

Chapter 70

Burnout Among Formal Caregivers and Risk of Violence Against Institutionalized Elderly

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ABSTRACT

Sociodemographic changes occurring in past decades are reflected as increased population aging, resulting in a higher need to institutionalize elderly. Violence against elderly is a relevant public health problem. The aims of the present cross-sectional exploratory and descriptive study with a quantitative approach were to analyze burnout among formal caregivers at institutions for elderly and to assess the risk of violence against institutionalized elderly. As a part of project ESACA—Envelhecer com Segurança no Alentejo (Prevenir as Quedas e a Violência sobre Idosos)—Compreender para Agir (Aging Safely in Alentejo [Preventing Falls and Violence against Elderly]), the present study analyzed 34 formal caregivers from three institutions that provide care to elderly in the Evora district, Portugal. No situations involving violence against institutionalized elderly were detected. Most participants (96.3%) did not exhibit burnout, although they did report feeling physically and emotionally tired.

INTRODUCTION

Population pyramids have undergone considerable changes in recent years, pointing to demographic aging, with consequent challenges to unprepared governments, families, and communities.

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Demographic aging is a social phenomenon with significant multidimensional impacts that demands urgent reflection and decisions to help adjust social contexts and integrate this new reality with a minimum of negative consequences for citizens while strengthening consensual harmonization. It is not difficult to recognize that healthcare will be one of the sectors most likely to feel the impacts of demographic aging.

Social responses that address a significant number of elderlies are therefore a priority; such response essentially involves speaking about reform in the Portuguese state, and of a period of transition, with a view toward well-being, social protection and social rights. This new paradigm calls for qualified formal caregivers for elderly, with the expectation that better training of the former will result in better provision of care and, consequently, better quality of life and protection of the latter.

According to the Portuguese Association for Victim Support (Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima – APAV) (2010, p. 41), “recognizing that elderly are victims was slow, but at present it is an increasingly evident phenomenon within the current process of global population aging” (Portuguese Association for Victim Support – APAV, 2010, p. 41). According to The APAV (2013) estimates, 39.4% of elderly in Portugal are victims of aggression. The country is ranked by “the World Health Organization as the fifth among 53 European countries surveyed with significant rates of violence against elderly” (Coler, 2014, p. 19).

Institutionalization might promote the occurrence of violence against elderly, for which reason accurate knowledge of the associated conditions and risk factors is necessary to develop intervention/prevention strategies (Carrilho, Gameiro & Ribeiro, 2015).

Several authors (Jamieson, Teasdale, Richardson & Ramirez, 2010) observed that exposure to stress at work might harm the mental health of formal caregivers, particularly the more compassionate and altruistic ones, resulting in patient exhaustion and impacts on their own personal, family, and institutional lives. Studies on burnout are critical, as formal caregivers of institutionalized elderly are considered a high-risk group as a function of the demands inherent to their job (Meireles, 2016).

The aims of the present study were to analyze burnout among formal caregivers at institutions for elderly and to determine the risk of violence to institutionalized elderly within the context of project ESACA — Envelhecer com Segurança no Alentejo (Prevenir as Quedas e a Violência sobre Idosos) — Compreender para Agir (Aging Safely in Alentejo [Preventing Falls and Violence against Elderly] — Understanding to Act) Ref: ALT20-03-0145-FEDER-000007.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Aging

Even though defining elderly exclusively based on age is controversial and limited, here, this group is considered to include men and women aged 65 years or older. This notion is accepted by international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations (Paschoal, 2000). Aging is a variable process, and according to “the times, culture, lifestyles, and scientific, medical and technological means, thus are the changes in the aging process” (Imaginário, 2008, p. 41).

Lehr (1998) observed that aging occurs at the biological, physiological, mental, and social levels. According to the National Institute of Statistics (Instituto Nacional de Estatística–INE),

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