



KNOWLEDGE OF ELDERLY WOMEN ABOUT CYTOPATHOLOGICAL EXAM

CONHECIMENTO DE IDOSAS SOBRE O EXAME CITOPATOLÓGICO

CONOCIMIENTO DE SEÑORAS MAYORES ACERCA DEL EXAMEN CITOPATOLÓGICO

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ABSTRACT

Objective: investigating the knowledge of women of an older group about gynecological examination and determining the level of understanding of older women about HPV and its consequences. **Method:** a descriptive, exploratory study with a qualitative approach conducted with ten women aged between 60 and 80 years old, who are part of the dance group Renascer de Mogeiro/PB. For data production it was used the technique of interview and a semi-structured form with open questions. The research had the project approved by the Research Ethics Committee, Protocol 0660.0.133.000-11. **Results:** most old ladies interviewed have empirical understanding about gynecological examination, considering it important, but do not regularly perform it. Regarding HPV all elderly are completely unaware about it. **Conclusion:** it becomes necessary performing educational activities about this theme with the elderly, in order to clarifying the importance of gynecological examination to reduce morbidities and mortalities coming from cervix neoplasms and from infestations by sexually transmitted diseases. **Descriptors:** Cervical Uterine Cancer; Pap Smear; Elderly Women.

RESUMO

Objetivo: investigar o conhecimento das mulheres de um grupo de idosas sobre o exame ginecológico e averiguar o nível de entendimento das mulheres idosas sobre o HPV e suas consequências. **Método:** estudo descritivo, exploratório com abordagem qualitativa realizado com dez mulheres na faixa etária entre 60 e 80 anos de idade que integram o Grupo de dança Renascer de Mogeiro/PB. Para a produção de dados utilizou-se a técnica da entrevista e um formulário semiestruturado com questões abertas. A pesquisa teve o projeto aprovado pelo Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa, protocolo nº 0660.0.133.000-11. **Resultados:** a maioria das idosas entrevistadas possui o entendimento empírico sobre o exame ginecológico, considerando-o importante, porém não o realizam periodicamente. Em relação ao HPV, todas as idosas o desconhecem completamente. **Conclusão:** torna-se necessária a elaboração de ações educativas sobre a temática junto às idosas, no intuito de esclarecer a importância do exame ginecológico para reduzir morbimortalidades decorrentes das neoplasias do colo uterino e das infestações por doenças sexualmente transmissíveis. **Descritores:** Câncer do Colo Uterino; Exame Papanicolaou; Idosas.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: investigar el conocimiento de mujeres de un grupo de señoras de más edad acerca del examen ginecológico y determinar el nivel de conocimiento de las señoras mayores acerca del VPH y sus consecuencias. **Método:** un estudio descriptivo, exploratorio con abordaje cualitativo realizado con diez mujeres con edades comprendidas entre 60 y 80 años que forman parte del grupo de danza Renacer de Mogeiro/PB. Para la producción de los datos se utilizó la técnica de la entrevista y una forma semi-estructurada con preguntas abiertas. La investigación tuvo el proyecto aprobado por el Comité de Ética en la Investigación, protocolo 0660.0.133.000-11. **Resultados:** la mayoría de las investigadas tiene el entendimiento empírico acerca del examen ginecológico, teniendo en cuenta que es importante, pero no lo realizan regularmente. Con respecto al VPH todas lo desconocen completamente. **Conclusión:** se hace necesaria la preparación de actividades educativas acerca del tema junto a las ancianas con el fin de aclarar la importancia de un examen ginecológico para reducir las morbimortalidades resultantes del cáncer del cuello uterino y las infestaciones de enfermedades de transmisión sexual. **Descriptores:** Cáncer del Cuello Uterino; Prueba de Papanicolaou; Ancianas.

