

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36489/nursing.2020v23i268p4562-4569>

# Mental health and the social isolation of elderly people in the pandemic period

**ABSTRACT** | Objective: To describe the impacts that social isolation can have on the mental health of the elderly during the pandemic. Method: This is an integrative bibliographic review, using the descriptors "Coronavirus Infections", "Pandemics", "Mental Health", and "Aged", making the combination between you and the Boolean operator OR as a search strategy in the databases data: LILACS, SciELO, WEB OF SCIENCE. Adopted inclusion criteria: publications in the period of 2020 that dealt with the subject, in Portuguese and English. As exclusion criteria: repetition in the databases, articles out of context regarding the guiding question of the research. Result: 32 articles were found, selected 26, of which 8 were analyzed. Conclusion: Mental health in a pandemic period was explicit as an impact factor, reflecting favorable and unfavorable outcomes in the context of mental health. The need for promotion for interventions is evident in order to minimize negative impacts on mental health.

**Keywords:** Coronavirus Infections, Pandemics, Mental Health, Aged.

**RESUMEN** | Objetivo: Describir los impactos que el aislamiento social puede tener en la salud mental de los ancianos durante la pandemia. Método: Esta es una revisión bibliográfica integradora, utilizando los descriptores "Infecciones por coronavirus", "Pandemias", "Salud mental" y "Envejecido", haciendo la combinación entre usted y el operador booleano O como una estrategia de búsqueda en las bases de datos. datos: LILACS, SciELO, WEB OF SCIENCE. Criterios de inclusión adoptados: publicaciones en el período de 2020 que trataron el tema, en portugués e inglés. Como criterios de exclusión: repetición en las bases de datos, artículos fuera de contexto sobre la cuestión orientadora de la investigación. Resultado: Se encontraron 32 artículos, se seleccionaron 26, de los cuales se analizaron 8. Conclusión: La salud mental en un período de pandemia fue explícita como factor de impacto, reflejando resultados favorables y desfavorables en el contexto de la salud mental. La necesidad de promover intervenciones es evidente para minimizar los impactos negativos en la salud mental.

**Palavras-chaves:** Infecciones por Coronavirus, Pandemias, Salud Mental, Anciano.

**RESUMO** | Objetivo: Descrever impactos que o isolamento social pode acarretar na saúde mental dos idosos durante a pandemia. Método: Trata-se de uma revisão bibliográfica integrativa, utilizando os descritores "Coronavirus Infections", "Pandemics", "Mental Health", e "Aged", realizando a combinação entre si e o operador booleano OR como estratégia de busca nas bases de dados: LILACS, SciELO, WEB OF SCIENCE. Adotados critérios de inclusão: publicações no período de 2020 que tratassem do assunto, em português e inglês. Como critérios de exclusão: repetição nas bases de dados, artigos fora do contexto quanto a pergunta norteadora da pesquisa. Resultado: Foram encontrados 32 artigos, selecionados 26, e destes foram analisados 08. Conclusão: A saúde mental em período de pandemia foi explícita como um fator de impacto, refletindo os desfechos favoráveis e desfavoráveis no contexto da saúde mental. É evidente a necessidade de promoção para intervenções afim de minimizar impactos negativos para a saúde mental.

**Palavras-chaves:** Infecções por Coronavírus, Pandemias, Saúde Mental, Idoso.

## Jaqueline Maria Silva dos Santos

Graduating from the Nursing Course at Centro Universitário Mário Pontes Jucá - AL. ORCID: 0000-0003-3690-7811

## Euda Maria dos Santos Messias

Graduating from the Nursing Course at Centro Universitário Mário Pontes Jucá - AL. ORCID: 0000-0003-3073-2686

## Raquel Ferreira Lopes

Advisor professor: Master, Centro Universitário Mário Pontes Jucá - AL. ORCID: 0000-0002-2061-7038

## INTRODUCTION

Currently, one of the biggest public health emergencies in the world is the new Coronavirus (COVID-19). In December 2019 the first case of infection in China was registered. <sup>1</sup> This health emergency is increasing the challenges for caring for the elderly, whether in the community, in nursing homes or even in hospitals. <sup>2</sup>

During the Coronavirus pandemic, in which the elderly must remain in isolation, it is important that caregivers and family members pay attention to the first sign of sadness, discouragement, lack of energy, negative thoughts, hopelessness and changes in behavior. This burden leads to anguish and unfavorable feelings

such as frustration and sadness that are detrimental to maintaining the mental health of the elderly. <sup>3</sup> It is also evident that these conflicts can result in isolation and loneliness <sup>4</sup>.

