



REVIEW ARTICLE

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OLDER PEOPLE AND PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES, ASSOCIATED PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS: AN INTEGRATED SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research was to investigate aspects related to the use of psychoactive drugs by older people of both genders. The study was an integrative systematic review, in a descriptive and qualitative way from the Brazilian virtual library in health. According to the systematization of the findings, it was possible to verify that there is a shortage of sources about the proposed perspective, also, the identification and professional action before the health services, due to the limitation of knowledge related to the consumption of drugs in old age. Alcohol, tobacco and medicines are the most commonly used chemicals in this age range, and their use is motivated by different reasons.

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INTRODUCTION

Making considerations about different topics that directly contemplate the older population becomes viable, as the increase in life expectancy in developed and developing countries like Brazil. One of them is alcohol and other drugs. Throughout human development certain circumstances may lead individuals to have contact with drugs whether they are legal or illicit, and the choice to consume it or not is taken. In the older age, the use, abuse or dependence of chemical substances can be motivated, for example, by clinical conditions, aggravate them or even cause illnesses. Although this subject is part of the social reality, when mentioned, little is associated with the older people, that's why it's pertinent to approach it to the expansion of knowledge of this fact. Since it is verified in articles, there are few publications that portray the use of drugs in this stage of life. Therefore, the attention given to the theme in question is valid to the society for its understanding and clarification and for the manifestation of

more efficient and effective positions in the face of their health demands. Among the objectives of this study is the dissemination of collected data specially to those professionals who work direct to them. By encouraging the involvement with a theme that is not widely explained, it becomes possible to broaden the discussion and productions on the present subject. As to the abusive use of these substances by the older people, it is linked to a significant morbidity and death index, and as regards the demand for treatment in health services, this reality has been shown to be low (PILLON *et al.*, 2010). As it was evident in the elaboration of this work, professional detection and intervention often become difficult due to the sub-identification and other reasons mentioned later. Certainly, the stages of human development are marked by progressive organic and functional changes, and in aging there are characteristic that declines in this stage of the life cycle, regardless of the appearance or not of diseases. This concomitant drug abuse or dependence on these substances increases health risks, compromising the well being. Thus, the changes that tend to happen in old age, such as loss of relationships and changes in biopsychosocial stability, can lead the subject to seek alcohol, tobacco, drugs, in order to mask

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conflicts arising from that moment of life. In addition, another form related to the use of these types of substances in the same period refers to their consumption from previous life stages, and their continuity is maintained in the third age. There is evidence, shown in researches, that most of the older people who now use alcohol and other drugs mostly enter old age with this behaviour, while the minority starts to use to psychoactive substances from the age of 60 onwards. Although Brazilian health policies places a greater emphasis on the younger population, with regard to drug use, relevance is also evident for the older people, which results in measures such as encouraging prevention, reducing risks associated with consumption and other actions that promote longevity through the quality of life. Thus, informing the population about the meaning of psychoactive use and its repercussions in old age, it becomes a way to stimulate the subjects' critical capacity so that they express an active position on the matter. In this way, by raising these aspects, it is possible to provide guidelines that help the older people, those who are on the way to this stage of life, relatives and professionals who deal with this public in an attempt to demystify preconceived impressions and educate the population. Although the society has a link with psychoactive people from remote historical times, in the face of this link specifically with the older people, the construction of debates is deficient. Therefore, this research is justified by the instigating intention to describe drug-related factors in a descriptive way when the consumers of these substances are older people, as well as to make the obtained compilations become additional sources of contribution to the social and health context.

them appeared more than once. Others were surveys from medical perspective, for this reason they were not included. At the end of the 19 articles found, only four fit the criteria of this research. The sources considered for the elaboration subsequently verified are predominantly national, and were published between 2004 and 2015. The theme: use of psychoactive substances by the older people, did not appear in all cases as the main subject. Two of these four articles do not mention the older people contingent directly, since they do not address the peculiarities of the consumption of chemical substances in the old age in particular, but among the population studied are people who belong to this group. Therefore, there is no diversity of publications on the subject in question, especially in the online library. As a result, only four scientific articles, described in the table above, were selected by inclusion method, selected on February 11, 2016

