
EVALUATING THE SOMATIC IMPAIRMENTS IN THE ELDERLY: PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE 10/66-DEMENTIA RESEARCH GROUP PREVALENCE STUDY IN PORTUGAL.

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Background: Somatic comorbidities are common among elderly patients with mental health problems, namely dementia and depression. Quite often, somatic problems are associated with a substantial impairment in daily routines, as well as to a worse outcome of the neuropsychiatric condition.

Objectives: to investigate the level of impairment due to comorbid somatic problems in the elderly, as part of the implementation of the 10/66-Dementia Research Group Population-based Research Protocol in Portuguese settings.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey was implemented of all residents aged 65 in a semi-rural area in Southern Portugal. Evaluation included a cognitive module and the Geriatric Mental State-AGECAT (GDS). Training of the field researchers was conducted with the supervision of the 10/66-DRG coordinators (CF, MP).

Results: 703 elderly participants were evaluated. Interference with daily activities was present in every area assessed, with moderate to severe impact in the following areas: Arthritis or rheumatism (36,9%), eyesight problems (19,8%), hypertension (10,5%) and gastro-intestinal conditions (10,4%). 48,9% of the participants had at least one contact with a primary care health centre in the last three months, and 22,5% had at least one contact with a doctor in a general hospital.

Conclusions: Results showed a relevant degree of impairment due to somatic conditions, and a high use of services, namely at primary care level. The significant prevalence of comorbid somatic conditions should be taken into account regarding the organization of services directed to older patients with mental health problems, that has been considered a priority in the Portuguese Mental Health Plan 2007-2016.