SEXUALITY AND AGING: IDENTIFIED NEEDS FOR CONSTRUCTION OF AN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to identify the needs of the elderly in view of their sexuality to subsidize the construction of an educational technology. Method: an exploratory-descriptive study, with a qualitative approach, carried out with seven elderly people. Data collection was carried out with a semi-structured script and the information, transcribed and, then analyzed and presented in thematic categories. Results: the results showed sexuality as an important need for well-being, but there are still specific barriers to aging that interfere with sexual intercourse. A troubling factor is unprotected sexual practices. The video and/or visual resources, together with the professional interaction, were verified as the most appropriate technology to promote understanding by the elderly in relation to the theme. Conclusion: focusing on the needs of the elderly about sexuality requires support from nurses in order to identify and find ways to achieve responses to these needs.

Descriptors: Educational Technology; Elderly's Health; Sexuality; Qualitative Research.

RESUMO

Objetivo: identificar as necessidades dos idosos diante de sua sexualidade para subsidiar a construção de uma tecnologia educativa. Método: estudo exploratório-descritivo, de abordagem qualitativa, realizado com sete idosos. A coleta de dados foi realizada com um roteiro semiestruturado e as informações, transcritas e, em seguida, analisadas e apresentadas em categorias temáticas. Resultados: os resultados mostram a sexualidade como uma necessidade importante para o bem-estar, mas que ainda existem barreiras específicas do envelhecimento que interferem na relação sexual. Um fator preocupante são as práticas sexuais desprotegidas. Verificou-se o vídeo e/ou recursos visuais, aliados à interação profissional, como a tecnologia mais apropriada para promover o entendimento pelos idosos em relação à temática. Conclusão: o enfoque sobre as necessidades dos idosos acerca da sexualidade requer apoio dos enfermeiros no sentido de identificar e encontrar meios de alcançar respostas a essas necessidades. Descritores: Tecnologia educacional; Saúde do Idoso; Sexualidade; Pesquisa Qualitativa.

RESULTADO

Objetivo: identificar las necesidades de los ancianos frente a su sexualidad para subsidiar la construcción de una tecnología educativa. Método: estudio descriptivo exploratorio de enfoque cualitativo, llevado a cabo con siete personas mayores. Los datos se recolectaron con una información semiestructurada y las informaciones, transcritas y, luego analizadas y presentadas en categorías temáticas. Resultados: los resultados demuestran la sexualidad como una necesidad importante para el bienestar, pero que siguen siendo barreras específicas del envejecimiento que interfieren en la relación sexual. Un factor preocupante son las prácticas sexuales sin protección. Se verificó el video y/o recursos visuales, combinados con la interacción profesional, como la tecnología más adecuada para promover el entendimiento de los ancianos en relación con el tema. Conclusión: el enfoque sobre las necesidades de los ancianos acerca de la sexualidad requiere apoyo del personal de enfermería en el sentido de identificar y encontrar maneras de lograr respuestas a estas necesidades. Descriptores: Tecnología Educacional; Salud de los Ancianos; Sexualidad; Investigación Cualitativa.

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The aging of the Brazilian population and the greater life expectancy of the elderly are the new challenges that also indicate new perspectives of life. Most of the elderly remain in good physical conditions, perform the basic and instrumental tasks of daily life, which contradicts the idea of frail people. In this context, changes can already be seen in the daily life of the elderly and the biopsychosocial changes of this population, which leads to the revision of basic human needs, among them, those related to sexuality.

The need for sexuality "is the need to integrate somatic, emotional, intellectual and social aspects of being, with the goal of getting pleasure and consummate the sexual relationship with a partner or procreating." The full development of sexuality is essential for individual and interpersonal well-being. Sexual rights are universal human rights backed by inherent freedom, dignity and equality for all human beings.

Sexuality can be understood as an energy that finds its physical, psychological and social expression in the desire for contact, tenderness and, sometimes love, a set of feelings. The development of sexuality happens throughout life and depends on the person, their genetic characteristics, environmental interactions, socio-cultural conditions and others, considering the different physiological stages: childhood, adolescence, adulthood and senility.

The Ministry of Health acknowledges the importance of dealing with the sexual issue of the elderly population, due, not only to the aging of the population and the growth of communicable diseases (AIDS, in particular) among individuals over 60 years of age, but also because it is a Fundamental aspect for the quality of life of these people.

It is observed that the elderly who overcome the possible barriers related to aging to live a satisfactory sexuality are those who receive a warm assistance from health professionals, who inform the events of aging and pay more attention to their doubts and insecurities.

