ARTICLE

GROUP OF ELDERLY AS A STRATEGY OF RESILIENCE EMPOWERING OF ITS MEMBERS

ABSTRACT

Objetivo: To identify the contribution of the elderly group to strengthen the resilience of its participants. Method: This is an exploratory, descriptive and qualitative research, with the group “healthy aging”, linked to an extension project of the Faculty of Medical Sciences of Campina Grande/Paraíba/Brazil, from August 2011. The sample consisted of 13 elderly patients between 71 to 84 years old. The empirical material was analyzed through content analysis of categorical themes proposed by Bardin. The study followed the ethical guidelines issued by the Resolution 196/96, submitted to the Ethics Committee in Research of the Center for Higher Education and Development (CESED) that gave its assent on 08.17.2011, under protocol 0105.0.045.000-11. Results: The results showed the importance of participation of elderly people in support groups, to develop their ability to face and overcome adversity, to promote the strengthening of resilience from the construction of bonding. He realized the importance of healthy bonds between group members, to the emerging sense of belonging and social redefinition of old age, increased self-esteem and emotional empowerment. Conclusion: Thus, there was the elderly group as a promoter of self-esteem, demonstrating positive effectiveness in maintaining physical and psychological well-being of its members. Descritores: aging; health of the elderly; resilience.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Identificar a contribuição do grupo de idosos para o fortalecimento da resiliência dos participantes. Método: pesquisa exploratória, descritiva e qualitativa, realizada com o grupo “envelhecendo com saúde”, vinculado a um projeto de extensão da Faculdade de Ciências Médicas de Campina Grande/Paraíba/Brasil, no período de agosto de 2011. A amostra foi composta por 13 idosos entre 71-84 anos. O material empírico foi analisado pela análise de conteúdo tipo categorial temática. O estudo obedeceu aos preceitos éticos emanados pela Resolução 196/96, submetida à apreciação do Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa do Centro de Ensino Superior e Desenvolvimento (CESED) que emitiu parecer favorável em 17/08/2011, sob protocolo nº 0105.0.045.000-11. Resultados: os resultados evidenciaram a importância da participação de idosos em grupos de apoio para o desenvolvimento de sua capacidade em enfrentar e vencer as adversidades, promovendo o fortalecimento da resiliência a partir da construção de laços afetivos. Percebeu-se a importância dos vínculos saudáveis entre os participantes do grupo para o emergir do sentimento de pertença social e re-significação da velhice, do aumento da autoestima e do empoderamento pessoal. Conclusão: o grupo de idosos como promotor da autoestima, demonstrou eficácia positiva na manutenção do bem-estar físico e psicológico. Descritores: envelhecimento; saúde do idoso; resiliência.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Identificar la contribución del grupo de adultos mayores para reforzar la resistencia de sus participantes. M étodo: este es un estudio exploratorio, descriptivo y cualitativo, con el grupo de “envejecimiento saludable”, vinculado a un proyecto de extensión de la Facultad de Ciencias Médicas de Campina Grande/Paraíba/Brasil, a partir de agosto de 2011. La muestra consistió en 13 pacientes de edad avanzada entre los 71-84 años. El material empírico fue analizado a través del análisis de contenido de los temas categóricos propuestas por Bardin. El estudio siguió las normas éticas dictadas por la Resolución 196/96, presentado al Comité de Ética en Investigación del Centro para la Educación Superior y el Desarrollo (CESED) que dio su asentimiento a 08.17.2011, en virtud del Protocolo de 0105.0.045.000 11. Resultados y Discusión: Los resultados mostraron la importancia de la participación de las personas mayores en los grupos de apoyo para desarrollar su capacidad para enfrentar y superar la adversidad, para promover el fortalecimiento de la capacidad de recuperación de la construcción de la unión. Se dio cuenta de la importancia de los lazos saludables entre los miembros del grupo, a la nueva sensación de pertenencia y de redefinición social de la vejez, el aumento de la autoestima y el empoderamiento personal. Conclusión: Por lo tanto, no era el grupo de ancianos como un promotor de la autoestima, lo que demuestra la eficacia positiva en el mantenimiento de bienestar físico y psicológico de sus miembros. Descritores: envejecimiento; la salud de las personas mayores; resistencia.
INTRODUCTION