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INTRODUCTION

Care for the body should be a prevalent habit in all stages of life, contributing to disease prevention and health promotion. With regard to sexuality, self-care should always be in evidence, because of the risk involving the theme, which highlights the vulnerability to contamination by sexually transmitted diseases and other diseases, especially in people who enter the elderly, members of a risk group each day more active sexually. Due to intense technological progress that underpins the development of drug therapies that enhance the performance of sexual activity, hormone refund for women, adherence of prosthesis for erectile dysfunction for men, older adults have, increasingly, a more sexually active life. These developments support to improve the quality of life of the elderly; however, taboos and prejudices directed to this age group, linked to problems with implementation of public policies, makes the elderly more exposed and vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).¹

Facing increased longevity and said advancement of science, the elderly has experienced a change of values that includes a set of new experiences, and affection and emotions, being sex one. Thus, the emergence of STDs, such as contamination by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection and human papilloma virus (HPV), tend to increase in this population; therefore encouraging safe sexual practices is not directed to this population, since these citizens are often not recognized as population at risk, since they may be still seen as asexual individuals.²⁻³

These conditions contribute to the increased susceptibility to infection in the urogenital system, affecting the elderly more likely to acquire STDs and development of diseases in the cervix, like cervical cancer.⁴ The decline in ovarian production of estrogen and progesterone, menopause occurring triggers significant alterations in the female reproductive system, including thinning of the vaginal wall, narrowing the length of the vagina, loss of elasticity, decreased vaginal lubrication, among others. Thus, these alterations derivations, without the use of water-soluble lubricants, sex tend to be painful, and may even occurs bleeding.⁵

These conditions added to behaviors usually identified in old age as committed intimate hygiene, smoking, lack of condom use and the removal of gynecological monitoring reveal themselves as factors that increase imminent risk for developing cancer

of the uterine cervix. Given their past history, still stands out early sexual initiation, where for cultural determination many elderly married in adolescence.⁶

Although cervical cancer has one of the highest levels of prevention and cure, it has a high incidence in our country, so that by 2012 there were expected 17.540 new cases, with an estimated risk of 17 cases per 100.000 women. This estimate reaffirms the magnitude of the problem and opens a range of discussions about prevention, exam, early detection and treatment of cancer.⁷

The Pap test, also called a Pap smear, is the preferred method for the screening of cervical cancer. This is an examination conducted by collecting cytological material, painless, inexpensive and effective that should be offered to women aged 25-64 and who have started sexual activity. It is known that with a cover of the target population of at least 80% is possible to obtain a satisfactory impact with regard to the capture of premalignant lesions, so this procedure have a very important role for the reversal of incidence numbers and mortality of this pathology.⁸⁻⁹

One cannot neglect the population's knowledge about the development and importance of Pap smear, as well as early detection of the onset of cervical cancer, also identifies the presence of HPV and other STDs, not necessarily by cytological examination, but because allows the observation of the presence of condyloma lesions in the female reproductive tract, which if not removed, can lead to the development of malignant changes.⁹

Although prior infection with human papilloma virus (HPV) has been identified as a major risk factor for the development of cervical cancer, epidemiological grounds say that HPV infection is the necessary cause, but not sufficient for development dysplasia of the cervical cells and their transformation into cancer cells, however HPV is present in 99% of cases of cervical cancer and is therefore a rather frequent virus, especially in the female elderly population, due to pre-provisions conditioned by biological aging.¹⁰

It is a fact that the aging body is clearly more exposed to the risk of developing chronic diseases, like cancer. Thus, older women are often more prone to develop diseases in many different ways, including neoplasms related to sexuality, which represent a significant cause of morbidity and mortality determinants of conditions in old age.

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Several behavioral, cultural, social and economic factors are associated with non-adherence to this care practice with health. In this perspective, an effective health education is critical in order to promote the learning of the female population, allowing them to know your body, stimulating them after accession of self-care practices, leading them to greater autonomy in your life and health.¹¹

Before this problem, we emphasize the importance of encouraging women in old age to continue or begin, care for their gynecological system. Therefore, it is necessary to undergo Pap smear, especially now where the old index sexually active increases exponentially, associated with the significant increase in life expectancy.

Thus emerges the immediate need to work this issue with these women who live to old age, as they need guidance and care regarding the completion of the Pap smear in a systematic way, as this is the method most insurance diagnose medical conditions and in their sexuality and vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases.

