



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### SEXUALITY IN AGING: UTOPIA OR NEW PERSPECTIVE?

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#### ARTICLE INFO

##### Article History:

Received 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2017

Received in revised form

04<sup>th</sup> November, 2017

Accepted 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2017

Published online 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2018

##### Keywords:

Sexuality,  
Elder,  
Aging,  
Senescence,  
Behavior,  
Quality of Life.

#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The purpose of this article was to analyze the biopsychosocial and cultural implications of the sexuality of the elder, in an attempt to demystify the association of the elder with loss, limitations, inability to procreate and sexual inactivity. In this context, it tries to deal with the breakdown of paradigms and prejudices associated to the theme.

**Methodology:** This was a bibliometric review based on a search conducted in the Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature database (LILACS), in May 2017, with the following descriptors: aging, sexuality, elder. The following filters were used: full text, elder as the main theme, Portuguese language, fully available, Brazil, published from 2007 to 2016.

**Results:** 44 articles were found, of which nine were discarded after the exclusion criteria. The year 2011 had more publications; the most found article modality was the original one; the most frequent participant group was the elder; and the magazine *Kairós Gerontologia* was the journal with the highest number of publications on the subject in this period.

**Conclusions:** Sexuality was seen as a pathological process, being insufficient the approach with respect to the sociocultural aspects. We hope this study may contribute to the promotion of reflections and changes in attitudes about sexuality in senescence.

#### INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, the prolongation of life is one of the greatest triumphs of humankind. That is why the global aging has become the central point for researchers and communities, since this process interferes in all instances and levels of humanity. Countries like China and Japan already live with this reality, a significant contingent of elders and their related problems. Nevertheless, emerging countries such as Brazil and Mexico are in transition, rapidly increasing their elderly population (Mendes, 2005). The arrival of old age brings many challenges in its most varied aspects, and this phase introduces some changes in the physiological, psychological and social aspects. The decreased functional capacity, work and resistance; appearance of solitude; loss of social roles; psychological and emotional losses still constitute the main events experienced at this stage of life.

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This usually hinders the acceptance of aging and is still aggravated by the myths and stereotypes related to old age (Netto et al., 2002). With regard to sexuality and aging, Brazil has provided more room for the issues, relevant fact when considering the impact of the elderly population in our country (Freitas, 2013). However, there is a long way to go, sexuality, when bound to the elder, is an issue often dealt with in an irrelevant way, and notwithstanding the theme comes filled with myths and stereotypes in which the elders are seen, by themselves and by society, as an asexual person, and sexuality, as something belonging to the youth and their attributes (Moraes et al., 2017). Such labels sponsored by our culture lead to sexual censorship in old age, which can be justified by the association that society makes between sexuality and procreation (Risman, 2005). Nevertheless, gerontology has been challenging everyone, establishing new paradigms and releasing questions and analyses with regard to the elder, demythologizing the sexuality as a unique component of the young person and of psychosocial moratorium (Costa, 2009).

Limitations and modifications of the senescence do not make the elder an asexual person<sup>7</sup>. The elder experiences intimate relationships, has desires, fantasies and needs; sexuality is not limited to the “genital act itself”, this is naive. It goes beyond human satisfaction as a need; sexuality expresses intimacy, excitement, pleasure, affection and love. In this perspective, sexuality is essential, so that a person can enjoy a successful aging. The problematization of sexuality must be a constant and natural prerogative because it is intrinsic to human issues. Since this process brings new challenges, assistance to the elderly person must be integral, in a holistic view, including sexuality. Within this context, the general objective of this study was to identify and analyze the publications about the sexuality of the elderly person in the last ten years in Brazil, since this issue is still new among the professionals and researchers of gerontology.

descriptors pre-defined from their abstracts: aging, sexuality, elder. The exclusion criteria were repeated publications, manuscripts such as like letters to the editor, theses, dissertations, monographs, books, book chapters, manuals and summaries. From this, the abstracts were read using a structured guide for data collection, containing the following variables: year of publication, article modality (original or revision), group participant of the research. This information was organized in an Excel<sup>®</sup> spreadsheet, and descriptive method was used to examine the contents addressed by the authors. Figure 1 illustrates a summary of the method.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Virtual Health Library (VHL), Latin American literature and Caribbean Health Sciences (LILACS) were used as

