

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FALL HISTORY AND THE SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF OLDER ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

Population aging is an irreversible, multifactorial phenomenon of great magnitude, resulting from socioeconomic factors, medical and scientific advances, and changes in reproduction and longevity patterns. This situation of age transition, related to the intrinsic complications of the aging process, highlights falls as a major in public health concern, especially in the Brazilian context, where the older adults represent 15.8% of the population. This is because falls are one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality among the elderly, which underscores the need for further investigation. This is a cross-sectional, descriptive field study conducted with older adults enrolled at UniAPI, using a questionnaire that assesses socioeconomic aspects and the frequency of falls. In the sample of 120 people, the following characteristics can be observed: female (91.7%), “pardo” (42.5%), widowed (47.5%), incomplete elementary education (38.4%), retired (90%), and family composition with two members (42.5%). In addition, there was a 40% rate of falls in recent years, with a predominance of single episodes (47.9%), consistent with the overall sample profile. Therefore, based on this study, it is possible to observe a sociodemographic profile of Brazilian older adults in the context of demographic transition, elucidating the high incidence of falls among this population.

Keywords: Elderly; Accidents due to falls; Demography.

INTRODUCTION

Population aging, in the global context, emerges as a phenomenon of undeniable magnitude, multifactorial and irreversible in nature. This demographic development, marked by aging, results from the intersection of socioeconomic factors, medical and scientific advances, and changes in reproduction and longevity patterns (REIS; BARBOSA; PIMENTEL, 2016). Thus, the combination of these aspects has led to a growing proportion of older people in the population, which outlines a new social, economic, political, and, above all, health landscape, in which new complaints and problems demand extreme attention.

In the Brazilian context, demographic transition is a recent, rapid, and growing reality, with the number of older adults representing 15.8% of the population (IBGE, 2022), and it is estimated that there will be twice as many older adults as young people in 2060 (IBGE, 2013).

In this sense, it is essential to highlight the concept of aging, defined as a phenomenon that affects everyone, characterized as a dynamic, progressive, and irreversible process linked to biological, psychological, and social factors (BRITO; LITVOC, 2004). This process is characterized by the decline of different physiological functions of the body that affect different areas, thereby compromising quality of life. These losses are evident in the social and cognitive spheres but most apparent in neuromuscular functions.

Thus, the combination of demographic transition and the intrinsic complications of the aging process highlights falls among older adults as a major public health concern, requiring in-depth investigations and multifaceted approaches. Thus, the complexity of this phenomenon lies in the interaction of intrinsic factors related to natural physiological changes and extrinsic factors such as the environment, lifestyle, and polypharmacy (CHAGAS et al., 2018).

As falls are one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality among older adults, generating physical, psychological, and social consequences (MATHIAS; JORGE; ANDRADE, 2006), a comprehensive geriatric analysis correlating these factors, especially sociodemographic elements, is essential.

Thus, the present study aimed to identify the sociodemographic profile of older adults who experienced falls, participants in the UniAPI/UniEVANGÉLICA project.

METHODOLOGY

This is a cross-sectional, descriptive field study conducted with older adults participants in the activities of the Open University for the Elderly (UniAPI) at UniEVANGÉLICA in Anápolis, Goiás. Thus, in February 2024, a semi-structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions was applied to identify sociodemographic variables: age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, educational level, and professional occupation. In addition, the history of falls was assessed with the question: "Have you experienced any fall or falls in the last 12 months?" After collection, the data entered into Microsoft Excel and were analyzed descriptively with relative and absolute frequencies.

This study complies with Resolution 466/12 of the National Health Council. The project has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee (CEP) of UniEVANGÉLICA, through opinion no. 1,583,515.

RESULTS

In total, the research sample consisted of 120 older adults, 48 of whom had suffered a fall in the previous 12 months, representing 40% of the total sample.

Thus, when analyzing the sociodemographic aspects of subjects who suffered a fall in the last 12 months, we obtained an average age of 71.6 years and the following prevalence: female (39.2%), “pardo” (22.5%), widowed (16.6%), incomplete elementary education (16.6%), retired (34.2%), and family composition with two members (18.3%) (Table 1). Regarding the presence of falls in the last 12 months, there was a high number of older adults who had accidents, with 40% of the sample suffering at least one fall and about 52.1% suffering two or more (Table 1).

In contrast, the sociodemographic characteristics of the subjects in the sample who did not suffer a fall show an average age of 71.6 years and a prevalence of: female (52.5%), white (27.5%), widowed (30.8%), incomplete elementary education (21.6%), retired (55.8%), and family composition with two members (24.3%) (Table 1).

Although the groups were socioeconomically similar, when comparing the groups of older adults who suffered falls and those who did not, it is possible to observe subtle differences, such as a reduction in the average age (70.7 years), a more significant proportion of males (12.5%), a predominance of the white ethnic group (45.8%), a reduction in the frequency of economically dependent individuals, and an increase in the proportion of single-person households (23.3%) and two-person (24.3%) households in the group that did not suffer accidents.

Table 1. Sociodemographic profile of the sample that suffered and did not suffer a fall in the last 12 months.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Group Falls (n)</i>	<i>% of tota</i>	<i>Non-fall group (n)</i>	<i>% of tota</i>
<i>Average age (years)</i>	71		70.7	

<i>GENDER</i>	Female	47	39.2	63	52.5
	Male	0	0	09	7
<i>ETHNICITY</i>	White	15	12.5	33	27
	Brown	27	22.5	24	20
	Black	04	3.3	12	10
	Yellow and Indigenous	0	1	03	2
<i>MARITAL STATUS</i>	Married	17	14.2	19	15
	Widowed	20	16	37	30.8
	Divorced	09	7.5	10	8
	Single	0	1.7	06	05
<i>EDUCATION</i>	Higher Education	0	6.7	10	8
	High School Graduates	09	7	18	20
	Incomplete High School Education	0	2	06	0
	Complete elementary education	07	5.8	12	10
	Incomplete elementary education	20	16	26	21
	Illiterate	0	0	0	0
<i>PROFESSIONAL OCCUPATION</i>	Retired	41	34	67	5
	Dependent	0	05	3	2
	Economically active	0	0.8	2	1
<i>FAMILY COMPOSITION (NUMBER OF MEMBERS)</i>	1	1	1	2	2
	2	22	18.3	29	24.3
	3	05	4.3	11	9.2
	4	03	2.5	0	0
	5	0	0.8	0	0.8
	6	0	0.8	0	0.8
	7	0	0	0	0

Source: Author, 2023

CONCLUSION

Thus, based on this study, it is possible to observe a sociodemographic profile of Brazilian older adults in the face of the current demographic transition, marked by the significant presence of females, mixed race (pardo), widows, low educational levels, and retirement. Therefore, when relating this profile to the presence and number of falls, the same sociodemographic pattern is repeated.

Furthermore, although most falls were restricted to a single episode (47.9%), a considerable proportion of older adults experienced multiple falls, which may result in irreversible consequences for health and well-being.

Therefore, the findings of this study may contribute to the development of preventive strategies and effective interventions to reduce falls and maintain postural balance, thereby decreasing morbidity and mortality and improving the quality of life of this population.

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