DISCUSSION

Findings from the genre of the older people drug user:

According to the evidence, men uses drugs the most. Male behavior regarding alcohol use is permeated by social permissiveness in the Brazilian context (CANTÃO *et al.*, 2015). Such positioning can influence the entrance to alcohol consumption, as well as its maintenance. This is due to purely cultural issues that makes it acceptable to this gender (FACHI & FURTADO, 2011). Due to the social understanding that the individual man receives for the use of alcohol, the very treatment by them in health services tends to be spontaneously sought, if necessary, so this occurrence seems to exist without

Table 1. Characterization of the analyzed studies

Authors	Year	Journal	City	Sample Size	Type of Study
Alexandre Fachini Erikson Felipe Furtado	2012	Rev. Psiq. Clín	São Paulo	32 articles	Systematic Review
Sandra Cristina Pillon Lucilene Cardoso Gisela Amorin Marques Pereira Emmanuel Mello	2010	Esc Anna Nery	São Paulo	191 medical records	Descriptive retrospective
Luiza Cantão Leonardo Leão Kahey Fonseca Talita Ingrid Magalhães Silva Marcella de Oliveira Valéria da Conceição de Oliveira Richardson Miranda Machado	2015	Revista rene	Minas Gerais	218 medical records	Epidemiologic retrospective
Renata Brasil Araújo Margareth Oliveira Luciane B. Piccoloto Karen P.D.R Szupszysnki	2004	Rev. Psiq. Clín	Porto Alegre	77 men	Cross-sectional Study

METHODOLOGY

The integrative systematic review is the type of applied research, and from this procedure the ideas compiled are put in articulation with the investigative, exploratory and descriptive intention. In this way, the scientific data were collected and organized in a qualitative way. As for, the Virtual Health Library (VHL), was the only database accessed for the purposes of this study. The search was carried out through the descriptors; older people, alcohol, drugs, being listed in full 19 articles. However, by the exclusion criteria, only four served for the purpose. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were: filtered so that all were written in Portuguese, most of them were discarded for not portraying, specifically, the central objective of this production, ie: the use of drugs by the old person, and consecutively the implications associated with this process. During the analysis of the articles found, some of

great resistance (PILLON *et al.*, 2010). Pillon *et al.*(2010) corroborates the information concerning the male gender, which is the one that most consumes drugs. It is worth mentioning that the most commonly used substance is legal, precisely because it refers to alcohol, while illicit is cannabis sativa, although it is rarely used in old age. Regarding the feminine, Cantão *et al.*(2015) says that cigarette smoking is most often one of the drugs most used by women. Such a psychoactive substance may receive social consent because of its lawfulness. Older women also have high rates of drug use, not infrequently sometimes abusively, and pharmacological prescriptions, especially sedatives and hypnotics, are other substances widely used by them (Pillon *et al.*, 2010). For Fachi & Furtado (2011), the attention of the female-oriented professional needs to be made more cautiously, as it can often be neglected, as if the female gender could not consume, abuse and depend on alcohol, for example. Due to the current

political mobilizations in the national scenario regarding the use of nicotine, restriction on its use in certain spaces, ends up reflecting in the diminution of the tolerance of this substance (PILLON *et al.*, 2010). According to the research conducted by Cantão *et al.* (2015), with analysis of 218 medical records of older patients for 72 months in Mental Health Unit in the city of Minas Gerais. It has had its findings related to drug addiction within the criteria of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10). In this way, the mental and behavioral disorder due to the use of substances was the most prevalent diagnostic hypothesis in men, while the female prevalence fell to the mental and behavioral disorders due to smoking. According to the same survey, men have more depressive symptoms and are the ones who consume drugs the most. Alcohol and tobacco are the substances that are most associated with men and women respectively, and because they are licit tend to have their access facilitated, added to the fact that social permissiveness often admits the consumption of both (FACHI & FURTADO, 2011; CANTÃO *et al.*, 2015).

