EVIDENCE ON AGGRESSORS IN CASES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST OLDER PEOPLE: AN INTEGRATIVE REVIEW

How to cite this article: Alarcon MFS, Damaceno DG, Sponchiado VBY, Braccialli LAD, Marin MJS. Evidence on aggressors in cases of violence against older people: an integrative review. Rev baiana enferm. 2019;33:e28184.

Objective: to identify evidence on aggressors in cases of violence against older people in national and international studies. Method: an integrative literature review was carried out in 2018 in the CINAHL, PubMed, Scopus, LILACS, Web of Science, and SciELO databases. The non-controlled descriptors (keywords) were: “Older people”, “Senior”, “Elderly”, and “Aggressor”. The controlled descriptors (Health Sciences Descriptors-DeCS) were: “Violence” and “Aged”. After close reading of 238 articles and 56 theses and dissertations, three articles and six dissertations and theses were selected. Results: a prevalence of the qualitative approach with low evidence level was found. The main aggressors found were older people’s children, who mostly reported repentance for their acts, which were often caused by alcohol and drug use, unemployment, history of family violence, closeness between aggressors and victims, and financial dependence on one of the parties. Conclusion: evidence on aggressors in cases of violence against older people in national and international studies was limited to their profile, type of violence practiced, and feelings regarding the act of violence.


Objetivo: identificar, nas produções nacionais e internacionais, as evidências acerca do agressor em casos de violência contra o idoso. Método: revisão integrativa da literatura realizada em 2018 nas bases de dados CINAHL, PubMed, Scopus, LILACS, Web of Science e SciELO. Os descritores não controlados (palavras-chave) foram: “Older people”, “Sênior”, “Elderly” e “Aggressor” e os descritores controlados (Descritores em Ciências da Saúde-DECS): “Violence” e “Aged”. Foi realizada leitura seletiva de 238 artigos e 56 teses e dissertações e permaneceram no estudo três artigos e seis dissertações e teses. Resultados: predominou a abordagem qualitativa, com baixo nível de evidência. Os principais abusadores são os filhos que, na maioria das vezes, relataram arrependimento dos seus atos, sendo o fator desagregador mais comum para tais atos o uso de álcool e drogas, desemprego, histórico de violência familiar, proximidades entre agressor e vítima e a dependência financeira de uma das partes. Conclusão: as evidências

Evidence on aggressors in cases of violence against older people: an integrative review

Introduction

Despite being considered an important achievement for mankind, the increase in population aging has presented consequences such as violence against older people. This theme, present in the daily living of individuals and families, has gained utmost importance for public health, due to the impact caused on the quality of life of those involved in this type of situation\(^1\).

These situations are difficult to be handled, since difficulties begin in the investigation itself, that is, when cases are confirmed, because most cases occur at homes with family members, which makes victims afraid and ashamed of reporting them. Evidence shows that only one of every four elderly victims of violence reports the case\(^2\).

One multicenter study carried out with 1,995 older people aged 65 years or older in Canada, Colombia, Brazil, and Albania, showed that 0.63-0.85% of the participants suffered physical abuse and 3.2-23.5% suffered psychological abuse\(^3\). The consequences of these types of violence include physical traumas, which may cause incapacity, suffering, psychological and emotional disorders, moral damage, and even death\(^4\).

One systematic review showed that violence is prevalent worldwide and elderly victims of abuse and neglect are more at risk of dying than those who do not suffer violence\(^5\).

In Brazil, older people’s situation does not differ from other countries, because they suffer prejudice and discrimination, and reports of maltreatment and neglect are more frequent in welfare and healthcare organizations. However, most cases of abuse happen at home. At home, the elderly are often isolated, depressed, and when assaulted, they feel intimidated and afraid of reporting their aggressors and suffering maltreatment as a consequence, thus becoming a vicious circle of aggression and fear\(^6\).

In this respect, the vulnerability of older people in the physical, social, economic, and emotional aspects leads them to suffer violence and its consequences. However, interventions demand the understanding of their context. Therefore, although coexisting with aggressors brings risks to older people, this scenario seems to be their only survival option.

In this context, the following question emerged: What is the knowledge produced and its evidence level on aggressors in cases of violence against older people? The objective of the present study was to identify evidence on aggressors in cases of violence against older people in national and international studies.
Method

This was an integrative literature review, understood as a method that allows construction of discussion regarding publications’ methods and results, with a focus on the analysis of preexisting knowledge on the theme researched. This type of method allows the systematization of studies with different methodologies and synthesis of the results obtained based on scientific rigor.