Nursing must be attentive and prepared to give the necessary support to the elderly, with its intense modifications, which involve the plasticity of the body and biological factors that interfere with sexuality. Professionals should not treat the elderly as a degenerate being, full of constraints and a distorted view of their being, but, on the contrary, they must create situations, moments in which together they let rise the valorization of self-esteem, helping relevantly in their well-being biopsychosocial.

The nurse, as educator and health promoter, has used the various technologies for the promotion, maintenance and recovery of health, exercising, with creativity and competence, the art of caring. Thus, it is extremely important to invest in the processes of creation, development and evaluation of educational technologies in the area of Nursing.

In view of the above, the lack of initiative to invest in the creation of educational technologies that address the issue of sexuality in aging, considering the participation of the subjects, led us to this research. The construction of an educational technology to promote sexuality in aging should be supported in the experience of the group in question, this will enable the researcher to understand this phenomenon, the survey of important elements to compose the technology, such as content, type of material and language to be used, and, above all, to consolidate the construction of appropriate technology.

The construction of an appropriate technology is associated with the principle that the best technology is one that will meet the needs and aspirations of a social group, with the purpose of contributing to the solution of specific problems of that community previously identified. How important is the concern of the researchers to follow a theoretical-methodological rigor in the construction and validation of educational technologies, it should be the stage of identifying the needs of a group that will use technology.

Concerns about the creation of an educational technology to promote sexual health in the elderly have emerged from the professional experience of the authors, recognizing the fragility of primary health care professionals in dealing with this issue and thus underestimating, during the follow-up of the elderly, a real and fundamental aspect of their well-being, which is sexuality.

It is hoped, therefore, to contribute to the improvement of their care practice, since it is believed that the use of an educational technology can collaborate in actions that promote safe sexual behavior and the experience of a healthy sexuality among the elderly.
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The interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. The analysis of the data was subsidized by the thematic analysis, which is composed of three stages: pre-analysis, material exploration, and treatment and interpretation of the results obtained. Therefore, the sequence of steps followed, as well as the recommendations of each of which included: an exhaustive reading of the transcribed material; determination of unit of record, of context; form of categorization, correlating with the proposed research objectives; and search for interpretations, based on the theoretical reference of the theme.

The data were organized in a descriptive way and discussed according to the national and international literature dealing with sexual health, sexuality, aging, technology and health education.

The research was carried out in accordance with the recommendations of Resolution No. 466/12, of the National Health Council, which involves researches with human beings. The confidentiality of the information was ensured for each interviewee, identified with the letters and numbers E1, E2, ... consecutively. The research was approved by the Ethics and Research Committee of the Vale do Acauá State University of Sobral-CE, under protocol number 420,435.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data, it was possible to identify the characteristics of the subjects. Seven elderly people participated in the study, six of them female and one male. It was verified that the minimum age of the participants was 65 and the maximum 78 years. The marital situation for the majority is married, five, consisting only of one in stable union and one single. Among the participants, four had incomplete elementary education and three, complete high school education. All the elderly were retired, although two remained in the labor market, with the activities of mason and seamstress.

The speeches seized were transcribed and resulted in the following categories: perception of the elderly about sexuality; relevant topics to compose educational technology and appropriate educational technology to promote the sexual health of the elderly. The categories portray information about subjects’ subjectivities and bring important elements about educational technology to promote the sexual health of the elderly.

OBJECTIVE

• To identify the needs of the elderly before their sexuality to subsidize the construction of an educational technology.

METHOD

Exploratory-descriptive study, with a qualitative approach. The data collection period occurred during the months of October and November of 2013, in the municipality of Santa Quitéria, located in the northern part of the State of Ceará (CE), Brazil, with territorial area of 4,260 km² and a population of approximately 42,763 inhabitants.

This municipality, in partnership with the Family Health Strategy, the Social Assistance Reference Center and the Secretariat of Social Action of Santa Quitéria, have developed the Active Life Project in the Elderly, which develops social and leisure activities for old people. Thus, seven elderly people enrolled in the Active Life Project of the Third Age participated in the study. Elderly people who attended, at least, five meetings of the Active Life Project during the year 2013, who were oriented in time and space, and who had ease of communication and oral expression, were selected. The sample was, therefore intentional, using the criterion of saturation of the data.

For the recruitment of the participants, the field researcher previously participated in five meetings of the Active Life Project for knowledge of the population, establishment of bond, identification of the elderly and their residential addresses, presentation of the research and scheduling of the interviews, according to the availability of the elderly.