Most commonly used drugs and the age range within the old age in which consumption occurs most frequently:

Regarding the analysis of Pillon *et al.* (2010) obtained through 191 medical records of older people in a CAPS AD (Mental Health Unit specialized in addiction) in the interior of São Paulo, alcohol was listed as the drug most used abusively by predominantly older men. Then comes the abusive use of medical prescriptions, including the characteristics of the drugs most consumed which are more likely to cause dependence. As already explained, the appearance of women in this context is due to smoking, because tobacco is the drug most abusively used by them, as well as drug drugs such as hypnotics, benzodiazepines, analgesics (PILLON *et al.*, 2010). According to research by Cantão *et al.* (2015), alcohol and tobacco are the most commonly used drugs in old age. According to Araújo *et al.* (2004), the most commonly used drugs also concern alcohol, and then tobacco. Although the involvement with illicit drugs is lower in this stage of life, when marijuana, crack and cocaine are used the most frequently used drugs (PILLON *et al.*, 2010). Regarding to the time of old age in which drug consumption occurs in a larger dimension, this occurs in the first and second decades of old age, and this is associated with being more active in face of the different demands of life and more independent among the 60 and 70 years of age (CANTÃO *et al.*, 2015). As the age advances, the possibility of drug use decreases, but the possibility of dependence increases. It is noteworthy that in senescence is a greater propensity to dependence (CANTÃO *et al.*, 2015).

The risks associated with the use of drugs by the older people and the profile of this consumer:

Regarding the risks in question, there are physical and psychosocial results, the latter mainly do not affect only the user, but also his family, and other social spheres in which he is inserted (CANTÃO *et al.*, 2015). Also according to the aforementioned reference, multiple factors lead to drug addiction, and among their reverberations are also evident, emotional overload in relation to inter and intrapersonal relationships, as well as clinical consequences even in the face of low alcohol use due to physiological changes in old age. In both genders, aggravations occur, and dysfunctions in the respiratory tract are more recurrent impairments in the lives of those who use them in a harmful way to nicotine, and liver problems in alcohol users (CANTÃO *et al.*, 2015). The use of psychoactive substances by this public is associated with high morbidity and

mortality rates, so it is worth noting that as the age advances, the possibilities of risks increase because of the body fragility resulting from the natural deterioration of aging and in some cases even pathological (Pillon *et al.*, 2010). According to Fachini & Furtado (2011) there are transgenerational factors that affect alcoholic behavior and consumption of other drugs, with the result that the antecedent family generation has some influence on the use of drugs. Regarding self-medication, Brazilian culture reveals this tendency, which is not infrequently used for an extended period of time, mainly by the older population, which is certainly contraindicated for reasons such as risks of abuse and consequently health (Pillon *et al.*, 2010). The abuse of medications also occurs in cases of depression and anxiety, diseases that often manifest themselves in the older people, and these pathologies are another risk factor (PILLON *et al.*, 2010). Depression may act as a precursor to drug use, abuse or dependence, since older people affected by the disease may resort to drugs as a means of minimizing their mental distress (CANTÃO *et al.*, 2015). Finally, in relation to the findings of Pillon *et al.* (2010) inherent to the profile of the consumer researched here, it was possible to infer that unmarried, separated or divorced older people, in addition to those with low levels of education, retirees, socially isolated and males are who are more likely to use drugs