The starting point of the present study was the identification of the aspects indicated by the PICO strategy, the acronym for P: Patient or population studied; I: Intervention or indicator of what will be studied; C: Comparison or control as criteria for effectiveness assessment of the intervention or question of interest; O: Outcome, which is the answer found. In the present study, this strategy was used as follows: P: Aggressors; I: Having practiced violence against older people; C: Not applied; and O: Evidence on aggressors.

The literature search began in May 2018 and included non-controlled descriptors (keywords) – “Older people”, “Senior”, “Elderly”, and “Aggressor” – and controlled descriptors (Health Sciences Descriptors-DeCS) – “Violence” and “Aged”. The following databases were used: Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature (LILACS); Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL); SCOPUS; Web of Science; US National Library of Medicine (PUBMED); and Scientific Electronic Library (SciELO).

The following inclusion criteria were adopted: Primary articles that presented information on aggressors of older people, published from 2008 to 2018 in English, Portuguese, or Spanish with full texts. Time delimitation was motivated by the researchers’ interest in exploring characteristics that involve aggressors and relationships with their victims at the present time. The following exclusion criteria were adopted: Editorials and review articles previously selected through the search in other databases that did not answer the study question.

Files of the following two digital libraries were used for the selection of dissertations and theses: The Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD, as per its acronym in Portuguese) and the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES, as per its acronym in Portuguese). The terms “Agressor” and “Idoso” were used as keywords in the CAPES, and “Violência”, “Idoso”, and “Agressor” in the BDTD. The following inclusion criteria were adopted: Full original articles, theses, and dissertations. The following exclusion criteria were adopted: Bibliographical review and theoretical reflection articles.

Initially, a selective reading of 238 articles and 56 theses/dissertations was carried out. According to Flowchart 1, three articles and six dissertations/theses remained in the final sample.
Evidence on aggressors in cases of violence against older people: an integrative review

**Flowchart 1** – Sample selection of publications on evidence on aggressors in cases of violence against older people. Marília, São Paulo, Brazil – 2018

The articles’ selection was blindly and independently carried out by three researchers who were authors of this manuscript. In order to prevent biases, 95% of agreement was obtained. Discrepancy cases were discussed and evaluated together in order to achieve consensus.

Articles were selected and categorized according to the quality of the following evidence level presented: level I: Systematic review of controlled and randomized studies; level II: Controlled and randomized studies; level III: Cohort and case-control studies; and level IV: Experts’ opinion and descriptive studies.

An instrument prepared by the researchers was used for the extraction and synthesis of the articles selected. The following data were...
extracted: authors/journal/study’s presentation place, year of publication, study type and evidence level, study setting/data source, objectives, main results, and conclusions.

The presentation of the data was systematized by means of a table, and critical analysis and reflective synthesis were descriptively carried out according to the findings on aggressors of older people.

Results and Discussion

The study sample was made up of three articles, three theses, and three dissertations, being one study from 2014, seven from 2016, and one from 2017, and they were all carried out in Brazil.

The following studies were found in the methodological design: one ecological study, two descriptive studies with a qualitative approach, one descriptive study with a quantitative approach, three retrospective studies, one population-based descriptive study, and one exploratory study with a qualitative approach. Therefore, most studies are at evidence level IV, followed by evidence level II. The participants in the studies were older people and aggressors of older people.

Chart 1 presents the characteristics and main findings of the publications analyzed according to the following aspects: authors/year/journal or presentation place, type of study and evidence level/study setting/data source, and objectives. Chart 2 presents the following aspects: authors/year/journal or presentation place, main results, and conclusions.

Chart 1 – Synthesis of the articles published on evidence on aggressors in cases of violence against older people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors/year/journal or presentation place</th>
<th>Study type and evidence level/setting/source</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irigaray TQ, Esteves CS, Pacheco JTB, Grassi-Oliveira R, Argimon III(9) 2016. Psychology student (Campinas)</td>
<td>Type: Documentary and retrospective study Evidence level: IV Setting: Police station for older people’s protection Data source: Reports of elderly victims of maltreatment.</td>
<td>To verify the prevalence and types of maltreatment suffered by older people recorded in the police station for older people’s protection in Porto Alegre, a city in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. To describe the profile of victims and aggressors, and identify the reasons for occurrences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faustino AM(13) 2014. Thesis University of Brasília</td>
<td>Type: Descriptive population-based study Evidence level: IV Setting: Health center. Source: The sample was made up of 237 older people aged between 60 and 93 years.</td>
<td>To characterize older people regarding sociodemographic aspects, health conditions, personal information, and their relationship with psychological, physical, and financial violence, abandonment, neglect, and self-neglect. To characterize the type of aggressor and frequency of the acts of violence suffered by older people. To analyze the prevalence of cases of violence according to situations of violence. To identify the relationship between the functional and cognitive capacity of older people and presence of violence.</td>
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Chart 1 – Synthesis of the articles published on evidence on aggressors in cases of violence against older people.