At the time of the interviews in the households, the signing of the Free and Informed Consent Term (TCLE) was requested to the participants of the research, by reading and agreeing the document. This was followed by a semi-structured script with multiple choice and discursive questions that included aspects related to: 1. socio-demographic characterization of the study subjects, with the purpose of knowing the socioeconomic profile of the population that will use technology and subsidize the type of language appropriate to the group for which it is intended; 2. elements that will support the construction of educational technology to promote sexual health in aging, such as the perception of the elderly about sexuality in old age, relevant themes to be worked on and the type of educational technology that best suits the needs and social reality in which they live.
Perception of the elderly about sexuality

In this first thematic category, we sought to capture the knowledge of the elderly about sexuality. When asked about what they meant by sexuality, it was observed that they associate sexuality with the relationships of affection, love, affection and not merely the sexual act, according to their accounts. 

[...] The person to have sex, but has to have love, affection and respect [...] (E1)

[...] Sexuality is a respect, understanding and affection that one feels for the other [...] (E3)

I think it is related to life to two, exchange of affection and love. (E6)

It's staying together, sharing the secrets, sleeping together. (E7)

A study conducted with Australian elderly women found similar findings. The participants did not associate sexuality directly with sexual penetration.10 Questioning elderly directly about their sexual behavior may not elicit responses that reveal a complete picture of their sexual experiences because of cultural influence which permeates sexuality among the elderly, however, the findings can lead to the understanding of sexuality by the elderly as an integral part of every human being. It is related to intimacy, affection, caring, tenderness, a form of expression of feeling and expressing human love through affective-sexual relations, an extended set of feelings involving bodily, psychic, sentimental, fullness of the present, and memory of the past.16

Health professionals can enhance understandings and attitudes about sexuality, as well as facilitate marital relationships during old age. It is important to emphasize the importance of nurses to use educational technologies that promote sexual health guidance in this life cycle, enhancing the positive feelings that permeate the experience of sexuality. 17

In the development of educational technologies, the nurse must have, besides the scientific foundation and the technical competence, the wisdom to raise the prior knowledge of the users under his guidance. In this sense, the nurse will use the educational technology based on the reality lived by the subjects, making possible a meaningful learning. 18

Relevant topics to make up the educational technology

The focus given to this category will be to deepen the experience of the elderly in their sexuality, in order to identify their main needs and, consequently, the themes relevant to educational technology. The manifestations of the subjects will therefore serve to subsidize the elaboration of the educational technology to be used to promote the sexual health of the elderly, as they portray perceived needs of the participants who have lived the experience.

This study reveals that the elderly experience sexuality in an affectionate way, but also with the sexual act itself. Older people said they still have sex less often when compared to youth, adding that they find it pleasurable when it happens.

[...] When we were a young couple, we practiced more, nowadays they are rare, but we still do. (E3)

 [...] I live well, practicing. Today it's different, it's more time-consuming, you have to have a lot of love and affection, I do it a few times, but it's good when I do. (E4)

Research has evaluated the sexual attitudes of older women and observed that the frequency of sexual activity has no significant impact on their quality of life.19 Findings in this research represent similar ideas when discourses reveal that sexual intercourse is rarely practiced but accompanied by a pleasurable feeling. This fact reinforces the assumption that the sexuality experienced by the affective, emotional and psychological dimension is overestimated at this stage of life.

Given the above, it is clear that the sexual act is practiced by the elderly, therefore, health professionals should include the guidelines on safe sexual practices in the care of the elderly, in addition to considering the physiological peculiarities of their own age.

It is known that such activity was historically denied or annulled by socio-cultural values and norms with a focus on negative stereotypes linked to human aging. However, with the increase in life expectancy and the availability of new technologies, it is possible to increase the quality of life of the elderly and, thus, to include sexuality as a fundamental aspect of the integrality of the elderly. 20

The adoption of public health policies that focus on the older population, the implementation of prevention programs aimed at the care of people 60 years of age and older should be aware of the issues of sexuality in aging, and it will be necessary to understand the culture of each individual. Sexuality, in this age group, is not discussed and, in some cases, even ignored. Older people should be seen as having desires, sexual needs, and planning for the future.
Discourses emerged among the elderly who portrayed the absence of the sexual act of their lives.

[...] I no longer live my sexuality, I did not pause, I do not feel any more desire and I am very unwell, but when I lived it was good. (E1) [...] I'm already old, I barely even think about it.

But when I got married it was good ... (E5)

The experience of sexuality among the elders of the present generation can be considered the fruit of a repressive education. Past generations had their lives built up in repressive models and concepts, according to which sex was a dirty and sinful act, to be practiced exclusively for procreation, leaving the woman excluded from feeling her pleasures.21

The elderly who do not practice or practice the sexual act infrequently, face difficulties, as they express in their reports.