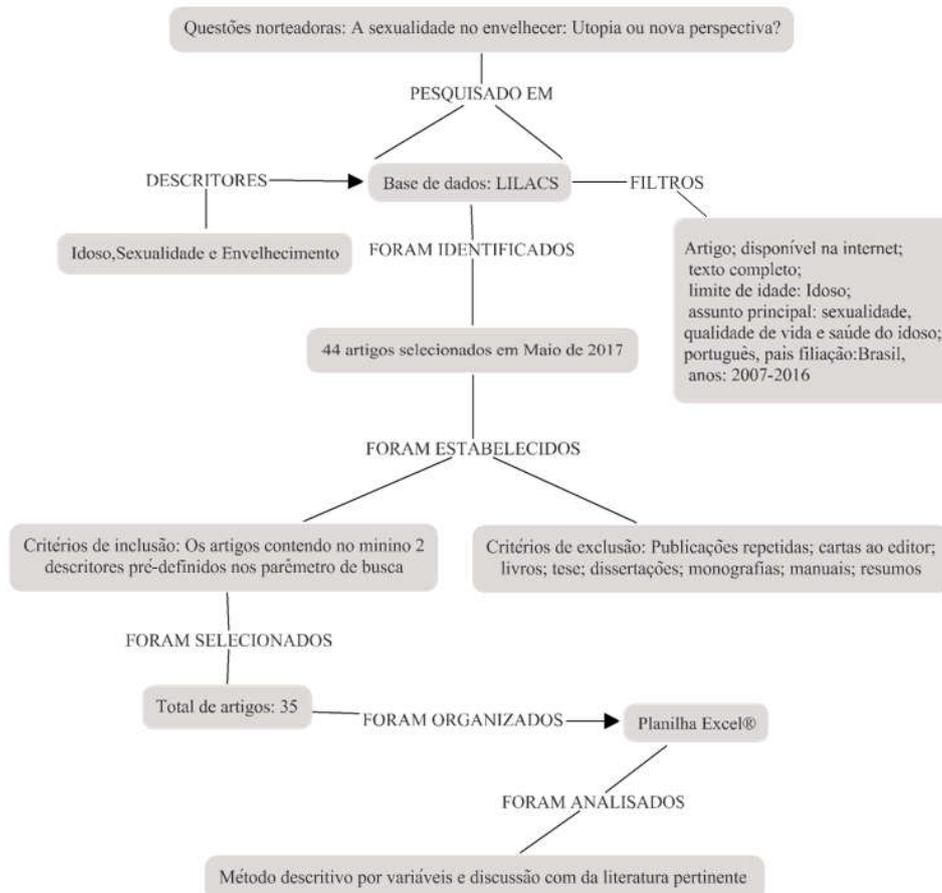


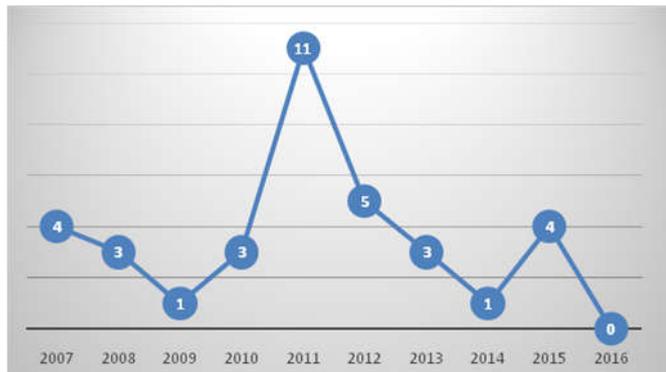
Figure 1. Conceptual map of the method

## METHODOLOGY

This was a descriptive study of bibliometric approach, from the analysis of articles available online in LILACS database of the Virtual Health Library (VHL). The bibliometric review is a method explored by researchers when they want to examine researches, by means of distinction and quantification of scientific literature on certain subject. The collection was held in May 2017, including full papers published between 2007 and 2016. We initially identified 44 articles, considering the following filters: published articles in full text in Portuguese language; fully available on the internet; whose country of origin is Brazil; country of affiliation: Brazil, and whose main theme was the elder; at the end, there were 35 articles, after excluding nine articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were articles that contained the following