To that end emerged the questions that guided the study: Do the elderly know the Pap smear? Do older women know HPV and its complications? Do the elderly give due importance to the Pap smear? Do the elderly perform pap smears regularly?

In order to answering the concerns that permeated the study, the following objectives were traced: investigating women's knowledge of a group of elderly women about cytopathological exam; determining the level of understanding of older women about HPV and its consequences; examining whether older women periodically conduct Pap smear.

METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive, exploratory study with a qualitative approach, prevailing assumptions of semi-structured interview, important condition for achieving goals.

The study population consisted of women aged 60 and older, which form the Dance Group Renascer of the city of Mogeiro/Paraíba and wished to contribute to the research. The sample consisted of ten women who agreed to participate. Data were collected between the months of December 2011 to February 2012.

Empirical data were obtained through interviews which were scheduled and held individually. A questionnaire with subjective questions, allowing the inclusion of women's perceptions on the subject, resulting in a qualitative survey was used as data collection

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instrument. The interviews were recorded with the aid of a mini tape recorder and transcribed verbatim, in order to organize and sort the data of the texts.

To supporting the empirical material produced, the technique of the Collective Subject Discourse (DSC) was used, enabling the analysis of a set of individuals subjected to a condition, recovering and identifying the ideas, opinions and feelings to structure the ways of thinking and interpreting.¹²

The research project was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the State University of Paraíba (UEPB), which was carefully analyzed and received the opinion of approval No 0660.0.133.000-11. All research followed the principles of Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council.

RESULTS

Based on the universe of subjects and following methodological proposal, there are presented, then, the results and the analysis of the empirical material. The CSDs were grouped by themes, which relate mainly to the specific objectives of the research. To each DSC there was associated to the corresponding central idea that, in this way, it was possible to analyze the statements, with reference to the current scientific literature on the subject under study.

Theme A - Knowledge and understanding of the elderly about Pap smear

Regarding knowledge and understanding of the elderly about Pap smear, to analyze statements identified that most of them know about it and positively positions over the same, as seen in the CSD 1:

DSC 1: ... I know this exam, is that this is for every woman to do, right? Special and important to the health thing, we have to take care to prevent disease through this examination us know if you have any problems with the cervix, inflammation, infection, some kind of germ, find out if a person has cancer, venereal diseases, and so much that we cannot even explain, good things is not right, you have to be a bad thing because good thing is not so ... Once you do this test if a woman has this problem will enter the treatment. This examination, he brings so a health for women, right. (CSD 1 - Central Idea - The examination is to identify diseases in women).

Although based on empirical knowledge, elderly manifest a sense of appreciation against the examination, based on a particular responsibility with self-care and health promotion. The performance of the test is

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shown as a key resource for the early identification of diseases in the cervix, while allowing the carrier of diseases woman entering the treatment still in the early phase of the disease, thus preventing the development of malignancies and conferring his quality of life.

Also in relation to knowledge and understanding of Pap smears, it was also observed that some elderly totally unaware of the issue, as suggested by the CSD 2:

CSD 2: I don't know; never see; never did; I do not understand. (DSC 2 - Central idea - Lack of knowledge about Pap smear).

Adherence to the exam is irregular in the various regions of our country, being influenced by socioeconomic factors and personal determinants, such as lack of time, lack of interest, misinformation, fear, and discouragement by the partner and even social prejudice, which has cultural roots.

Theme B - Knowledge of older women about HPV

When reporting the issue at hand, the interviewees demonstrated total ignorance about HPV and its consequences, as suggested by the speech 3 below:

CSD 3: No, not know this... so I do not know... not know much these things... I have not heard of this problem does not... I cannot ... I do not know what this HPV is (CSD 3 - Central idea - total ignorance about HPV).