However, social isolation is important when speaking in the health context, people who are in a situation of excessive loneliness, are more willing to depression and other mental disorders, often characterized by depressed mood and loss of interest in several activities. <sup>5</sup> There are gaps in the diagnosis and adequate treatment, as well as insufficient actions adopted and aimed at promoting the mental health of the population under discussion. <sup>6</sup>

Due to the large number of incidences, in order to minimize the consequences caused by COVID-19, some

Received on: 07/26/2020

Approved on: 07/29/2020

countries have adopted control measures such as the social isolation of schools, daycare centers, the elderly, people at risk and the quarantine of the entire population.<sup>3</sup>

During the pandemic, the decrease in dynamics that many exercised ended up being hampered, such as visiting children, grandchildren, closest relatives and family meetings. However, it is emphasized that during this period there must be a more focused look at the elderly of family and friends, since psychic diseases can be aggravated and can lead to panic disorders or even suicide.

Given the above, this study will seek to answer the following guiding question of the research: what aspects can social isolation have on the mental health of the elderly during the pandemic? Therefore, the general objective is to describe the aspects of mental health and social isolation of the elderly in a pandemic period through an investigation in the available scientific literature.

**METHOD**

It is an integrative literature review study following the methodology guided by Mendes (2008) which contemplates it in six construction phases: identification of the theme and selection of the hypothesis, literature search, categorization of studies, evaluation of included studies, interpretation of results, presentation of the review. It also states that the contribution of the synthesis of research results to the incorporation of evidence produces new knowledge for practice.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, the first stage of this study that delimits the research problem has already been described during the introduction, favoring the logical understanding of the elaboration process.

The literature search and data collection period took place in June 2020 and identified articles on this subject using the descriptors and MeSh: "Coronavirus Infections", "Pandemics", "Mental Heal-

th", and "Aged", performing the combination with the resource of the Boolean operator OR as a search strategy in the databases: Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS), Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) and Web of Science.

The filter inserted in this search corresponds to the publication period related to the year 2020, due to the wide availability of literature in that period, in English and Portuguese. Being excluded: repetition in the databases, articles out of context and no answer regarding the guiding question of the research.

In order to categorize the studies, it was decided to extract the following information: title, authors, methodological path, sample, country, journal and year of publication, and considerations related to the central theme of the object of discussion in this review. In cases where the abstract was considered sufficient, articles were selected and the full version was obtained to confirm eligibility and thus be included in the study.

The stages of evaluating the studies and interpreting the results were carried out in an impersonal way, reviewed

in pairs, carefully detailed, seeking to understand the results, discussing their association with the aspects related to the answer to the guiding question of this review.

Moving on to the last step, which is the description of the summary of the review in the constitution of this study presented here.

