interferem diretamente na qualidade do envelhecimento dos mesmos, sendo esses empecilhos caracterizados por acesso à saúde precário, preconceito, discriminação e abandono. Conclusão: constatou-se que as condições de envelhecimento das pessoas trans no Brasil são precárias em decorrência do preconceito extremo e da ausência de apoio social e familiar e que mais estudos precisam ser realizados nessa área.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Envelhecimento; Geriatria; Qualidade de vida; Transexuais; Transexualidade; Brasil.

## ABSTRACT:

Objective: to collect data on the living conditions that hinder the aging of transgender individuals. Method: this is an integrative literature review, carried out from February to July 2024, with a search for studies in the PubMed and Lilacs databases, whose corpus of analysis was 12 articles. Results: the research identified a series of obstacles that transgender people need to face daily to survive and that directly interfere with the quality of their aging, these obstacles being characterized by precarious access to health care, prejudice, discrimination, and abandonment. Conclusion: it was found that the aging conditions of trans people in Brazil are precarious due to extreme prejudice and the lack of social and family support and that more studies need to be carried out in this area.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Aging; Geriatrics; Quality of life; Transgender people; Transsexuality; Brazil.

## RESUMEN:

Objetivo: recopilar datos sobre las condiciones de vida que limitan el envejecimiento de las personas transexuales. Método: se trata de una revisión integradora de la literatura, realizada entre febrero y julio de 2024, con búsqueda de estudios en las bases de datos PubMed y Lilacs, cuyo corpus de análisis consistió en 12 artículos. Resultados: la investigación identificó una serie de obstáculos que las personas transexuales deben enfrentar diariamente para sobrevivir, los cuales afectan directamente la calidad de su envejecimiento. Estos obstáculos se caracterizan por el acceso precario a la salud, el prejuicio, la discriminación y el abandono. Conclusión: se constató que las condiciones de envejecimiento de las personas trans en Brasil son precarias debido al prejuicio extremo y a la falta de apoyo social y familiar, y que se deben realizar más estudios en esta área.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Envejecimiento; Geriatria; Calidad de vida; Transexuales; Transexualidad; Brasil.

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a noticeable rise in the number of minority groups that are continually fighting for their rights, seeking greater equality in society. Although it is an arduous struggle, many have gained space in the social and political spheres, although there are still groups that need greater support in this fight for dignity. One such group is made up of transgender people, who are those who are born with a certain biological sex (female or male), but do not feel that they belong or do not identify with that sex. To resolve this impasse and achieve greater satisfaction with their identity, they resort to procedures such as hormone therapy and sex reassignment surgeries.<sup>1</sup>

The lives of transgender people in Brazil are extremely complex and difficult to understand for those who do not experience the challenges faced by a large part of this population on a daily basis. Among the various factors that contribute to the low quality of life of transgender people, the lack of formal and dignified employment stands out, which often forces them to resort to unstable income alternatives, the most common of which is prostitution. This, in turn, exposes sex workers to various acts of violence, many of which are fatal.<sup>2,3</sup>

The lack of decent job opportunities is a consequence of several socioeconomic flaws in Brazilian society, but among them, prejudice and marginalization of this population play a major role as factors that reduce these opportunities. And

these factors begin from the moment the trans individual establishes their relationship with transsexuality, which often begins in adolescence, affecting their school life and family environment. It is common to find cases of family abandonment after discovery and confirmation, in addition to discrimination within the school environment.<sup>2,3</sup>

In addition to discrimination, violence against this population is characterized by high death rates, a characteristic that is another pillar that supports Brazil's situation as the country that kills the most its trans community in the world, according to the National Association of Transvestites and Transsexuals (ANTRA), which according to its 2023 dossier, there were 145 registered murders of trans people, a number 10% higher when compared to that of 2022.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the construction of a fragile educational base, exacerbated violence and neglect on the part of the State directly reflect on the future quality of life of a transsexual individual, making them increasingly marginalized and increasingly vulnerable, in which prejudice, discrimination and violence gain more space, which explains the fact that in Brazil, the majority of transsexuals do not manage to surpass the age of 35, since this number represents their life expectancy in the country.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to highlight this general context of life in which transsexuals are inserted so that we can understand how those who are at an older age live in Brazil. It is clear from the outset that, despite ha-

ving a very fragile foundation during their youth, the quality of aging of these people is still very deficient. Thus, this integrative literature review article aims to collect data on the quality of aging of transsexual people in Brazil, so that we can have a clear view of their fragility and what factors contribute to it.