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| Bohm V (14) 2016. Thesis Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul | Type: Qualitative study  
Evidence level: IV  
Setting: City of Caxias do Sul in the state of Rio Grande do Sul  
Source: Convenience sampling made up of five women and three men who were children of the victims, and one man who was a husband. | To analyze the factors that led to violence against older people from the aggressors’ perspective.  
To know the life history of the aggressors of older people.  
To identify the possible reasons that triggered aggression.  
To understand the structural aspects that may be associated with the practice of violence.  
To provide elements for educational interventions in the field of violence. |
| Taveira LM (15) 2016. Dissertation Catholic University of Brasilia | Type: Cross-sectional retrospective and descriptive study with a quantitative approach  
Evidence level: IV  
Setting: Secretariat of Human Rights of the Presidency of the Republic.  
Source: Computerized database with male and female victims. | To analyze the profile of violence against older people in Brazil based on reports through call 100, describing the sociodemographic aspects of the victims, identifying the incidence of violence per Brazilian geographic region, and type of relationship between the suspects of aggression and victims. |
| Cachina AMP (16) 2016. Dissertation Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte | Type: Documentary analysis  
Evidence level: IV  
Setting: Department of Justice of Rio Grande do Norte.  
Source: Reports of maltreatment of older people. | To analyze processes regarding reports that reached prosecutors experts in older people.  
To identify the profile of the participants in the study. |
| Lopes LGF (17) 2016. Dissertation Federal University of Pernambuco | Type: Descriptive cross-sectional study with a quantitative approach  
Evidence level: IV  
Setting: Data from the Noticeable Diseases Information System (SINAN, as per its acronym in Portuguese).  
Source: Victims of violence aged 60 years or older. | To evaluate the occurrence of violence suffered by older people in Caruaru, a city in the state of Pernambuco.  
To characterize the aggressors’ profile according to the following variables: gender, relationship with the elderly person, and suspicion of alcohol use.  
To characterize the victims of violence according to sociodemographic variables.  
To describe violence according to nature, setting and injury level, and instrument used.  
To verify the evolution of cases considering hospital discharge, evasion/escape, and deaths.  
To verify the association between the occurrence of violence and variables researched. |
| Siqueira ACBS (18) 2016. Thesis Federal University of Paraíba | Type: Quanti-qualitative study  
Evidence level: IV  
Setting: Institutions of protection for older people in the city of Teresina: Specialized police station for older people, Department of Justice, Public Defender, physical spaces for older people’s assistance.  
Source: Elderly victims of violence | To analyze factors or conditions that may have influenced the behavior of caregivers or family members of victims, leading them to practice violence against the elderly under their care. |

Source: Created by the authors.
Chart 2 – Synthesis of the articles published on evidence on aggressors in cases of violence against older people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors/year/journal or presentation's place</th>
<th>Main results</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Irigaray TQ, Esteves CS, Pacheco JTB, Grassi-Oliveira R, Argimon IL</td>
<td>Of the 224 reports, 175 reported situations of maltreatment, mostly psychological, followed by financial abuse. Most of the victims were women with a low education level. Most of the aggressors were men and family members of victims. Verbal and physical abuse were found in the study. The following main motivations were found: alcohol, physical closeness, financial dependence of aggressors on older people, and relationship of violence between them. The following aggressors’ feelings were identified after the occurrences: sadness, disappointment, anger, sense of injustice, anguish, and outrage; needs are associated with the desire to end the process and return to the good coexistence with the elderly.</td>
<td>Further studies with a wider scope must be conducted, with information from the elderly of the community and not only from police reports, with the aim of increasing knowledge on the theme and implementing prevention and intervention strategies. Greater visibility of aggressors is required to understand what triggered violence and contribute so they are able to give a new meaning to the experience, by means of attentive listening.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rodrigues RAP, Monteiro EA, Santos AMR, Pontes MLF, Fhon JRS, Bolina AF, et al</td>
<td>Psychological abuse was prevalent in most cases, which occurred at home. In younger older people, rates are similar in both genders. In the three cities, there was a prevalence of male aggressors aged between 30 and 49 years. A low proportion of alcohol and drug consumption by aggressors was found. In the city of Ribeirão Preto, most aggressors were single, family members, and did not live in the same house. In the city of João Pessoa, most aggressors were married, family members of victims, and did not live with the elderly. In the city of Teresina, there was a prevalence of single aggressors who were family members living with victims.</td>
<td>Violence is a cultural phenomenon difficult to be reported by older people, because it often occurs within the family context.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faustino AM</td>
<td>Regarding prevalence, 64.97% of the elderly reported having suffered at least one type of violence. Regarding type of aggressor, most were victims’ children, followed by partners. Abandonment was the most reported type of violence by the elderly. Sociodemographics and assessment of functional and cognitive variables are associated with situations of violence. Aggressors are family members. Being dependent on others for self-care basic needs favors the increase in exposure to situations of physical abuse. Regarding violence and cognitive function, no statistical relationship was found; however, the highest frequencies of violence were reported by older people with worse cognitive performance.</td>
<td>The fact of family members, especially children and partners of victims, being the main aggressors leads to latent generational conflicts and close relationships. Older people also reported having experienced situations of psychological abuse, abandonment, and neglect at least five or more times.</td>
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**Chart 2 – Synthesis of the articles published on evidence on aggressors in cases of violence against older people.**