research source, whose databases aggregate especially the largest scientific journals in the region, in particular, those relating to the Public Health in order to understand the sexuality of the elder (Separavich, 2013). The number of publications addressing the subject increased in the year 2011, with 11 articles, surpassing the average of 3.8 per year. Then, the publications decreased drastically, with no publications in the year 2016 (Graph 1). In relation to the number of articles published on the subject, this proportion increased in the year 2011. Such variation can be associated with the broad growth of private universities in the country. In 2011, 2,365 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) participated in the Higher Education Census, 88.0% of these are private and 12.0%, public, being 4.7% state, 4.3% federal and 3.0% municipal. Concomitant to this event, there was the Student Financing Fund (FIES - *Fundo de Financiamento Estudantil*), a program

of the Ministry of Education designed to fund the graduation at private higher education organizations.

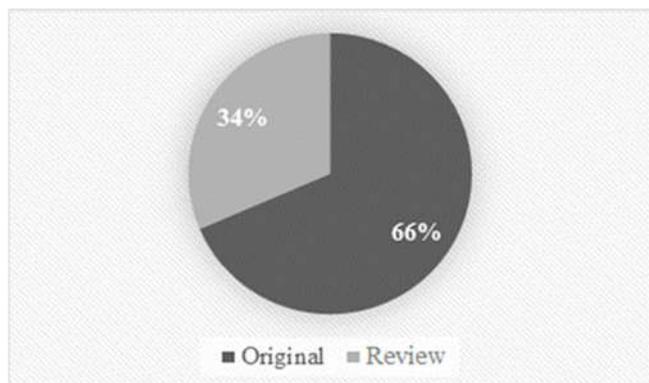


Source: research data, 2017.

**Chart 1. Distribution of the number of articles per year (2007-2016)**

In 2010, it suffered significant reforms, such as the reduction of the interest rate to 3.4% and its funding increased to 100%. These changes have generated great impact on education, putting more than 200 thousand students back in the universities in 2010.

In addition to funding, there is investment for the research; this information has resulted in an increase in the number of publications in 2011 as previously seen.



Source: research data, 2017.

**Graph 2. Distribution of the modality of the published articles (2007 - 2016)**

Considering the modality of publications, original articles prevailed, as illustrated in graph 2. Based on the results, such circumstance may have occurred because this subject is still little explored, thus, few items available for researches.

**Table 1. Distribution of the research group in the published articles (2007-2016)**

Participant group	N	%
Elders	22	62.8
Non-applicable	11	31.4
Others: nursing professors and; family members and managers and professionals in the health sector	02	5.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: research data, 2017.

Most of the articles published in relation to sexuality and aging discuss this binomial superficially, limiting them only to the physiopathological issues of the elderly person, restricting sexuality to the mere processes of body structures, which is an erroneous view. The term sexuality must be associated with the other dimensions of the individual such as: biological, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual. The culture factor stands out, since it influences and determines specific patterns of sexual activity of human beings. These sexual behaviors, when added up to their practices, relationships and their meanings, base experiences that make people as social beings, inside of sexuality in our society (Fernandes, 2009). The data in the table show the tendency to place the elders with notoriety, which is expected when studying aging. The inquiries regarding sexuality and aging that arise in the course of the research are not responsibility of health professionals, but of the elders themselves, who must report the significance of the theme in their life. The obtained information should prioritize what the elder knows, experiences and feels. This setting allows a greater understanding of the context, in which sexuality must be understood systemically and distantly from stereotypes propagated in our Western culture. Talking about sexuality in aging is to understand our own future (Rozendo et al., 2015). In the Brazilian society, due to culturally rooted reasons, people generally tend to reject the sexuality of the elderly person, refuse to admit that the elder has desires to date, relate to, refuse to understand that sexuality does not consist only of genitality (Gradim, 2007). From this, it is necessary to understand the elderly person as subjects who have desires, sexual needs and make plans for the future, that

