

# PROMOTING ACTIVE AND HEALTHY AGING THROUGH MULTI-PRONGED PUBLIC HEALTH STRATEGIES

## PROMOÇÃO DO ENVELHECIMENTO ATIVO E SAUDÁVEL ATRAVÉS DE ESTRATÉGIAS DE SAÚDE PÚBLICA MULTIFACETADAS

M. Melo

In this issue of the PsychTech & Health Journal, a set of articles is presented that mainly address problems that currently represent challenges for public health. Overall, the need for early identification of syndromes associated with significant loss of functionality and quality of life stands out. It is also relevant to know the determinants that guide actions to promote quality of life and highlight the advantages of active ageing. The works we publish add to the scientific evidence that can guide support and face the problems that now represent a challenge in Public Health.

Ageing is an inherent reality for all living beings, but each uniquely experiences this phase. For some, it means only the passing of time measured by chronology. For others, it implies restrictions resulting from health problems. In recent years, the concept of “active ageing”, proposed by the World Health Organization, emphasizes the importance of preserving autonomy, physical and mental health, well-being, and social participation throughout life. This optimistic view of old age can sometimes be associated with genetic factors. However, it is shown that healthy lifestyle habits throughout life are determinants for harmonious ageing.

Considering that cognitive impairment is a risk factor for functional loss and institutionalization, and taking into account the increasing number of older adults worldwide, strategies

for promoting active ageing must contemplate brain health, among other aspects to be considered. In this sense, the existing evidence reinforces the need to stimulate regular physical exercise and monitor metabolic and hormonal factors throughout the life cycle. These actions, when incorporated into health promotion programs for the elderly, can decisively impact the delay of cognitive decline. The increase in life expectancy brings challenges and opportunities, such as the possibility of healthier and more autonomous ageing. It is necessary to advance research that clarifies the cellular and molecular mechanisms involved so that interventions of a higher level of evidence can be implemented in multilateral public policies. Only then will we be able to offer the elderly truly promising perspectives for the coming decades.

One of the articles addresses the prevalence of main geriatric syndromes in community-dwelling older adults in northern Minas Gerais (MG), Brazil. It assessed the association between syndromes and gender. The most prevalent syndromes were immobility, urinary incontinence, and postural instability. Women had significantly higher rates of immobility, urinary incontinence, and postural instability compared to men.

Another study evaluated syndromes in older adults followed in a health reference centre in MG, Brazil. Some key research

projects have highlighted the associations with the female sex, advanced age, low body mass index, and lower education. Other aspects that need particular attention are the association between different syndromes related to vitamin D and testosterone levels and their health consequences. The published results tend to corroborate with others that have evidenced that higher testosterone levels are associated with better scores on memory, attention, and executive function tests.

Public health policies significantly influence the health of a population. A critical element that demands attention is the role of physical activity. Researchers in Brazil have been mainly focused on the impact of regular physical activity on enhancing overall health, mitigating chronic diseases, and fostering mental well-being. Physical activity contributes to weight control and reduces the risk of cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, and certain types of cancer. It fortifies bones and muscles, improves mental health and mood, and enhances longevity. Considering the substantial evidence supporting these health benefits, it's evident that physical activity should be a cornerstone of public health policies. However, despite the known benefits, many people do not get the recommended amount of physical activity. This is where public health policies have to come into play. Policies can create environments that make it easier for people to engage in physical activity. Through initiatives like creating safe and accessible recreational facilities, promoting active transportation, implementing school physical education programs, and launching public awareness campaigns about the benefits of physical activity, this can be achieved.

Moreover, public health policies can also address disparities in physical activity levels among different groups. For instance, they can aim to increase access to physical activity opportunities in underprivileged areas or tailor programs to meet the needs of specific

populations such as the elderly, children, or those with disabilities. It is safe to say that physical activity is a vital component of a healthy lifestyle, and public health policies have a significant role in promoting it. Public health policies can prioritize physical activity, which can contribute to healthier, happier, and more productive societies.