Theme C - Conduction, frequency and importance of Pap smear

Regarding the conduction of Pap smear and its attendance by the older, to analyze statements of this study revealed that the minority of them performs the scan and is aware of its importance, as observed in the CSD 4:

CSD 4: I did last year, this year I have not done, but I do ... it's been more than six months I've done, it's time to do ... I started doing every six months now do every year ... I know it's very important, we know the problems that we're, of infection in health problem in the cervix, not only is it a venereal disease these things all discover, though thank god I did not feel nothing in women should take this, it is very important ... I think it's important to see if there's anything of disease, if you have any, to see how things are going inside ... I do every year (CSD 4 - Central idea - The Pap test is important and should be periodic).

The statements also show the importance attributed to Pap smear testing for the maintenance of health and tranquility of the woman, as to verify the health of the cervix,

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even without presenting signs and symptoms indicative of conditions in this organ. Emphasizing that prevention is the best way to a healthy old age, far from gynecological diseases in your device. However, some women in their discourses revealed not perform pap smears at intervals recommended by the Ministry of Health and not give them due weight, as referred to in CSD 5:

CSD 5: is a thirty-something, since I had the surgery I did not do, I made a fibroid surgery, alas I did not do, I did not feel nothing, feel nothing, with the grace of God everything is normal... I think it should already do some thirty years I did this test... it's been a long time... (CSD 5 - Central idea - lack of symptoms and incentive leads to non-periodic conduction of Pap smear).

There are many reasons why women do not perform Pap smear, as previously discussed, but the obtained reports revealed that due to misinformation and lack of encouragement from health professionals, many women fail to take Pap smear, after surgeries, such as myomectomy, hysterectomy, among others. Another relevant factor is the question of the absence of signs and symptoms suspicious or inactive sex life, so common in old age.

The CSD 6 shows that, among the interviewees, there are those that, although superficially know what it is about the theme, revealed not perform pap smears for a personal matter of indifference, as indicated below:

CSD 6: know that it is to prevent disease, to see if you have cancer, but never wanted to do ... I never, ever heard of but never did not, it must be important if the people invents should be important to know if have an illness ... but I never did, never made me want to do ... I know what it's right to prevent disease, but I've never seen, never stopped to see not ... I'm not much a doctor no, do not know much things, I'm not curious ... (CSD 6 - Central idea - the indifference leads to non-performance of Pap smears).

DISCUSSION

Studies show that women informed about the purpose of the Pap smear undergo even more often, resulting in more and more conscious demand. Whereas those who were not informed about the disease and its consequences seek the service with lower attendance.¹³

The lack of information is responsible for carelessness and lack of interest of women for the prevention of cervical cancer and other gynecological diseases. So it is important to

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stress that access to information and actions and health services are the key to reducing the alarming rates that make up the international scene of women's health.¹³

Considering Pap smear is among the priorities of the Ministry of Health, it is for health professionals in their routine proximity to the community develop strategies and actions that can demystify the fears about the exam and thus increase the demand for serviced users, thereby reducing the number of cases of cervical cancer in Brazil.

Given the above, health education becomes a great ally in the fight against cancer of the cervix, as it combines opportunities that contribute to health maintenance and promotion, going beyond the traditional transmission of content and bringing cases to the reality of user through the exemplification of educational practices and encouraging autonomy, giving the individual responsibility for their health condition, and the empowerment necessary for the full exercise of citizenship construction.

As noted in the CSD 2, many elderly claim not performing preventive Pap smear, unaware of the purpose of the examination as soon undertake the periodic holding of it and are exposed directly to the dangers of the vulnerability of old age. In this perspective, the spread of the importance of this test is fundamental to reducing cases of uterine cancer as well as other gynecological pathologies. The educational practice promotes the development of individuals; it offers a significant learning, efficient and organized. In this context, preventive medicine in the elderly should be linked to the conservation of functional and cognitive ability, so as to prevent the presence of diseases and disorders that compromise the quality of life.¹⁴

Although the Ministry of Health will work diligently to combat cervical cancer, by their condition prevention, attendance demand by Pap smear presents compromised. The factors related to non-adherence of women to the examination, according to the recommended interval, are linked, among other weaknesses, the organization of health services and the effectiveness of the actions in women's health, evidenced by the lack of information on the cervical cancer, lack of appropriate referral of women and insufficient resources to absorption of the target population.