## METHOD

This is an integrative literature review, constructed in four stages.<sup>5</sup> The first is characterized by the definition of the guiding question, and for this purpose the "PICO" strategy was used ("P" for population chosen for the study, "I" for intervention of interest and "Co" for context). As a result, the following question was determined: what factors influence the quality of aging of transgender people in Brazil?

The second stage is related to the search for productions around the guiding question. For this, scientific articles were searched in two databases, PubMed and Lilacs, in the period of March and April 2024. To optimize the search, descriptors obtained from the Health Sciences Descriptors (DECS) were stipulated and crossed using Boolean operators. Thus, the following search strategy was constructed: transsexual OR transgender OR transsexual persons OR transgender persons AND aging.

With these descriptors, and using the filters "free full text", "full text" and "5 years" in PubMed, 15 articles were acquired, and in Lilacs, translating the descriptors into Portuguese and opting for the filters "texto completo", "Lilacs", "Português"

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and “últimos 5 anos”, 10 productions were found, totaling 25 scientific works.

The fourth stage of the methodology employed was the reading and critical analysis of the content found, and this review included works that used the LGBT population as the study population, but excluded those articles that were limited to only one axis of this group other than transsexuals, such as homosexuals. Thus, 12 were selected to compose this review, six from PubMed, all in English, and six from Lilacs, all in Portuguese.

## RESULTS

All the works are qualitative in appro-

ach and the number of interviewees varies depending on the target audience. In those productions whose interviewees are trans or LGBT in general, few people were questioned, while in the productions in which those questioned about the topic correspond to a social group other than LGBT, the number of individuals questioned is higher.

In general, the studies portray aspects of the life trajectories of the people interviewed, which are significant for the construction of transcendent narratives, but still contain little data on the specificities of old age. However, relevant articles were found that present important arguments

to be considered in the evaluation of the quality of aging of transgender people in Brazil.

As a rule, Brazilian studies focused on trans people are concentrated in the area of health, more specifically addressing access and inclusion, diagnosis and prevention of HIV/AIDS, body, transsexualization process, mental health, diagnosis x depathologization and also, in the social and human sciences, addressing identities and sexualities, performativity and social representations.<sup>6,7,8,9,10,11</sup>

Following the methodology presented, 12 scientific articles were considered to compose this review, namely:

Title	Author/ year	Objective	Method
<i>Addressing the particularities of old age among lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people (Abordagem das particularidades da velhice de lésbicas, gays, bissexuais e transgêneros)</i>	Furst et al. 2018	<i>Address the aging of this population, reinforce appropriate definitions and discuss the discrimination they suffer in health services.</i>	<i>Bibliographic review</i>
<i>Aging and appearance: perceptions of a heterosexual transgender woman (Envelhecimento e aparência: percepções de uma mulher transexual heterossexual)</i>	Yoshioka et al. 2019	<i>Study the trajectory of the construction of the appearance of a heterosexual transgender woman.</i>	<i>Case study with ethnographic method</i>
<i>Catholic religious people and LGBT old age: a study on social representations (Religiosos católicos e velhice LGBT: um estudo sobre as representações sociais)</i>	Ludgleydson et al. 2019	<i>Understand and compare the Social Representations of Catholic religious people in the face of LGBT old age.</i>	<i>Exploratory descriptive research, carried out with cross-sectional data.</i>
<i>Social representations of LGBT old age among Community Health Agents (CHAs) (Representações sociais da velhice LGBT entre Agentes Comunitários de Saúde [ACS])</i>	Jesus et al. 2019	<i>To identify social representations of LGBT aging among Community Health Workers.</i>	<i>Social representations of LGBT old age among Community Health Agents (CHAs) (Representações sociais da velhice LGBT entre Agentes Comunitários de Saúde [ACS])</i>
<i>Social representations of LGBT old age among professionals of the Family Strategy Program (PEF) (Representações sociais da velhice LGBT entre os profissionais do Programa Estratégia da Família [PEF])</i>	Jesus et al. 2019	<i>To identify social representations among professionals enrolled in the Family Strategy Program (PEF) regarding LGBT aging.</i>	<i>Social representations of LGBT old age among professionals of the Family Strategy Program (PEF) (Representações sociais da velhice LGBT entre os profissionais do Programa Estratégia da Família [PEF])</i>
<i>Provider and LGBT Individuals Perspectives on LGBT Issues in Long-Term Care: A Systematic Review</i>	Caceres et al. 2019	<i>To understand the unique needs of aging LGBT populations, seeking to synthesize and critique evidence related to LTSS providers and LGBT individuals' perspectives on LGBT issues in LTSS in the United States.</i>	<i>Provider and LGBT Individuals Perspectives on LGBT Issues in Long-Term Care: A Systematic Review</i>
<i>Health Disparities Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Older Adults: A Structural Competency Approach</i>	Lampe et al. 2023	<i>To examine and summarize key contributions and ongoing gaps in research on health disparities among LGBT+ older adults</i>	<i>Health Disparities Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Older Adults: A Structural Competency Approach</i>
<i>Gender-affirming hormone therapy, mental health, and surgical considerations for aging transgender and gender diverse adults</i>	Iwamoto et al. 2023	<i>Offer insights based on existing data, while acknowledging limitations related to the transgender population.</i>	<i>Gender-affirming hormone therapy, mental health, and surgical considerations for aging transgender and gender diverse adults</i>



