

# Elderly People in Times of Pandemic: Analysis of User Satisfaction With a Health Prevention Program Against COVID-19

Pessoas Idosas em Tempo de Pandemia: Análise da Satisfação Dos(as) Usuários(as) com um Programa de Prevenção para a Saúde Frente à COVID-19

Personas Mayores en Tiempos de Pandemia: Análisis de La Satisfacción de los Usuarios con un Programa de Prevención Sanitaria Frente a La COVID-19

## RESUMO

**Introdução:** O crescimento do número de pessoas idosas é um ganho para a sociedade, porém um desafio, quando se trata de países em desenvolvimento. Questões de saúde estão entre as que mais afetam os idosos, tornando-os um dos grupos principais do sistema de saúde. O surgimento da pandemia por COVID-19, afetou da forma mais enfática, os idosos. Diante disso, formulou-se ações de proteção específicas para essa população, entre elas o isolamento social e a prioridade para vacinação. Porém, observou-se que esse grupo fragilizado por patologias crônicas necessitava de acompanhamento mais de perto e contínuo, a fim de orientar, prevenir, tratar os agravos causados de forma direta ou indireta pela ação do COVID-19. Diante desse desafio, as equipes de saúde foram instigadas a desenvolver formas de alcançar os idosos mantendo o distanciamento. O telessaúde é uma recurso tecnológico de comunicação por de aparelhos como o celular e o telefone visando promover ações em saúde. Ele não é uma novidade nas ações de educação em saúde, porém era pouco utilizado com idosos, durante a pandemia foi adaptado para a intervenção com essa população. **Objetivo:** Analisar a satisfação dos(as) usuários(as) idosos(as) sobre a experiência durante a participação em um programa de telessaúde para prevenção e cuidado frente à Covid-19. **Método:** O percurso metodológico utilizou abordagem qualitativa, por abranger de forma mais eficaz a proposta da pesquisa. Seguindo a técnica da Análise de Conteúdo, foram analisadas 54 entrevistas, que foram realizadas ao final do programa. **Resultados:** Das análises das entrevistas, emergiram categorias que agregaram conteúdo sobre a experiência positiva e de satisfação em relação ao conhecimento adquirido, o espaço de escuta ofertado pelos encontros, inclusão social, bem como sobre dificuldades relacionadas ao uso de tecnologias remotas, duração do programa, ética na pesquisa científica e etarismo. **Conclusão:** Os resultados são de importância para o cuidado com as pessoas idosas, visto que o conhecimento gerado sobre a experiência com uma tecnologia educacional baseada no Telessaúde tem o potencial de orientar futuros projetos e abordagens direcionados ao público idoso, ampliando a possibilidade de uma oferta adequada de cuidado.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** covid-19; idoso; satisfação; telessaúde.

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The increasing number of elderly people is a societal gain, yet it presents a challenge, particularly in developing countries. Health issues are among the primary concerns affecting older adults, positioning them as a key group within the healthcare system. The COVID-19 pandemic had a particularly significant impact on the elderly. Consequently, specific protective measures were developed for this population, including social isolation and vaccination priority. However, it became evident that this vulnerable group, often affected by chronic conditions, required closer and continuous monitoring to guide, prevent, and treat the direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19. Faced with this challenge, healthcare teams were encouraged to develop strategies to reach older adults while maintaining social distancing. Telehealth emerged as a technological communication tool, utilizing devices such as mobile phones and telephones to promote health initiatives. While

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not new to health education practices, telehealth was rarely used with older adults before the pandemic and was subsequently adapted for intervention with this demographic. **Aim:** To analyze the satisfaction of elderly participants regarding their experience in a telehealth program focused on prevention and care during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Method:** The methodological approach adopted a qualitative design, as it effectively addressed the research objectives. Following the Content Analysis technique, 54 interviews conducted at the end of the program were examined. **Results:** From these interviews, categories emerged that highlighted positive experiences and satisfaction related to acquired knowledge, the listening space provided by the meetings, social inclusion, as well as challenges associated with using remote technologies, program duration, research ethics, and ageism. **Conclusion:** The results hold significant implications for the care of the elderly, as the insights gained from their experience with an educational technology based on telehealth can guide future projects and approaches targeting this population, thereby expanding the potential for providing appropriate care.