Studies reveal that cervical cancer is associated with persistent infection by oncogenic subtypes of HPV, especially HPV-16 and HPV-18, corresponding to approximately 70% of cervical cancers. HPV infections, when

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installed in women in adulthood regress spontaneously, but with advancing age infections have more persistence, making relevant instruct the older women on the theme, warning them in order to prevent properly against contamination virus and encouraging them to submit to the Pap smear as a precautionary mechanism.¹⁵

In population-based studies there was found the prevalence of genital HPV infection in bimodal curve-shaped "U", with the highest incidence among young, decline in the third decade and new peak around 55 years old or over. The trigger motifs of this second peak are still unknown, but it is important to considering the possibility of reactivation of latent infection due to progressive type-specific immunity. In this phase there also occur hormonal changes which can facilitate the said infection.¹⁶

In this light, there was developed research on micro-organisms and cell changes in women undergoing gynecological cytopathology in Canguçu/RS. This research examined 909 cytopathology, women of different ages. It was found that the highest percentage of HPV, this in women over 60 years old.¹⁷

The lack of understanding about the importance of holding the Pap test for women 60 years old or over, is big factor for not performing difficult tracing of cervical cancer in women more likely to develop the disease. The lack of knowledge about the importance and achievement of due diligence is a major challenge for health services because the lack of information may be related to lack of communication between the woman and the health professional.¹⁸

The prevention of HPV infections is consolidated as an extremely important work in health care for women; in particular, elderly women, since it represents a high STD incidence in women of all age groups, with capacity of keeping asleep for many years and by reducing the characteristic of the aging process immunity, reappear and cause serious damage to the health of the elderly.

Considering that HPV has no cure, because there are still no drugs and no methods to achieve eradication of the virus, prevention is the best strategy for the control of its transmission. Therefore it is necessary to invest in educational activities able to clarify what becomes the HPV and what complications it triggers the body of the infected woman.

Regarding the DSC 3, the work performed by the nurse in the Family Health Program

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(FHP) in the development of creative and strategic methods in order to encourage users of the unit must review periodically, is the factor that contributes to the women are aware of the importance of prevention, promotion and control of cervical cancer.¹⁹

The nurse's role is prominent in preventing cancer due to his conduct as an educator and counselor, since he as health educators can make use of creative methodologies that arouse the interest of the population, especially the elderly, to pursue the actions and services health. In addition, they use tools that promote a humanized care, such as dialogue, sensitivity, empathy and continuing education.²⁰

It is the health team play not only medical work, but exercise an educational lined paper in a creative working methods and motivating, able to contribute to the annual membership of older women to cytology and providing this population information as is useful in the prevention, control and combat diseases.²¹

The same authors state that one must also encourage the elderly woman to incorporate the educational guidelines about their health, their behavior, providing, thus, self-care and knowledge of their body, avoiding the involvement of easily preventable diseases, such as cervical cancer.²¹

The demand for older women who attend health services for assistance for drug treatment and control of chronic diseases such as hypertension and diabetes mellitus is great, but unfortunately, these demands are not taken for the completion of cytological examination, proving that the assistance offered does not act comprehensively and holistically.²²

In this perspective there is the tracking of appropriate contribution, through the capture of women seeking health services for different purposes for seeking cytological examination. The proper approach to these users can and should contribute to increasing the unit's coverage in terms of realization of the Pap test, as well as to minimize the elderly rates of dishonesty or afraid to seek the examination suffer silently with signs and/or symptoms a worsening of the cervix.

It is important that nursing is committed to working quality of life, highlighting the importance of self-care as a key to healthy aging, advising on the adoption of new habits and patterns of behavior, and encourage routine exams and their importance in the care health. Thus, during the development of interventions is important to respect the singularities, whereas health education work

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with the elderly requires a lot of dialogue, active listening and respect, and is a continuous process of interaction between practice and theory, where participation and understanding of the family contribute to the positive results.