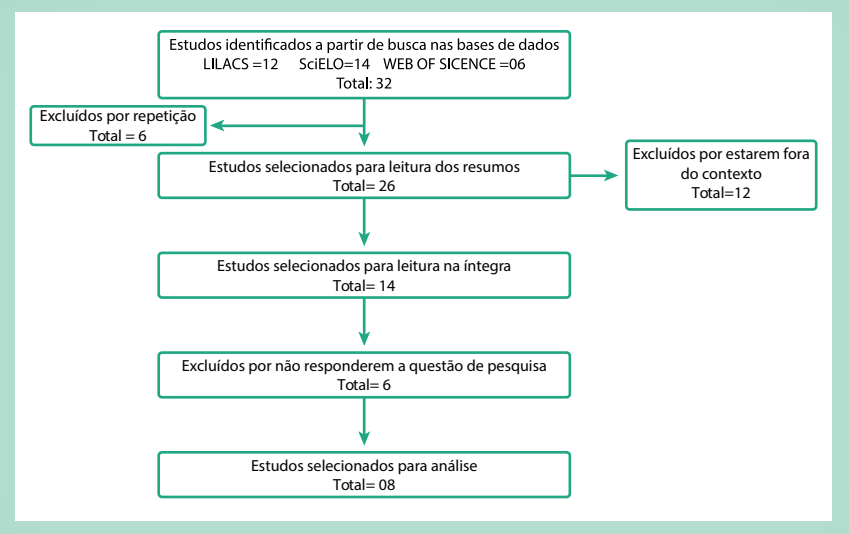
**RESULTS**

This study had as a priority to extract relevant information from the scientific literature that could categorize the relationship between mental health and the health of the elderly during the pandemic.

In order to facilitate the understanding of the results obtained, a flowchart was elaborated with the steps taken during the selection of the articles being displayed through Figure1.

Then, it was shown in Figure 1 the initial search for data that enabled the identification of articles in the LILACS 12, SciELO 14 and Web of Science 06 database. Resulting in 32 studies found through the delimited search strategy and with the insertion of filters.

**Figure 1: Identification Flowchart and selection of articles for an integrative review on the mental health of the elderly in a pandemic period, 2020.**



Source: Data from the survey itself, 2020

**Table 1: Summary matrix of articles on the mental health of the elderly in a pandemic period, 2020.**

Artigo	Título e Autores	Percurso Metodológico	Amostra e País	Periódico e Ano
1	Mood Disorders in Late Life: A Population-based Analysis of Prevalence, Risk Factors, and Consequences in Community-dwelling Older Adults in Ontario. Strauss R.; Kurdyak P.	Estudo transversal	Indivíduos de 65 anos ou mais. Ontario	The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry. 2020
2	Israel Ad Hoc COVID-19 Committee: Guidelines for Care of Older Persons During a Pandemic. Clarfield et al.	Validação de Instrumento	Idosos na comunidade e em Instituições de Longa Permanência. Israel.	The American Geriatrics Society. 2020.
3	Sintomatologia psicopatológica em idosos institucionalizados. Amaral et al.	Validação de Instrumento	Incluiu 262 idosos, com média de idade de 82,78. Portugal.	Psicologia, Saúde & Doenças, 2020
4	Perfil de saúde mental de idosos comunitários: um estudo transversal. Cordeiro et al.	Estudo transversal	Idosos cadastrados na área de abrangência de três equipes de saúde da família. Recife	Rev Bras Enferm. 2020.
5	Fatores associados a sintomas depressivos em idosos inseridos em contexto de vulnerabilidade social. Didone et al.	Estudo transversal	Estudo transversal realizado com 302 idosos de comunidade cadastrados em Unidades de Saúde da Família. NASF São Carlos	Rev Bras. Enferm. 2020.
6	Sintomas somáticos, sintomatologia depressiva e ansiosa em pessoas idosas. Gonçalves et al.	Quantitativo e transversal.	91 pessoas idosas, com uma média de idades de 78,40. Portugal.	Psicologia, saúde & doenças, 2020
7	Nursing homes and the elderly regarding the COVID-19 pandemic: situation report from Hungary. Kemenesi et al.	Relato de situação	Dados epidemiológicos coletados do banco de dados da Academia Húngara de Ciência. Hungria.	GeroScience. 2020.
8	Prevalência de sintomatologia depressiva em idosos brasileiros: uma revisão sistemática com metanálise. Meneguci et al.	Revisão sistemática com metanálise	Estudos com idosos brasileiros que identificaram a prevalência de sintomatologia depressiva. Brasil.	J Bras Psiquiatr. 2019.

Source: Research data, 2020.