Until recently Brazil was considered a young country, though it has been modified in recent decades, bringing together in this aspect, differentiated needs in the form of social organization of this population. Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) found that the Brazilian population is in an intense process of senility and inversion of the age pyramid, with the increase of 8.8% to 11.1% at the proportion of elderly in the years between 1998 and 2008. 1 Most of this transition / inversion of the predominant age will be according to changes in levels of mortality and fertility, in which the population that obtained before high birth rates coupled with high mortality rates, undergoes significant change. Thus, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul and Paraíba are the states with the highest proportion of elderly people, who have in their population over 10% of these, however, currently, all states in the Southeast and South, as well as mostly from the Northeast have reached this proportion. 1 2

The increase of life expectancy is of common interest, but linked to this desire must be the quality of life, rising, then, the necessity of changing values preformed related to the elderly, with a view to ensure a healthy aging, active and inserted into society. 3

Healthy aging means in a broader sense to keep the physical, mental and social well-being, balancing physical health with feelings of respect, security, opportunity to participate in society through their limitations and be recognized for their contributions. 4

It is in this stage of life that many are affected by diseases and / or non-transmissible chronic diseases, which may cause a disabling process, reducing the functionality of these people, so that the performance of daily activities become difficult or impossible to be performed, this factor compromises significantly the quality of life of the older people, affecting their independence. 5

It is still quite remarkable the presence of beliefs and cultural values related to the process of ageing who judge the elderly as invalid and dependent, making this process something only degenerative, far from development and acknowledgement. 6

Human behavior elicits some questions, like why some people succeed in overcoming the difficulties and others do not; the reason why some are more vulnerable and others can overcome big losses. This refers to the resilient power present in each individual. 7

Resilience is related to the ability to overcome the adversities of everyday life, and therefore this power generates in the person who faces the problem, the possibility to feel empowered. This phenomenon enables the development of the process of superation, even if the individual goes through difficult moments. Soon, for the ability of resilience emerges, the sources of personal and environmental protection contribute considerably in this process. 8

Thus, the light technologies of health can be considered a source of protection, because they are classified as promoters of humanized relations, consisting of feelings of optimization, hosting, affective ties and focus on self-esteem with promotion of care. It is considering this type of technology, which gives the formation of groups of elderly, which act in a relevant way on the development and strengthening of resilience, associated with the rescue of autonomy, promotion of socialization and a significant increase of the physical and mental well-being of the seniors.

The participation of the elderly in groups makes them develop a considerable increase in the capacity of positive psychosocial adaptation, even when they find themselves in situations of evident stress. This leads to positive results in the mental health of the elderly, reducing their emotional suffering. 10

For this purpose, was outlined as a question of research: The elderly group “Healthy Aging” has enabled the strengthening of resilience in its participants?

OBJECTIVE

- To identify the contribution of the elderly group “Aging with good health” to strengthen the resilience of the participants.

METHODOLOGY

This is of nature, an exploratory, descriptive, and qualitative research. It was realized with the group “healthy aging”, linked to an extension project financed by the Pedro Americo Foundation and developed at the Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMC), in Campina Grande / Paraíba / Brazil, in the period of August 2011.

The population consisted of 20 elderly members of the group, aged between 71 to 84
years old, and their sample consisted of 13 elderly, and 53.84% of the female gender, which are suited to the criteria of inclusion and who agreed to participate voluntarily in the study.

As inclusion criteria were used the following parameters: Being registered in the elderly group at FMC from Campina Grande / PB; being participating weekly of the activities of the group; to accept participate on the research and sign the Statement of Consent. All seniors who do not fit these terms were excluded from the study.

The study started from the literature search, followed by the application of a semi-structured interview, collected through the use of an Apparatus of Media Player (MP3).

After the interviews were transcribed from the empirical material, and this product gave rise to the corpus of work. After exhaustive reading of the speeches, the same were presented as narratives and analyzed according to the analysis of content, of the type thematic categorical, proposed by Bardin, which searches itself for a better way to comprehend a communication or discourse, as well as to deep into its ideological characteristics, beyond promoting an extraction of the most important points. Afterwards, the empirical material was analyzed and confronted, having as a base the pertinent literature.

