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The Oldest Old: Gender Differences in Mental and Physical Functional Status

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Introduction: The World Health Organization recognizes the gender as an ageing determinant. Thus, apart from biological differences, there is a need of a gender approach in health that includes an analysis of how differences in gender roles affect the health status.

Objective: To assess the functional status in two areas of the elderly's life (mental and physical health), analyzing the impact of gender as a determinant of health in aging.

Methods: Quantitative and descriptive study. Probabilistic sample stratified by age, gender and area of residence, constituted by 1153 older persons aged ≥ 75 years (N=16474), consisting of 422 men (36.6%) and 731 women (63.4%). The instrument for data collection was the Questionário de Avaliação Funcional Multidimensional para Idosos/Older Americans Resources and Services (QAFMI/OARS).

Results: With regard to gender differences in the areas of physical and mental health the results evaluated with the QAFMI/OARS model stand women with worse scores in this two functional areas. Although men, and especially the older age group, mentioned that have had more need for a physician visit. Related to mental health the self-evaluation is worse in women, and also in the assessment of the QAFMI/OARS model, were it was a notorious difference between genders, observing a decline in mental health among women.

Conclusions: The feminization of aging implies an adequate public policies and the organization of health services, and social support, based on the understanding of the differences between aging as a man and as woman.