<i>LGBTQ+ Aging Research in Canada: A 30-Year Scoping Review of the Literature</i>	<i>Wilson et al. 2021</i>	<i>To quantify and articulate the scale and scope of LGBTQ+ aging research over a 30-year period.</i>	<i>LGBTQ+ Aging Research in Canada: A 30-Year Scoping Review of the Literature</i>
<i>The State of Theory in LGBTQ Aging: Implications for Gerontological Scholarship</i>	<i>Fabbre et al. 2019</i>	<i>To provide an overview of the state of theory used in LGBTQ aging research.</i>	<i>The State of Theory in LGBTQ Aging: Implications for Gerontological Scholarship</i>
<i>Aging and vulnerability: perspectives of LGBTQIA+ older people (Envelhecimento e vulnerabilidade: perspectivas das pessoas idosas LGBTQIA+)</i>	<i>Espínola et al. 2023</i>	<i>Understand the perception of LGBTQIA+ elderly people regarding social and programmatic vulnerability.</i>	<i>Aging and vulnerability: perspectives of LGBTQIA+ older people (Envelhecimento e vulnerabilidade: perspectivas das pessoas idosas LGBTQIA+)Health and discrimination in the LGBTQIA+ aging process</i>
<i>Health and discrimination in the LGBTQIA+ aging process (Saúde e discriminação no processo de envelhecimento LGBTQIA+)</i>	<i>Soares et al. 2023</i>	<i>Identify the experiences and discrimination experienced by the aging LGBTQIA+ population during the provision of health services.</i>	<i>(Saúde e discriminação no processo de envelhecimento LGBTQIA+)</i>

## DISCUSSION

Taking into account the limited focus on the aging process, since research on the aging process of LGBTQIA+ individuals has focused mainly on infectious diseases such as HIV, attention to the necessary demands of old age is not adequately investigated.<sup>12</sup> Thus, when considering the population of elderly transgender people and their specificities, it is crucial to understand the complexities involved in the aging of this population, especially due to their reduced life expectancy, which denotes a temporality in which aging is not perceived as an inherent stage of life.<sup>13</sup>

The quality of aging for transgender people is a complex and multifaceted issue that involves several factors identified in this study, such as physical health<sup>14,15</sup>, mental well-being<sup>15,16,13</sup>, social support<sup>15,12,13</sup>, access to health<sup>17,12,18,13</sup> and gender-sensitive care.<sup>17,15,18,13</sup> In this sense, transgender individuals may face unique challenges as they age, including concerns related to hormone therapy<sup>15</sup>, surgical considerations and even fear of seeking health services.<sup>17,13</sup>

From this perspective, we chose to focus the review of selected studies and articles on 2 general areas to exemplify the factors inherent to the aging of the transsexual population, namely: the role of prejudice in the

aging of transsexual people and access to health related to transsexual people.