**Table 2: Details of the findings on the mental health of the elderly in a pandemic period.**

Artigo	Principais achados
1	A proporção dos homens é maior que vivem sozinhos, e uso crônico de opióide, transtorno de humor maiores nas mulheres interferindo na saúde mental favorecendo o surgimento de doenças psicopatológicas.
2	Promover diretrizes para triagem de idosos com infecção por COVID- 19, estratégias poderá resultar diminuição do risco de doenças relacionadas a saúde mental.
3	Presença de sintomatologia psicopatológica nos participantes. Sendo a intervenção psicológica um método eficaz na sua redução, salienta-se a pertinência da avaliação e intervenção psicológica em instituições de apoio a idosos.
4	Foi possível identificar desencadeadores de sofrimento psíquico, auxiliando a equipe de enfermagem no desenvolvimento de ações preventivas e de cuidado.
5	Qualidade de vida e suporte social foram identificados como fatores protetores para sintomas depressivos, enquanto estar sob risco de desnutrição, morar sozinho, relatar dor e ser do sexo feminino são fatores preditores.
6	Avaliação e compreensão das queixas somáticas de idosos, se considerarem sintomas psicológicos, nomeadamente, a sintomatologia depressiva.
7	Enfatizam a necessidade urgente de autoridades de saúde pública se concentrem nos lares de idosos e unidades de serviços residenciais em todo o mundo devido a vulnerabilidade dos idosos em contrairem a infecção por COVID-19.
8	Estratégias de intervenção para reduzir a prevalência de sintomatologia depressiva.

Source: Research data, 2020.

The synthesis matrix of this integrative review, shown in Table 1, describes predominant aspects in the production of knowledge about the relationship of the elderly and their mental health in the face of a pandemic situation.

## DISCUSSION

Some aspects may end up contributing negatively to the elderly in a pandemic period, as it is a time of great transformations for the individual, mainly for the elderly. This includes a series of physical changes, retirement, illness, removal or loss of loved ones, as well as a reduction in independence and autonomy in general.

In countries with Israel, for example, health services offer free services such as those operating in Canada and the United Kingdom, medicine in the country is well developed in services for the elderly. There it works as follows, if an elderly person becomes ill mainly with symptoms due to COVID-19 he

is evaluated immediately, if his health condition allows him to be treated at home and so he chooses he will be treated at home, the support centers of the United States United States of America (USA), offer sensible guidelines for this purpose. In addition, medicines approved by the Health Ministry are offered for oral treatments for COVID-19, home oxygen therapy, and medicines for other comorbidities that are already so present in the health of the elderly.<sup>2</sup>

Consequences such as depression, which is one of the factors that most affect elderly women, with about 7,1%, in comparison with men, 4,9%. A mood disorder with general prevalence that decreased with increasing age, from 6.9% in people aged 65 to 74 years, 5,2% in those aged 75 to 84 years and 4,2% in people aged 85 and over. Some of the strongest correspondents of mood disorders also include chronic opioid use, food insecurity, comorbidities and smoking.<sup>8</sup>

The elderly clinic is potentially exacerbated in relation to the social phenomenon of disbelief, aspects such as discrimination based on chronological age which was as it was being observed in many European countries, such as Italy, Spain and France, the modest capacity of the intensive care unit per capita (ICU) in Israel would be overwhelmed by new cases, many of them elderly people.<sup>2</sup>

Elderly people who are at the center of attention, when talking about coronavirus,

because amid precautionary measures such as social isolation and lots of information circulating, some true and others false, the elderly people end up being deprived of their social life bringing in excess anxiety fear and anguish.

Another important aspect to be discussed is the homes of the elderly, who are strongly affected. It was observed before the current pandemic that elderly populations living in nursing homes have a predominant role in epidemics, since the circumstances in these places provide an ideal environment for the acquisition of infections, residents are susceptible because they share sources of air, food, water and health care in a crowded institutionalized environment.<sup>9</sup>

So it is essential that simple measures of daily routines try to be maintained, such as not making the elderly feel useless or even infantilizing them, whenever possible trying to maintain autonomy, taking them to sunbathe, providing games, making it clear that this phase is fleeting and that isolation is necessary.