Knowledge of the elderly on the subject, contributes significantly into performing the examination, because they have the awareness of the need to take care to prevent the plethora of diseases that affect a large number of women in all age groups. Therefore, women who have prior knowledge about the advantages of having a cervical smear examination, encouraged by the spouse and family are more assiduous in making the same, which is offered free of charge at stations and universally health facilities.²³

Regarding the CSD 5, it is considered that there is no contraindication for the exam, so he becomes partner in potential of a healthy female life and no increased risk of recurrent infections, it is important and vital adhere it, regardless of the factors listed above, in addition to all this is a highly efficient examination, inexpensive and easy to perform.

Given the above, it is important to emphasizing preventive examination in old age, by an organic condition, regardless of sexual activity or any symptoms. It is essential that health professionals are responsible and committed, playing their role as educators and trainers of health awareness, so that these women feel encouraged to perform the screening test, but also for the care of your health as a whole.

Corroborating the results, a population-based study conducted in the state of Pernambuco, Brazil, found that young women and older were the least sought pap smears in the period considered, which is a notoriously disturbing circumstance, because they correspond to the moments higher incidence of genital HPV infections.²⁴

This study points to a possible weakness in the organization of health services and the provision of the procedure as well as for the negligent actions of individuals responsible for service provision, when fleeing the strategy to promote health context focusing on intersectionality.

The highest incidence of cervical cancer is found in women between 50 and 60 years old, with mortality rates increasing with age in the country. The fact that the elderly are outside the age range recommended in the Women's Health Program in relation to cytological examination has been concern, as the

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professionals who seek to fulfill goals end up prioritizing attention on women of reproductive age, becoming silent the decision to conduct or not the examination in the elderly. This fact contributes to some professionals do not give the amount due to preventive examinations for cervical cancer in elderly.²⁵

Another factor that contributes to this overwhelming context is that cervical cancer is more invasive in older women, due to the natural aging conditions, increasing the likelihood of deaths in elderly compared to younger women, resulting in 40% of deaths women in this age group.

It is known that Pap smear should be performed periodically, as it is the simplest and painless, representing the most viable way to detect female genitalia-related problems. Therefore, it becomes paramount to be realized at all stages of women's lives in order to prevent, and before that, it is for health professionals, especially nurses, being the professional that cares and is closer to users create educational and preventive strategies in order to educate women about the importance of adherence and attendance to Pap smear, making them understand that caring for themselves is the main bias to have health and quality of life.

CONCLUSION

According to the results obtained, it was possible to identifying weaknesses regarding care provided to elderly women, with regard to disease prevention in their reproductive system, especially cervical cancer.

With regard to knowledge and understanding of the elderly about the proposed theme, it was noted that most of the interviewees know it and understand its importance for the detection of diseases in the cervix, such as: inflammation, infections and venereal diseases, but the minority still reported to be unaware about that theme.

Regarding attendance with that older reported to undergo Pap smear, the result is truly unfortunate, considering that the minority performs the exam periodically, while most reports have the examination for some thirty years and no longer perform it, considering it unnecessary; since, in their view, they report feeling nothing, others report they no longer take the examination after a myomectomy.

Whereas cervical cancer is part of the health policy priorities of our country, it is necessary to investing the propagation of more precise information about Pap smear,

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highlighting the factors associated with non-performance and as guiding the importance that it perceives to women's health.

Obtained before the speeches observed how this issue should be explored, needing to be the main focus of educational activities, especially with regard to the elderly community, considering that such information is crucial for these women develop self-care, self-awareness and therefore increase their adherence to examination.

In this context, it is essential that health professionals face orientation and the clarification of possible doubts about the health of users, in case of simple measures, but able to substantially contribute to the well-being of women, providing them with a better quality of life.

The nursing professional, in particular from the FHS, while preferred gateway to SUS, should be concerned with constantly strengthening and qualification of health promotion, emphasizing health education as an emancipatory action, capable of reducing inequalities and stimulating role of women facing the disease prevention in the cervix.

In summary, it is concluded that there is still much to work with the elderly population, especially on the contribution to periodic holding of Pap smear in the fight against cervical cancer, mainly in times when the exponential increase in life expectancy sets the national demographic scenario, revealing the expression: Young country with white hair.

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