This study was subjected to approval by the Committee of Ethics in Research of the Center for Higher Education and Development (CESED) under Protocol 0105.0.045.000, obeying to the ethic principles of the Resolution 196/96 of the National Council of Health of the Brazilian Ministry of Health, which focuses on research involving humans.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

After analyzing the interviews, the repercussions were discoursed in the everyday of the elderly assisted by the group “Healthy Aging”. From each speech was possible to extract the comprehension of the elderly who participate in the group about the resilience and of the improvement of the quality of life after the experiences and weekly meetings.

When asked if they consider that the group “Healthy Aging” gave them more strength to face the difficult situations. Were constructed the following thematic categories:

- Group as empowering of resilience in the elderly

The groups of health care are considered, at present, innovative strategies that enable the approximation of the users assisted with the health team. These groups add people with similar impossibilities, thus becoming, a space dedicated to the exercise of citizenship and interpersonal relationships plus activities that relate to the spent of the free time, like physical activities and leisure. 12 The elderly group follows this standard and provides some repercussions in the lives of the seniors, which will be observed in the statements described below.

The group gave me more force, more comprehension. I was used to stay in solitude with the lost of my wife, I felt myself alone, [...] it was a bit difficult to surpass the death of my wife, but the group always shows something different, with the group I become much actualized [...] (1.7)

Yes, [the group gave me] much courage, much force, more health, we travel and become happy, content. I am happy; I wake up at five o’clock in the morning and also help raising my grandchildren. (1.8)

[...] to participate of the group gave me too much force, to live together and get on with my life, it teaches too much us, what is very good, directs too much the lectures, the tours. In the group we distract ourselves, we feel much better. My husband has Alzheimer’s, but I bring him here and he feels much better, we can live healthy. (1.9)

[...] with the participation of the group I got better, gave me more force to face the difficulties and problems of health. (1.10)

Gave me force, when we are here we become even healthier, the teachers help us to stay healthier […]. (1.13)

The category above states that activities in group contribute positively in the lives of the seniors when giving support to their health, demonstrating the capacity to face and win the daily adversities, promoting the strengthening of the resilience, the rescue of autonomy and the reduction of the social stigma.

This type of group activity promotes exchange of experiences, from which the share of the difficulties make it happen an increase in the self-esteem of the elderly, due to the feeling of social belonging generated when discussing about similar problems, thus developing, skills and capacity of superation of adversities. 13

This capacity of superation of the difficulties represents the basic characteristic of resilience, which allows to known and potentialize personal and interpersonal
resources that protect the development of the people and their constructive capacity. Representing, even, an essential tool for the achievement of strategies of promotion of the quality of life in the third age. 14

Resilience is characterized then by a dynamic process, which reaches the interaction between risk and protective factors, both internal and external to the individual, and that acts in the regulation of the effects of adverse life events, ie, the difficulty is overcome through the resilient effort and the people who own this characteristic, noted for valuing the bonds of support and stimulus. 15-16

Individuals, families and social groups surprise all by the ability to combat the constant annihilation to which are submitted, they can save their integrity, even under strong pressure and build a decent life, despite the difficult situations. 16 What demonstrates the resilience of this group of elderly, ie, the capacity to win, although the difficulties and difficult circumstances.

Therefore it is important to solidify the public health policies of the elderly, investing even more in the soft technologies of care, showing a humanized look, based on prevention and health promotion, acting always in a multiprofessional and interdisciplinary way, stressing the importance of the health care professional to promote an improve of the quality of life of the elderly population. 17

Given the questionings referred to the contribution of the group “Healthy Aging” to the best coping of the everyday difficulties, was built the following thematic categories:

- Group as a promoter of conviviality, bonds and friendship ties

It is noticeable the improvement in the quality of life of elderly people who are part of groups of health care, by facilitating the construction of these bonds of trust and friendship that provides discussions and debates about health problems common to this age group. This practice has led to the construction of mutual strategies to cope the suffering. The statements below reinforce this discussion:

improved, I felt alone, now I feel good, improved because I was used to stay much at home, my daughter lives far away, with the participation of the group I feel more comfortable, healthier. (1. 2)

[…] I felt isolated living with depression and it was strong, because I did a surgery of the pancreas, found fellowship with my friends, teachers, friendship with friends.