Health services: Regarding the health services offered to the older drug users, and according to the investigations in this context, considerations are made subsequently. According to Pillon *et al.*, (2010), the number of older people attending alcohol and other drug centers and other health services for the treatment of issues involving the use of chemical substances is low. Regarding the detection of psychoactive substances such as tobacco, its use is often under-identified or even neglected. This substance, specifically, ends up going through health care services as unrecognized, receiving little notice (PILLON *et al.*, 2010). In this sense, faced with this type of occurrence the impacts of consumption on the life of the individual are not even observed, as if this drug were not capable of damaging human health (CANTÃO *et al.*, 2015). It is convenient to recapitulate, however, according to Fachini & Furtado (2011), that the Brazilian culture accepts more easily when the alcoholic beverage is made by men, including the professional attention neglecting this information, nevertheless, the care must also return to the use of alcohol by women so that this fact is not neglected. There seems to be little technical ability to identify consumption, since everything indicates that there is a lack of information that guides the professional to the adequate management of the demands presented by the older people, as well as the failure of specialized referral (PILLON *et al.*, 2010). Still, according to the authors mentioned, this is necessary, since the use of drugs in old age also exists, and if in these cases the patient's gaze is not at least minimally granted, this care deficit tends to have detrimental implications for the quality of life with the chronicity of the problem.

Pillon *et al.* (2010) present another factor of relevance that refers to the process of reference and counter-referencing, which despite its significance is scarcely considered. Regardless of the number of older people contemplate a small portion in what concerns the insertion of this population in the places of care, it is essential to increase the policies of attention to this public, since little has the effect to support this clientele before the involvement with drugs, even more when there are mentally impaired people involved (CANTÃO *et al.*,

2015). There seems to be little understanding and articulation directed at the health specificities of the older people drug user. This question is a problem not well understood, due to its underestimation, little attention and even difficulty of investigation that depart as much from the perspective of the patient, either by shame, dementia or isolation, as by the side of the professional inserted in the health services (PENTON *et al.*, 2010, CANTÃO *et al.*, 2015)

Scarcity of publications regarding the use of drugs by older people:

While there is a progressive increase in the number of older people, the amount of systematized national literature that chronicles the use of psychoactive substances in old age is somewhat limited, and their exploitation is obvious (PILLON *et al.*, 2010). Still to Pillon *et al.* (2010) say it is worth considering in front of this group, the importance of more research, and before this is also interesting to report that such shortage seems to be linked to the difficulties of detection of drug use by the older people. For Cantão *et al.* (2015), it is also clear that aging is promoting changes in the world demographic profile, however, few studies have been done in favor of discussions, understanding and better performance in face of this phenomenon. Faced with this, there is no clear and convincing evidence on the central theme of this research, so it is possible to reinforce that there are studies in research sources accessed in virtual libraries, but they are still insufficient.

Other sources: Given the scarcity already raised, we chose to search other sources of information, in order to improve the knowledge about the selected theme. According to Supera (2013) the abusive use of alcohol linked to old age happens when the onset of consumption occurs in youth, remaining in the elderly, as well as, although less common, when its beginning is made at maturity. Older alcoholics have lower cognitive recovery compared to individuals of other age groups, but it is interesting to state that they generally respond effectively to adherence and continuity of treatment (SUPERA, 2013). According to speculations, the alcoholic beverage is ingested in a recommended way, produces beneficial cardiac results by fitting the average of two doses for men and one for women (FINGERHOOD, 2000; SILVA, 2008). According to the authors, the older person usually uses approximately two medicines a day, and the literature shows that their use is common with alcohol, which is certainly not recommended. The old people, due to the normal modifications of old age, present physiological characteristics that make them more vulnerable to the effects of alcohol. An example of this is the decrease in body fluid that reduces the body's ability to dilute the substance, causing its concentration to increase, although its elimination occurs naturally, however, there is a greater risk of manifesting harmful reactions such as intoxication (SILVA, 2008). Although old people have fewer cases of drug involvement when compared to young people, the older individual, when establishing harmful involvement with psychoactive substances, like any other person, also manifests heterogenous and unfavorable reactions to the maintenance of their health, contributing to the existence of problems in the health question (SILVA, 2008). According to Silva (2008), alcohol consumption, the drug most used in old age, is one of the main public health problems not only in Brazil, but also in the world. Finally, among the range of variables that predispose the old people to the consumption of these psychoactive substances are: isolation, loneliness,

abandonment, anxiety, sadness and chronic diseases (SILVA, 2008, SUPERA, 2013).

