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Original article

Nutritional status in the oldest elderly and associated factors*

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To verify factors associated with nutritional status in an oldest elderly community-dwelling population in Southern Brazil.

Methods: This cross-sectional epidemiological and household-based study involved all subjects (n = 134) aged \geq 80 years who were living in Antônio Carlos (Santa Catarina state, Brazil). Nutritional status was assessed by body mass index (BMI < 22.0 kg/m², underweight; BMI > 27.0 kg/m², overweight). Explanatory variables in the study were: gender (women/men), literacy (knows how to write and read – yes/no), living conditions (lives alone/with company), cognitive function (normal/altered), eating difficulty (yes/no), medication use (none to two/three or more), morbidity (none to two/three or more diseases), alimentary pattern (adequate/inadequate), alcohol consumption (none to one day a week, two or more days a week), cigarette smoking (never/current or former smoker), physical activity level (< 150 min/week; \geq 150 min/week), and sitting time (< 4 hours/day; \geq 4 hours but < 6 hours/day).

Results: Prevalence of underweight was 27.3% in men and 12.8% in women (p < 0.01), and was positively associated with altered cognitive function (OR: 3.52) and inversely related with greater medication use (OR: 0.34). Overweight affected 25.5% of men and 53.8% of women. It was negatively associated with illiteracy (OR: 0.12) and positively associated with female gender (OR: 2.58).

Conclusion: There are differences between men and women regarding nutritional status. The factors associated to nutritional status of the oldest elderly from Antônio Carlos are specific to the vulnerability condition (underweight and overweight).

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Estado nutricional de idosos longevos e fatores associados

RESUMO

Palavras-chave: Índice de massa corporal Idoso de 80 anos ou mais Baixo peso Sobrepeso Objetivo: Verificar os fatores associados ao estado nutricional de uma população de idosos longevos vivendo em comunidade no sul do Brasil.

Métodos: Este estudo epidemiológico, transversal, de base domiciliar, envolveu todos os idosos (n = 134), com idade \geq 80 anos, residentes no município de Antônio Carlos (Santa Catarina). O estado nutricional foi verificado por meio do índice de massa corporal: (IMC < 22,0 kg/m², baixo peso; IMC > 27,0, excesso de peso). As variáveis exploratórias do estudo foram: sexo, saber ler e escrever (sim/não); arranjo familiar (mora só/acompanhado); função cognitiva (normal/alterada); dificuldade para comer (sim/não); uso de medicamentos (0-2/3 ou mais); morbidades (0-2/3 ou mais), padrão alimentar (adequado/não adequado); consumo de bebidas alcoólicas (0-1 dia/sem. ou 2 ou mais dias/sem); tabagismo (nunca/fumante ou ex-fumante); nível de atividade física (< 150 min./sem.; \geq 150 min./sem.); tempo sentado (< 4 horas/dia; \geq 4 horas mas < 6 horas/dia; \geq 6 horas/dia).

Resultados: A prevalência de baixo peso foi de 27,3% nos homens e 12,8% nas mulheres (p < 0,01) e foi positivamente associada à função cognitiva alterada (OR: 3,52) e inversamente relacionada ao uso de mais medicamentos (OR: 0,34). O excesso de peso afetou 25,5% dos homens e 53,8% das mulheres e foi negativamente associado a não saber ler (OR: 0,12) e positivamente associado ao sexo feminino (OR: 2,58).

Conclusão: Existem diferenças no estado nutricional de homens e mulheres. Os fatores associados ao estado nutricional dos idosos longevos de Antônio Carlos são específicos à condição de vulnerabilidade (baixo peso e excesso de peso).

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Introduction

In the elderly population, underweight and overweight are important issues to be considered.¹⁻³ Many factors appear to contribute to the nutritional condition evidenced with aging. Physical or physiologic problems related to chewing, digestion and absorption of food, lack of appetite or motivation to prepare meals, and difficulty accessing or preparing meals, among others factors, can contribute to underweight.⁴ In addition, smoking, alcohol consumption, and excessive use of medication also play a role in malnutrition.⁵⁻⁷ Conversely, lifestyle (sedentary behavior, physical inactivity, poor diet), hormonal changes, and diseases can contribute to overweight.^{2,5}

Considering the seriousness of underweight and overweight in elderly people, it is important that an evaluation contemplating the different dimensions of health conditions and lifestyle should be conducted to identify the factors that affect nutritional status and, possibly, to develop strategies to promote health and quality of life. Although there are different procedures to evaluate the nutritional status in the elderly, the body mass index (BMI) is commonly used in epidemiological studies, ^{3,5,8–10} having the advantage of being simple, easy to apply, and noninvasive.

There are few studies that address the nutritional status of the oldest elderly population in Brazilian communities. Studies on the elderly aged 60 years and above living in larger urban centers and small municipalities^{3,9,10-12} have demonstrated that factors related to nutritional status vary, highlighting the need for more studies on the factors associated with underweight and overweight in the oldest elderly.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the association between nutritional status and socio-demographic variables, health conditions, and lifestyle of an oldest elderly community-dwelling population in Southern Brazil.

Methods

Area of study

The city of Antônio Carlos (229 km²) is located 30 km from the capital of the state of Santa Catarina, in Southern Brazil. Data from the 2010 census found 7,458 inhabitants, and 12.8% (n = 936) were over 60 years of age. ¹³ The city has good health and quality of life indicators, presenting high (0.827) Human Development Index (HDI). ¹⁴ Antônio Carlos has one health service unit, located downtown, which attends individuals of all ages. Three Family Health Program (FHP) teams (composed by one doctor, one nurse, auxiliary nurses, and community health agents) cover the entire town. This program aims to increase population access to primary care. ¹⁵

Delineation and attendees

This was a cross-sectional and epidemiological study of a household-based population, which uses part of the initial data of the "Effectiveness of health actions, physical activity and nutrition in the elderly of Antônio Carlos – SC" (SAÚDE-AC) research. ^{16,17}

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