My friends were at home to give more force, to live with everyday companionship is very important, the group helped me too much my spiritual side. (1. 3)

[…] I started to live better with people, because I was shy and was afraid to expose myself, I was isolated, the difficulty I passed was hunger, I started working when I was a child, had no childhood, worked to live, my father was deficient, could no longer work. (1. 6)

It improved my relationship with the others, increased my knowledge about the diseases since my participation in the group, my knowledge and approximation. (1. 7)

Described in these statements, it is perceived expressive changes in relation to the construction of healthy social bonds, to the increase of the fellowship and friendship found in the next, becoming an alternative for older people to retake social roles and / or other activities, having favored the interpersonal and social relationship.

The community is a significant factor to the rescue of lost values and for the human development through the construction of healthy bonds, which are characterized by mutual relationship in which positive feelings emerge and reinforce the personal and cultural identity, consolidating the social inclusion and turning them strong against the difficulties of life. Healthy bonds are all those which generate well-being and encourage the life in society, already the weak or risk bonds are all those that are based on indifference or conflicts and that generate emotional discomfort, harming the health. 16

Thus, the groups were identified as promoters of self-determination and independence of the elderly people, because they worked with the objective to develop autonomy, self-esteem, and even the improvement of the sense of humor, and can thus trigger effective aspects to expand the resilience and weaken the vulnerability, through the construction of social bonds that generate social inclusion and give meaning to life. 12

In turn, autonomy is understood as what is connected to the independence and freedom, power to self governs. When related to the life of the elderly, it provides to the same to exercise his functional capacity in realizing daily activities or not. Be able to handle difficult situations, to be the owner of his proper life. 19

Self-esteem was classified as positive, provides feelings of satisfaction, fulfillment, well being and happiness, together with ones
personal valorization and, when negative, reflects feelings of depression, disability and conformism. 20

In the groups turned to the elderly, the identification between their members favors the social aggregation that allows the redefinition of old age in all its aspects, empowering them, not only as a group, but also their particular identities. Social relations of the elderly with their family and friends play an expressive role in maintaining their well-being. However, although the family is the primary source of social and emotional support to the elderly, the relations of friendship in old age echo in a especially beneficial way, functioning as a relevant protective factor to the elderly, mainly when they are spontaneous and involve the exchange of experiences and existences common among people of the same court. 14

**FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Life expectancy is increasing every day, bringing with it the challenge of reorganizing society, enabling it to receive the elderly population, reducing to the maximum the generating risks of mental suffering and giving support for their inclusion in the community and familiar living. One must keep in mind that despite the aging process causes numerous changes in the physical and social context of these, the limitations do not mean unproductivity and disability.

So, for these changes being received naturally and with serenity for these individuals, some alternatives considered light technologies of care, which promotes the improvement of the quality of life in old age, are essential strategies, due to their restorative capacity of the construction of the interpersonal relationships, which develop an increase of self-esteem and of the self-empowerment.

The formation of groups of support for older people has undeniable relevance in the pursuit of the strengthening of the resilience and rescue of the autonomy, implying positive results in the mental health and physical well-being of the elderly, diminishing the mental suffering affected by this stage of life, because with the effective participation in the group, was identified a significant improvement in facing daily setbacks.

The elderly participants in this study revealed through their speeches, the importance of participation in the group for the capacity to face and win adversities, promoting the strengthening of resilience related to the emotional ties that were built during the meetings.

The strengthening of the resilience occurred in the way that were detached valuable acquisitions for the daily life of the elderly who take part in the group "Aging Healthy", as exchange of experiences, formation of healthy affective bonds and companionship between the participants. Are examples of these acquisitions: increase or formation of self-esteem, autonomy, self-determination and independence, with maximum emphasis to overcome the adversities imposed by life.

This study made us realize that participation in the group developed in the elderly feelings of social belonging and redefinition of old age, demystifying the cultural value of this population associated to disability, resulting in these the determination to improve the quality of life.

In this light, it became clear that the participation of the elderly in the groups gave a significant improvement in the strategies of living together, even with the physiological and pathological changes that this stage of life provides. The understanding of the importance of the terms autonomy and self-esteem to the realization of daily facing of the elderly with the everyday problems, associated to the evident strengthening of the resilience that the group proposes, are relevant factors to an enclosed and healthy social life, away from possible outbreaks of mental suffering.

**REFERENCES**


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