**KEYWORDS:** covid-19; elderly; satisfaction; telehealth.

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** El aumento del número de personas mayores es una ganancia para la sociedad, pero un desafío cuando se trata de países en desarrollo. Las cuestiones de salud están entre las que más afectan a los adultos mayores, convirtiéndolos en uno de los grupos principales del sistema de salud. El surgimiento de la pandemia de COVID-19 afectó de manera más significativa a los adultos mayores. Frente a esto, se formularon acciones de protección específicas para esta población, entre ellas el aislamiento social y la prioridad para la vacunación. Sin embargo, se observó que este grupo, ya vulnerable por patologías crónicas, necesitaba un acompañamiento más cercano y continuo, con el fin de orientar, prevenir y tratar los agravios causados de manera directa o indirecta por la acción del COVID-19. Ante este desafío, los equipos de salud fueron incentivados a desarrollar formas de alcanzar a los adultos mayores manteniendo el distanciamiento. La telesalud es un recurso tecnológico de comunicación a través de dispositivos como el celular y el teléfono, con el objetivo de promover acciones en salud. No es una novedad en las acciones de educación en salud, pero su uso con adultos mayores era limitado; durante la pandemia, se adaptó para la intervención con esta población. **Objetivo:** Analizar la satisfacción de los usuarios mayores sobre la experiencia durante su participación en un programa de telesalud para la prevención y el cuidado frente al COVID-19.

**Método:** El enfoque metodológico utilizó un enfoque cualitativo, por ser más eficaz para abordar la propuesta de la investigación. Siguiendo la técnica de Análisis de Contenido, se analizaron 54 entrevistas realizadas al final del programa. **Resultados:** Del análisis de las entrevistas emergieron categorías que agregaron contenido sobre la experiencia positiva y la satisfacción respecto al conocimiento adquirido, el espacio de escucha ofrecido por los encuentros, la inclusión social, así como las dificultades relacionadas con el uso de tecnologías remotas, la duración del programa, la ética en la investigación científica y el etarismo. **Conclusión:** Los resultados son importantes para el cuidado de las personas mayores, ya que el conocimiento generado sobre la experiencia con una tecnología educativa basada en telesalud tiene el potencial de orientar futuros proyectos y enfoques dirigidos al público mayor, ampliando la posibilidad de una oferta adecuada de cuidado.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** COVID-19; adulto mayor; satisfacción; telesalud.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Population aging in Brazil and around the world has grown significantly, highlighting the need to deepen our understanding of the aging process and its implications for quality of life. This phenomenon has significant social impacts, especially in societies where youth is valued over old age, which is often associated with unproductivity and incapacity.<sup>1-4</sup>

In addition, illness is the main challenge faced by elderly people. As age advances, the chances of developing pathologies increase, which, due to the fragility inherent to aging, can

lead to disabilities and be more lethal.<sup>1,5</sup> Thus, aging is associated with the emergence of chronic diseases and greater vulnerability to infectious diseases, such as Covid-19, which has impacted the physical and mental health of the world's population since 2019.<sup>6,7</sup>

This disease has had its greatest impact on the elderly, increasing mortality rates and causing significant disabilities. The Sars-CoV-2 virus responsible for the disease was initially identified in Wuhan, China, in 2019, and quickly spread around the world, leading the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare the disease a

pandemic in March 2020.<sup>8</sup> In Brazil, the most affected regions were the North and Northeast, which faced greater difficulties in accessing healthcare due to precarious infrastructure and territorial extension.<sup>9,10</sup>

In Brazil, the most affected regions were the North and Northeast, which faced greater difficulties in accessing healthcare due to precarious infrastructure and territorial extension.<sup>8,11</sup> To mitigate these effects, strategies such as telehealth were developed, which proved to be an effective alternative for maintaining remote monitoring and health education.<sup>12</sup>

However, telehealth is not a new

tool, but it has gained prominence during this period due to its ability to enable remote care in a safe manner. Its service modalities include teleconsultations, tele-education, and telemonitoring, using technologies such as videoconferencing, telephone calls and instant messaging.<sup>13,14</sup> The Telessaúde Brasil Program, established in 2010, already aimed to qualify family health teams.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, adapting to telehealth during the pandemic was essential to reduce exposure to the virus and ensure continuous care, especially for the elderly, the group most vulnerable to Covid-19.<sup>16,17</sup> However, there are still barriers to access and adherence, such as difficulty using technologies and lack of familiarity with digital resources.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, user satisfaction is a fundamental criterion for evaluating the effectiveness of telehealth strategies. It reflects the individual perception of the service offered and can be measured by qualitative and quantitative methods.<sup>18</sup> This fact is increasingly present as studies indicate that there are initial difficulties for the elderly in reporting good acceptance of telehealth, especially when there is no adequate support for the use of technological tools, whether due to factors of age, health, gender or other personal situations (Mao et al., 2022; Schin-feling et al., 2020).

Therefore, it is crucial to further research on the satisfaction of older adults with telehealth programs, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding this perception can contribute to improving health practices and developing more inclusive and effective strategies to promote the health of this population group. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the satisfaction of older adults regarding their experience during participation in a telehealth program for prevention and care against COVID-19.

## METHOD

This is a qualitative exploratory study that seeks to understand the subjectivity of the group studied and their behavioral peculiarities within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The qualitative approach allows us to capture individual and social motivations, which are fundamental for analyzing the impact of the interventions carried out. For content analysis, the Bardin methodology was used<sup>21</sup>, which includes the steps of transcription, categorization and interpretation of data.