**Table 2. Distribution of the number of articles published by periodicals, from 2007 to 2016**

Journals	N	%
Kairós Gerontologia	5	14
Jornal brasileiro de doenças sexualmente transmissíveis	4	10
Revista de Enfermagem do Centro-Oeste Mineiro	3	9
Rev Saúde e Sociedade	3	9
Revista Brasileira de Geriatria e Gerontologia	2	6
Rev enferm UERJ	2	6
Rev Gaúcha Enferm	2	6
COGITARE	2	6
Others: Revista Ciência Saúde coletiva, Revista de Psiquiatria Clínica, Psicologia saber social, Medicina Sexual, Revista Rene, Revista brasileira de enfermagem, Revista brasileira de ginecologia e obstetrícia, Revista enfermagem hereditária, Arquivos Brasileiros de Cardiologia, Revista Eletronica de Enfermagem. OBJN-Online Brazilian Journal of nursing (one for each)	12	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: research data, 2017.

sexuality is inherent in the human being. Early approaching such topic that causes so much fear and doubt in those who experience it is indisputably necessary, since the elderly person's sexuality encompasses many prejudices, inversion of values and stigmas marked by our society. In this perspective, it is important to sensitize society with educational activities that aim at changing the look at this theme that has been increasingly gaining prominence (Maschio, 2017). As for the journals that published the articles, the *Kairós Gerontologia* magazine has been around since 1997 and is coordinated by researchers associated with the Center for Study and Research of Aging (Nepe - Núcleo de Estudo e Pesquisa do Envelhecimento) and the Gerontology Postgraduate Studies Program at PUC-SP. Its goal is to publish studies pertaining to the aging theme and disseminate researches produced in the field of interdisciplinary studies. It has been in electronic format since 2009, with quarterly publications and has currently reached Qualis B3 in the last Capes evaluation, in the area of Nursing assessment. The *Jornal Brasileiro de Doenças Sexualmente Transmissíveis* does not have a registered Qualis; its mission is to disseminate scientific knowledge of quality in the area of sexually transmitted diseases and it intends to be recognized as a quality and efficient periodic in the world. The *Revista de Enfermagem* from Midwestern Minas Gerais has Qualis B2; it was founded in March 2010 by professor of the Nursing graduation of the Midwest Campus Dona Lindu of the Universidade Federal de São João Del Rei (UFSJ), Divinópolis-Minas Gerais. Its mission is to publish *Saúde e Sociedade* does not have a Qualis registered in the *sucupira* platform; it aims to promote the scientific production of the different areas of knowledge about health practices, with a view to the interdisciplinary development of public health; currently, it is a consolidated quarterly journal in the areas of Public/Collective Health and interface between Social Sciences and Humanities (Site da revista *Kairós Gerontologia*, 2017; <http://www.dst.uff.br/ojs/index.php/ojsdst> Acesso em 12 de setembro de 2017; : <https://ufsj.edu.br/recom/> Acesso em 13 de setembro de 2017; <http://www.scielo.br/revistas/sausoc/paboutj.htm> Acesso em 13 de setembro de 2017; <https://sucupira.capes.gov.br/sucupira/public/consultas/coleta/veiculoPublicacaoQualis/listaConsultaGeralPeriodicos.jsf> Acesso em 13 de setembro de 2017.). The other journals showed reduced number of articles published in the period under study. The magazine *Kairós* focuses on gerontology, but four of the articles under study were published in a journal whose focus are sexually transmitted diseases, which demonstrates once again sexuality as a pathological process of the age group in focus. The *Revista de Enfermagem* from Midwestern Minas Gerais and the magazine *Saúde e Sociedade* had three publications each, denoting a bond with nursing and public health that has shown appropriate insertion of the theme. However, these four most frequent magazines do not have good quality recognition in Capes evaluation.

## Conclusion

Given the aging process that the world is experiencing, it has become the cornerstone of the studies and researches, arousing great interest among researchers and communities. This research was not different, since it allowed providing the knowledge and understanding the future, old age. Sexuality is seen as a pathological process, being insufficient the approach in relation to socio-cultural aspects. We expect that this study will contribute to the promotion of reflections and changes in attitudes about sexuality in senescence, as well as highlight its importance to the quality of life.

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