The development of mobile applications for assessing various syndromes represents an exciting advancement in healthcare technology. The concept of developing mobile applications for the assessment of various syndromes is an innovative approach to healthcare. By providing easily accessible, user-friendly tools for self-assessment and monitoring, we can empower individuals to take an active role in their health and well-being. This not only has the potential to improve individual health outcomes but could also significantly impact public health as a whole. These applications could provide easily accessible tests and scales used for screening, diagnosing, and monitoring conditions such as cognitive impairment, falls, incontinence, and frailty. With technological advances, new ways to help people control their health status are in need.

Mobile applications can potentially revolutionize how we approach multiple health issues. They can provide a platform for regular self-assessment, enabling early detection and intervention. These devices are essential for conditions like cognitive impairment and frailty, where early detection can significantly improve outcomes. For instance, an app could include a series of cognitive tests that users can complete at their convenience. The results could be tracked over time to monitor any changes or trends. If any health parameter is declined, the app could alert the user and suggest they seek medical advice. It is necessary to keep in mind that despite the reluctance of some, these apps can be trusted as health indicators to seek help from adequately

trained healthcare providers. They are instruments for self-checks for balance and mobility or questionnaires to assess the frequency of different health domains. Again, tracking these results over time would allow for the early detection of any issues, and the app could advise when to seek further medical help.

Moreover, these apps could also include educational material to help users understand their conditions better and tips and exercises to help manage their symptoms. They could even connect users to support groups or healthcare professionals for further assistance. It is important to note that while these apps could be a valuable tool, they should not replace professional medical advice. They should be used as a supplement to regular healthcare, providing users with additional resources and support.

Modern lifestyles, characterized by rapid technological advancements, urbanization, and changing societal norms, have imposed new and more intensive burdens on families, particularly marital couples and their children. Firstly, the rise of dual-income households has increased stress and less time for family interaction. Both partners working full-time often struggle to balance their professional responsibilities with their roles as parents and spouses. Feelings of guilt, stress, and exhaustion can strain relationships and negatively impact children's upbringing, which may result from this reality. Secondly, the advent of technology, while beneficial in many ways, has also introduced challenges. The pervasive use of smartphones, tablets, and computers often leads to decreased face-to-face interaction among family members. This digital divide can hinder emotional bonding and lead to feelings of isolation. Thirdly, societal expectations and norms have evolved. There is increasing pressure to 'have it all' - a successful career, a happy marriage, well-rounded children, and a fulfilling personal life. These expectations can create a sense of inadequacy and stress,

particularly when reality does not align with these ideals. Lastly, modern lifestyles often involve living in urban environments, away from extended family support. This lack of a broader support network can pressure marital couples as they navigate parenting and relationship challenges.

In response to these challenges, families must prioritize open communication, quality time together, and self-care. Employers can also promote family-friendly policies, such as flexible working hours and parental leave. Society needs to acknowledge and address these pressures, working towards solutions supporting modern families' health and well-being.

In the present number of *PsychTech & Health Journal*, the articles discuss relevant issues to be considered by public health policymakers to attend to the present needs of families in the context of societal transformations. Changes in family structures, the job market, and social patterns have introduced new challenges for parents and children. Factors such as double shifts, excessive technology use, and pressure for unrealistic ideals of achievement have increased stress levels and isolation.

Families play a fundamental role in individuals' emotional support. However, they also need outside support, given the intensifications imposed by today's pace of life. Public policies, companies, and the community must foster environments that promote high-quality, balanced family bonding and life. Leaders and society must recognize the difficulties families face and provide solutions that genuinely meet their contemporary needs to strengthen families and the health of their members.

While not without limitations, the studies we now publish shed light on important topics with implications for policies to support modern families through a challenging period of societal transition. More research would further elucidate associated factors and their

impacts over time, informing multilayered, family-centred public health strategies. Ultimately, attention to families' well-being should remain a priority given their central role in individuals' and communities' health and development.

As populations continue expanding their average lifespans, promoting healthy ageing will require innovative public health solutions

addressing physical, mental, and social dimensions. The studies highlight key ageing-related issues and populations in need of tailored support. With an ongoing commitment to research-informed, collaborative strategies empowering older individuals and families, we can work to ensure these added years are lived with dignity and quality.