## CONCLUSION

Soon the mental health status of the elderly during the pandemic period ended up generating impacts explicitly, considering important factors and all their implications that were related to emergencies in the context of mental health, in favorable and unfavorable ways.

The health authorities' recommenda-

tions are to maintain social distance, however, the need to promote interventions and psychological practices is evident in order to minimize the negative impacts on the mental health of the elderly during the pandemic. However, isolation can cause some negative consequences and for those who already suffer from a mental disorder, such as depression, confinement can facilitate the worsening of the condition.

Elderly people in general end up suffering from fear of themselves, and their relatives who most often tend to be closer, thus being able to physiologically alter appetite, sleep, mood, and even cause changes in chronic diseases already pre- such as hypertension and diabetes, very common in this public. It is extremely important to recognize the existence of all these problems and that the lack of gerontological knowledge and mental health aggravates them.

Therefore, immediate efforts must be employed, at all levels and by the most diverse areas of knowledge, in order to minimize even more negative results in the mental health of the elderly population.

Finally, it is necessary to invest in adequate health care and, above all, in science in general, so that this period can be shortened and everyone can overcome the challenges of care for an awakening without feelings of loneliness, stress, anxiety, sadness and even suicide. 🐦

## References

1. Wang, C. et al. Immediate psychological responses and associated factors during the initial stage of the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) epidemic among the general population in china. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(5), 1729. Acessado em 03 de junho de 2020. Disponível em: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17051729>.
2. Clarfield et al. Israel Ad Hoc COVID-19 Committee: Guidelines for Care of Older Persons During a Pandemic. *The American Geriatrics Society. MONTH 2020-VOL. 00*. Acessado em 04 de junho de 2020. Disponível em: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jgs.16554>.
3. Cordeiro, Renata Cavalcanti et al. Perfil de saúde mental de idosos comunitários: um estudo transversal. *Rev. Bras. Enferm.*, Brasília, v. 73, n. 1, e20180191, 2020. Disponível em <[http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S003471672020000100172&lng=pt&nrm=iso](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S003471672020000100172&lng=pt&nrm=iso)>. acessos em 04 jun. 2020.
4. Fernandes, M. G. M.; GARCIA, L. G. O sentido da velhice para homens e mulheres idosos. *Saúde Soc. São Paulo*, v. 19, n. 4, p. 771-783, 2010. Disponível em: <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/sausoc/v19n4/05.pdf>. Acesso em: 04 de junho de 2020.
5. Brooks, S. K. et al. The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: Rapid review of the evidence. *The Lancet*, 395(10227), 912-920. Acessado em 04 de junho de 2020. Disponível em: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30460-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30460-8/fulltext).
6. Hao, Gang et al. Social participation and perceived depression among elderly population in South Africa. *Clinical Interventions In Aging*, [s.l.], v. 12, p.971-976, jun. 2017. Acessado em 04 de junho de 2020. Disponível em: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5491569/>.
7. Mendes, K.S.; SILVEIRA, R. C.; GALVAO, C. M. Revisão integrativa: método de pesquisa para a incorporação de evidências na saúde e na enfermagem. *Texto contexto - enferm.*, Florianópolis, v. 17, n. 4, p. 758-764, Dec. 2008. Acesso em 01 de junho de 2020. Disponível em: <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/tce/v17n4/18.pdf>.
8. Meneguci Joilson, Meneguci Cíntia Aparecida Garcia, Moreira Marlon Martins, Pereira Kariny Rodrigues, Tribess Sheilla, Sasaki Jeffer Eidi et al. Prevalência de sintomatologia depressiva em idosos brasileiros: uma revisão sistemática com metanálise. *J. bras. psiquiatr.* [Internet]. 2019 Dec [cited 2020 July 26]; 68(4): 221-230. Available from: [http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S004720852019000400221&lng=en](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S004720852019000400221&lng=en). Epub Feb 14, 2020.
9. KEMENESI G. et al. Nursing homes and the elderly regarding the COVID-19 pandemic: situation report from Hungary. *GeroScience* 18 de May 2020. Acessado em: 02 de junho de 2020.