### Role of prejudice in the aging of transgender people

Prejudice is a major obstacle that transsexuals face daily, and can be understood from two sources: prejudice originating from society in general and prejudice generated within the family itself.<sup>19,20,14,12</sup>

Social prejudice is a reflection of social ignorance about the subject.<sup>20,21</sup> Some studies have shown that society still understands very little about the life and aging of LGBT individuals, especially transsexuals, producing stereotypes that contribute to simplifications that formulate a prejudiced view of this population, such as the approach that dissatisfaction with one's own sex and with imposed sexuality is shown to be an individual's choice and not something innate, which is beyond their control.<sup>20,16</sup>

This approach, combined with other contributing factors, contributes to the stigma associated with the transgender population in Brazil, such as the strong religious burden present in the country, which often ends up segregating the minority in the name of religious principles.<sup>22</sup> Although there is a small and progressive change of thought on the part of Catholicism<sup>23</sup>, it is still common to see religious people who use the foundations of their

religion to justify their prejudice.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to social prejudice and religious judgment, family prejudice is a factor that is often repeated in scientific studies about the transsexual population. Unfortunately, it is common for families to despise or abandon one of their members when they realize that one of their members does not conform to the established standards of sexuality and acceptance. This abandonment often occurs when the transsexual is young, but the family's absence continues until the end of the individual's life, and is experienced in old age.<sup>21,19</sup>

Furthermore, abandonment and discrimination create the greatest obstacle, which is the lack of support, including in the financial sphere. As a result, this population becomes invisible, and as a result, its individuals become marginalized and are unable to fully access their rights as citizens, such as getting a good long-term job, in addition to frequently being victims of physical and verbal violence. Without employment, there is little chance of achieving the retirement due for old age.<sup>21</sup>

As a result, exclusion and invisibility among the trans population is present throughout their entire life cycle.<sup>17,12,13</sup> Thus, old age, even though it is a natural process of life, continues to be denied by this part of the population that, despite having gained nota-

ble space and recognition today, still finds itself fighting for rights inherent to the human person.

## Access to health related to Transgender people

No less important, transgender individuals often face barriers to accessing health services, due not only to the weaknesses of the Unified Health System, but also to issues intrinsic to this group. Older transgender people often face significant discrimination in health services such as long-term support (LTSS)<sup>22,17,13</sup>, often leading them to hide their identity in order to avoid negative treatment by health service providers. Thus, there are reports of numerous barriers in health services faced by sexual minorities, influenced by the heteronormative and cisgender orientation established in society.<sup>13</sup>

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Furthermore, one of the main gaps involving the elderly transgender population in Brazil is the lack of preparation and

professional training of the health team in the specificities of caring for transgender individuals.<sup>17,13</sup>

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Inadequate training of health professionals, who often do not receive specific education on the needs and challenges faced by transgender people, results in a lack of sensitivity and understanding during care.<sup>13</sup>

In this sense, health programs in Brazil are structured in a way that disregards the physical and mental health particularities of the transgender population, such as the need for hormone therapy, gender affirmation surgeries and specialized psychological support. This lack of individualization and attention to specific needs contributes to an environment of exclusion and discrimination, where transgender individuals do not feel welcomed or safe to seek medical help, perpetuating a cycle of marginalization and institutionalized neglect.<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

In short, after all the considerations presented here about the transgender community and its developments, a series of factors can be seen that be-

come significant obstacles for individuals who consider themselves transgender/transsexual, and that need to be overcome so that these people can have a minimum of dignity in Brazilian society.

Among these obstacles, social prejudice, family abandonment, discrimination, extreme violence in the Brazilian scenario and access to adequate public health care stand out. These factors directly affect the quality of aging of this community, whether due to the persistence of these inhumane conditions throughout life or the consequences that this extreme vulnerability has caused in the past. However, it is important to emphasize that there are limitations in this integrative review study, and that productions, especially scientific ones, on the subject are still rare and scarce.

Therefore, it is understood that it is more than necessary to expand the scope of studies on transgender people in old age, given the specificities of this population and the extreme vulnerability they face in Brazil and worldwide. Continuing research and applying appropriate theories can help develop more effective interventions and policies to support transgender individuals as they age, aiming to provide the minimum conditions for this to become a reality.



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