Final Considerations

Faced with the articles used to support this research, it was observed that, although there are factors such as the need to conduct more researches on the use of drugs in old age, as well as focal interventions for this group, there was not, in any of the readings, proposals that would subsidize an intervention plan. However, these notes on the attention to be given in greater number to the subject allows to identify aspects that need to be placed in evidences, and consecutively worked out. Therefore, it would also be pertinent to think of a harm reduction policy oriented towards the older people, so that vulnerabilities related to substance use could be minimized, without necessarily proposing abstinence as a form of treatment. In this way it is possible to confirm the need to develop further studies and research on the various factors that accompany the use of psychoactive substances by older people. As mentioned by the authors referred on this study, it is appropriate for the benefit of mental health and care to the older people, the disclosure of the consumption of alcohol and other drugs by this public for the purpose of improving services and the way the society deals with this growing reality in the Brazilian context. Regarding the articles made available and selected from the access to the VHL database, no data were observed. Whether the onset of drug use occurred in old age or from earlier periods of life, nor the understanding of the elderly about the meaning of psychoactive use and its repercussions. Although there are innumerable times when one tries to find out the reasons for the appearance of dependence or abusive use of alcohol and other drugs, the causes tend to be multifactorial. With regard to age, the older the person, the greater the fragility, as well as the development of chronic noncommunicable diseases (CNCD). Today people live longer, and there has been a considerable increase in the diseases in question, and among them are musculoskeletal diseases, such as arthritis and arthrosis, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, cancer, diabetes, mental disorders such as dementia and depression.

It is a fact that the individual as they grow older, they manifest one or more of a type of CNCD. Its appearance, as long as it does not lead to incapacitating conditions, does not automatically correspond to the loss of health, autonomy and independence. It is important to bear in mind that the loss of the capacity for self-management of life and consecutively of daily activities is not normal for old age, it is not a matter of age, although with the decline occurrences can find ways to continue administering the own daily experiences. Such diseases can make the elderly face polypharmacy, defined as the use of five or more drugs. In different sources it is mentioned that this population is the one that uses more prescription drugs, and even those sold without prescription. Thus, with the increased prevalence of CNCDs in senescence, recurrence of drug drugs may become greater, which may also lead to dependence and prolonged use either to alleviate pain, induce relaxation, dissimulate loneliness, anxiety or depression, which is undoubtedly contraindicated. As soon as chronic non-communicable diseases accompany the chronic use of alcohol and other drugs, this tends to have consequences for aging, such as its physical, cognitive and functional acceleration and motor instability, which causes falls and fractures, etc. .

Possibly it is difficult to identify the drug addiction in old age because of its veiled consumption. The elderly even makes abusive use of chemical substances, may even be addicted, however does not verbalize this and continues to use psychoactive in a hidden way. This is due to different reasons, which includes shame, fear and isolation, thus the elderly conceal that is a drug user, makes it impossible in cases with this configuration, early intervention, even stimulating the chronicity of consumption. In order to optimize the care and assistance provided, it is pertinent to the health services, such as the specialized staff, to provide training for the technical staff, to provide educational courses that support caregivers, family members, professionals, and even the elderly users themselves. The caution given to guidance to users with regard to the practice of self-medication and the use of other drugs is a course to be adopted in favor of these people. As already mentioned, alcoholism is one of the main public health problems, and as we have seen throughout this work, alcohol is one of the drugs most used by older people, and with the increase of the older population, the probability of use of the beverage and chemical substances by this group also increases. Therefore, action to prevent adverse health implications associated with drug dependence is relevant. In this way, when mental health is proposed in relation to issues related to alcohol and other drugs in old age, a set of perspectives arises due to aspects such as the peculiarities of this group that need to be known and respected, in addition to the deficiency of data that bias the professional performance. Therefore, disseminating and obtaining information about the consumption of licit and illicit drugs in the elderly is necessary, despite the stereotypes involved in this process, it is essential to systematize more knowledge about this subject, in order to take measures to improve the health of the older people.

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