[...] It gives me a job for me to start, it takes longer than I used to, that it was just touching and I was already on the point. [...] I need more of my husband's affection and patience than he does not have much. It takes me a little to feel like it, and sometimes it's so painful [...] (E3)

[...] Yes, now I sometimes feel a barrier in my sex, I felt a pain from time to time, I think it was because it was dry and did not do as easily as before. (E5)

During old age, the frequency of the episodes of desire becomes more spaced, independently of the partner. Therefore, men have a change in the pattern of sexual response, slow but as satisfactory as in adolescence. For women, sex is as pleasurable as it was in youth, although the excitement is slower to reach climax and it may still be accompanied by discomfort.22

Female aging alone does not diminish women's interest in sex or their potential for sexual reaction, especially if their overall health is balanced. There are, however, specific physiological changes in the cycle of the woman’s sexual reaction after menopause. These changes do not appear abruptly or identically in all women and are likely to be minimized.23

Studies have verified the association of factors that cause negative effects on sexual activity, and observed, among the most significant, age, older individuals, males, overweight and with impaired physical or mental health.24

Thus, health professionals should invest in educational activities that address the guidelines on physiological changes in the female and female reproductive system during the aging phase and, above all, recommend therapeutic measures that minimize the elderly's difficulties with their sexuality and, thus, favor the well-being of these subjects.

One of the factors that interfere with sexual activity in old age is the feeling of being sexually incapable, the lack of communication between the partners, the bad widowhood, the prolonged interruption of the sexual life, the resistance of the children and the family, the lifestyle, the false beliefs and myths acquired over the years.7 Among the speeches, the lack of communication on the subject during the years by the elderly couples was highlighted.

[...] From time to time I've been losing my will and my husband, too, and I'm not even talking to him about these things anymore. (E5)

Something worrisome was evident when the elderly expressed the non-use of the condom, as well as myths and beliefs that permeate the practice of safe sex.

[...] I never bothered. I never did a prevention, nor did I use a condom. It had the way it sometimes kicked out. (E5)

[...] I'm afraid to use a condom, I always try to stay with someone I know is clean. (E2)

In this way, it is essential that STD and AIDS prevention policies involve this age group, considering their particularities.25 Health education actions with a focus on condom use, as well as the STD / HIV / AIDS approach Should be taken by health professionals as one of the relevant topics to be discussed with the elderly.

In addition, surveys conducted in Brazil have shown a significant increase in the number of elderly people with Sexually Transmitted Diseases and AIDS.26

The possibility of an elderly person being infected with HIV seems invisible in the eyes of society, as well as the elderly themselves, who do not have the culture of condom use. In addition, the elderly women, by, in general, not being in fertile cycle, have the false impression of the uselessness of the condom. There is a lack of identification of the elderly with AIDS prevention campaigns, which are always, focused on young people. Therefore, the elderly do not consider themselves as a potential patient.26

In light of the above, what is perceived is the exposure, more and more, of these individuals to situations of vulnerability, which, in addition to being related to personal attitudes, extend to the difficulty in diagnosing early HIV virus in this age group. This is because their sexual life is not always

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In the participants’ statements, intentions of learning to better understand and adapt to the reality of sexual practice in the aging phase are reaffirmed. The integration of educational technologies complements the actions performed by nurses in their relationship with the person idosa. Technology has the ability to influence and change the way of living of the population and influence in various fields, such as sexual health of the elderly.

The video and the use of visual aids are seen as the main possible educational technologies to contribute to the understanding of sexuality in aging, and, thus underscore the need for the presence of the professional developing interactive communication. This type of technology can provide the individual with a greater ability to consistently reproduce what has been understood from the information derived from that educational technology. In the context of health education, the contribution of educational technology and the role of this feature are meant for health promotion, prevention of complications, skills development and fostering confidence and autonomy of the patient.

Health education can be favorable strategy in building concepts who view the elderly as a free individual to experience their sexuality free of myths and prejudices that are socially solidified, being necessary to consider that these educative actions should involve elderly and non-elderly. Since aging is inherent to the human being and questions about sexuality need to be discussed during life stages.

Realized the concern about the negative impact of use of images that portray the sexual act itself, perhaps by social and cultural representations involving the theme. Therefore, this aspect should be considered in the elaboration of educational technology, in order to minimize future rejections to the material.

**CONCLUSION**

The results obtained in this study allowed us to identify the main elements to compose an educational technology aimed at promoting the sexual health of the elderly, such as previous knowledge about the subject, the subjects to be worked and the type of technology most appropriate for the target public in question.

Sexuality was confirmed as a daily need of the elderly, experienced not only by the sexual act itself, but also established by the relations of affection and affection among its
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