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<tr>
<td>Bohm V (14) 2016. Thesis Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul</td>
<td>Most aggressors, usually children and grandchildren of victims, suffered violence in other stages of their lives. The wake up for the occurrence of violence is associated with family disruption, unemployment, and abusive consumption of alcohol/drugs. A poor performance of social mechanisms of protection was found for older people, which were not able to provide them with protection.</td>
<td>Aggressors do not see psychological abuse as severe, because they think it does not harm victims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taveira LM (15) 2016. Dissertation Catholic University of Brasilia</td>
<td>Most victims were women. The study showed a high incidence of violence in the southeastern region. Victims’ children were the main suspects of aggression, followed by grandchildren.</td>
<td>The study identified an increase in violence records and confirmed the existence of several types of family violence against older people. Neglect was the most frequent type of report, which suggests the lack of information and appropriate capacitation of families to provide care and strengthen relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cachina AMP (16) 2016. Dissertation Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte</td>
<td>Neglect was the most reported type of violence, followed by physical, psychological, and financial abuse, abandonment, and self-neglect. More women than men were identified as victims. Family members were identified as offenders and most of them were sons of victims.</td>
<td>Reports coming from healthcare services were not significant, which shows the need for investment in communication among services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lopes LGF (17) 2016. Dissertation Federal University of Pernambuco</td>
<td>In Caruaru, a city in the state of Pernambuco, 231 cases of violence were reported from 2009 to 2015, with a prevalence of men aged between 60 and 69 years. Married older people were those who most suffered violence. Most cases of violence occurred at homes, with a prevalence of physical abuse.</td>
<td>Being a pioneering study in the city of Caruaru, the data presented may serve as a basis for the development of interventions required for health promotion and prevention, with the purpose of promoting better quality of life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siqueira ACBS (18) 2016. Thesis Federal University of Paraíba</td>
<td>Elderly women suffered more violence than elderly men. Regarding aggressors, it was found a prevalence of daughters of victims, followed by sons in some cases. Consumption of drugs and alcohol were triggers of violence by male caregivers.</td>
<td>Violence practiced against older people by caregivers may be caused by factors such as stress, consumption of drugs and alcohol, social isolation, and assurance of impunity. Therefore, psychic, social, and legal factors may cause the non-recognition of the elderly victims.</td>
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Source: Created by the authors.

Regarding aggressors’ profile, the main abusers were family members, with a prevalence of sons, followed by partners and other members, such as daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, and grandchildren (13,16). One study identified victims’ children as main abusers, followed by grandchildren (15). In this context, it was found that aggressors were heavy users of illicit drugs and alcohol, factors that may maximize aggressiveness and maltreatment (11,18). Aggressors living in the same house with the elderly, being informal caregivers (18), being unemployed, and being financially dependent on elderly victims to have
money and meet their needs were considered triggers of aggressiveness\(^\text{14}\).

Unemployment, as an isolated cause, is not a condition for violence; however, it may generate stress, weaken self-esteem, and lead to scarcity of financial resources, thus becoming a risk factor for the occurrence of financial abuse, since older people have secured resources\(^\text{14}\).

The abusive use of drugs and alcohol is combined with financial dependence of aggressors on older people, as well as the fact of living in the same house or property\(^\text{19}\). The affective relationship between aggressors and the elderly must be also considered, which silences victims when facing a situation of violence, making them afraid that their aggressors will be punished\(^\text{16}\). In addition, elderly victims of violence may fear reprisals, be afraid of ending up in nursing homes, blame themselves for generating conflict, and be ashamed of their situation. This silence may affect victims’ physical and mental health\(^\text{20}\).

