

The temporal evolution of life satisfaction in institutionalized elderly: A longitudinal study

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Introduction

Subjective well-being in elderly is a major determinant of health and successful aging (Jivraj, Vanhoutte, Nazroo, & Chandola, 2013; Mhaoláin et al., 2012).

Research shows that variables such as depression, less functionality and health, less contact with family and others, may have a negative impact on life satisfaction (Siedlecki et al., 2008; Tooth et al., 2008; Westaway, Olorunju, & Rai, 2007).

Objectives

To verify which variables correlate with satisfaction with life (SWL) and analyze which of them predict the evolution of SWL.

Aims

To examine correlates and predictors of SWL in institutionalized elderly.

Methods

This study was a subsidiary longitudinal analysis of the cross-sectional data gathered at Phase I (2010-2012; $n = 493$ elderly) and after 36 months at Phase II (2013-2014; $n = 85$) of Aging Trajectories Project from Miguel Torga University College. Measures included the Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), Geriatric Depression Scale (Yesavage et al., 1983), University of California Los Angeles loneliness scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferguson, 1978), and the Geriatric Anxiety Inventory (Pachana et al., 2006).

Results

At Phase I, higher scores in SWL scale correlated with having visits ($r = 0.17$; $p < 0.01$), specially from family ($r = 0.20$; $p < 0.01$), less depressive ($r = -0.42$; $p < 0,001$) and anxiety symptoms ($r = -0.25$; $p < 0.001$), less loneliness feelings ($r = -0.37$; $p < 0.001$), less functionality ($r = 0.15$; $p < 0.01$), and better general physical health ($r = 0.25$; $p < 0.001$).

Age, sex, civil status, cognitive, and executive status did not correlate with SWL.

SWL, depressive and anxiety symptoms, and loneliness feelings were stable through time, between assessment stages ($p < 0.01$).

The worsening of depression and loneliness through time predicted the negative evolution of SWL (respectively, $\beta = 1.16$; $p < 0.01$; $\beta = -0,69$; $p < 0.05$).

Conclusions

Adding to previous research (Alexopoulos, 2005; Siedlecki et al., 2008; Victor & Scambler, 2000; Zaninotto, Falaschetti, & Sacker, 2009), these findings highlight the relevance of early detecting depressed mood and loneliness feelings in life satisfaction of institutionalized elderly, and the importance of the treatment and the development of preventive interventions for this vulnerable population.

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