In addition, conservative values, conditioned and preserved by older elderly victims were reasons for young people’s questionings, who broke and threatened the authority of the elderly, generating intergenerational conflicts, which may lead to the occurrence of different types of abuse against older people\(^\text{20}\).

Regarding types of violence suffered, psychological abuse, abandonment or neglect, and financial and physical abuse are included\(^\text{14,17}\). Aggressors find psychological abuse milder than physical abuse\(^\text{14}\). Financial abuse occurs when there is a relationship of trust between victims and aggressors. In most cases, it happened when older people lived with family members users of drugs and alcohol, who made use of the elderly’s retirement to sustain their addiction\(^\text{16}\).

Regarding physical abuse, aggressors often refused to recognize it, justifying it with relativity.

Regarding aggressors’ feelings, they showed repentance for their acts and, in other cases, they did not see them as acts of aggression\(^\text{14}\). Aggressors always showed the need for ending the process and returning to their normal lives, such as working, studying, and having a home. Desire for reconciliation with the elderly and quitting all disagreements were observed, thus showing duplicity of feelings with the situation\(^\text{11}\).

Family relationships must be fully considered, as well as the history of violence, because they mostly lived in an environment permeated by this type of constraint, thus reproducing what they received and witnessed throughout their lives\(^\text{11}\). The lack of preparation of aggressors for the aging of their parents and other family members was also identified in studies\(^\text{11-13}\).

Most caregivers were not trained and never had/showed/self-reported the intention to perform this role. This role requires continuous care and commitment, because it requires leaving/abdicating one’s own duties and daily living in order to enter and be part of other individual’s life, someone who has completely different habits and needs\(^\text{18}\).

Therefore, in this family structure (elderly and informal caregivers/aggressors), even if aggressions occur in the family environment, instances associated with the care and protection for older people, such as healthcare services, welfare, social, and legal assistance services, must be communicated for the decision making regarding aggressors, with the aim of controlling situations, since, many times, are recurrent\(^\text{19}\).

It is worth mentioning that older people are the most affected members with the disruption of a family environment, being the government’s role to intervene and protect their interests. However, there is still a lack of effectiveness in these services, generating complex situations of difficult solution for those who are in charge of providing assistance, such as professionals of the primary health care, welfare, and legal area\(^\text{21}\).

In spite of the importance to understand the needs of aggressors of older people, with the aim to establish appropriate interventions, few studies on the theme were found in the databases searched in the present study. This lack of studies allowed confirming the few number of studies that specifically approach the condition of aggressors, which was a limitation identified in the present study. In addition, most of the studies analyzed were categorized as evidence
level IV, showing the need for more consistent studies on the theme.

**Conclusion**

Regarding types of study, there was a prevalence of the qualitative approach, which presents a low evidence level. The studies analyzed indicated victims’ children as the main abusers. Most of them reported repentance for their acts. The most common disruptive factor for these acts was the use of alcohol and drugs, unemployment, history of family violence, closeness between aggressors and victims, and dependence on one of the parts, especially financial.

In conclusion, evidence on aggressors in cases of violence against older people in the studies researched was limited to their profile, type of violence practiced, and feelings regarding the act of violence, showing that this condition has a strong association with family structure and functioning.

Therefore, prevention of violence against older people is a challenge for healthcare professionals, due to the difficulty in identifying cases to provide the necessary care and adopting other appropriate measures. It is worth mentioning that, in these situations, aggressors’ needs must be recognized, so more effective interventions are adopted, from both healthcare services and other sectors involved with the care for older people.

Due to the complexity of violence against older people, further studies on the theme should be carried out, with the purpose of bringing more evidence to contribute to the adoption of measures to prevent and reduce the consequences from this issue.

**Collaboration:**

1. conception, design, analysis, and interpretation of data: Miriam Fernanda Sanches Alarcon, Daniela Garcia Damaceno, Luzmarina Aparecida Doretto Bracciali, Viviane Boacnin Yoneda Sponchiado, and Maria José Sanches Marin;
2. writing of the article and relevant critical review of the intellectual content: Miriam Fernanda Sanches Alarcon, Daniela Garcia Damaceno, Luzmarina Aparecida Doretto Bracciali, Viviane Boacnin Yoneda Sponchiado, and Maria José Sanches Marin.

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Received: September 26, 2018
Approved: July 1, 2019
Published: November 13, 2019