The data were obtained from the project "Prevention Program for Elderly Health in the Face of the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Municipality of Recife", approved by Propesq Call for Proposals No. 06/2020. The study focuses on the "60+ at Home Covid-19 Program" stage, which served elderly people monitored by Family Health Teams (EqSF) in the 8 Health Districts of Recife. The program included 8 teleconsultants with postgraduate degrees in Gerontology, serving a total of 160 elderly people through teleconsultations conducted via Microsoft Teams®. The consultations were structured to assess sociodemographic factors, health conditions, family and community functionality, as well as knowledge and practices of Covid-19 prevention.

The intervention included 12 weekly meetings addressing topics such as social isolation, community support, spirituality, COVID-19 prevention, nutrition and physical activity. The impact was assessed through qualitative interviews with 63 elderly individuals, exploring perceptions about the experience, contributions to health care and suggestions for improvement.

Elderly individuals with 100% participation in the meetings were included. Interviews with insufficient content for analysis were excluded, resulting in a total of 54 interviews

analyzed.

The entire research process was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Health Sciences Center of the Federal University of Pernambuco, opinion No. 4,089,705, in accordance with Resolution No. 466/12 and Resolution No. 510/16 of the National Health Council/Ministry of Health.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study was able to observe the sociodemographic profile of the participants of the "60+ at Home Covid-19 Program" (Table 01), highlighting the female predominance and the lower male participation, possibly related to men's neglect of health. 3 The majority of participants belong to the age group of 60 to 69 years, indicating both the greater representation of this age group and the difficulties of older people with technology.<sup>22,23</sup> Furthermore, the lower adherence of elderly people over 80 years of age may be related to fragility resulting from comorbidities.<sup>24,25</sup>

Regarding income, most participants had incomes between 1.1 and 2.9 minimum wages, which can impact the maintenance of basic needs, especially considering that many elderly people are the home providers.<sup>26</sup> Regarding education, there was an increase in the number of literate elderly people, reflecting recent educational advances in Brazil.<sup>27,28</sup> Education, in this sense, is an essential factor in combating social exclusion and ensuring greater protagonism for older people in society.<sup>28,29</sup>

**Table 01 – Characterization of socioeconomic data of elderly people interviewed in the Elderly Health Prevention Program in the Face of the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Municipality of Recife.**

Sociocultural Data	
<b>Sex</b>	
Male	28,2%
Female	71,8%
<b>Age</b>	
60-69	80,3%
70-79	18,3%
More than 80	1,40%
<b>Household Income</b>	
<1 to 1 Minimum Wage	23,9%
1.1 to 2.9 Minimum Wages	50,7%
≥3 Minimum Wages	25,4%
<b>Literacy</b>	
Yes	97,2±%
No	2,8%
<b>Years of Schooling</b>	
0 to 4 years	11,3%
5 to 8 years	26,8%
9 to 11 years	33,8%
12 years or more	28,2%

(Source: Own elaboration)

Furthermore, when evaluating the speech, it is possible to obtain the following responses to key questions from the elderly evaluated by the Elderly Health Prevention Program during the Covid-19 pandemic, in Recife.

**Question 1 - How do you rate your experience with the program?**

#### Prevention and health education in aging

Telehealth was widely used and was well evaluated by the elderly as a health education tool. Guidance on daily habits and preventive measures brought positive impacts.

[...] I consider it good guidance for everyone [...] the need for us to take precautions [...]

Research confirms the effectiveness of telehealth in promoting health and preventing Covid-19.<sup>30,31</sup>

#### Social isolation during the pandemic: loneliness among the elderly

The feeling of loneliness was highlighted, but the program alleviated this feeling by providing interaction and emotional support.

[...] I thought it was great that I wasn't so neglected [...]

[...] Very good! We also talk a litt-

le. It distracts [...]

Loneliness in the elderly is associated with family insufficiency and impacts on quality of life.<sup>32,33</sup> Studies reinforce that support networks and programs such as telehealth help to mitigate these effects.<sup>35</sup>

#### Online meetings as a space for speaking out

The elderly expressed satisfaction at being heard and valued. The listening space had a positive impact on emotional well-being.

[...] It was a huge help, just talking... So it helped me a lot because I was able to talk [...]

Research indicates that, even in the family environment, elderly people often feel isolated, and spaces for talking promote relief and belonging.<sup>36,37</sup>

#### Dissatisfaction: Stereotype of the elderly – Ageism

There was criticism of the form of the questions, perceived as infantilizing. The elderly expressed discomfort with the initial approach.

[...] I thought it was silly. Treating us like we were children [...]

Ageism manifests itself in overprotection and underestimation of the capabilities of the elderly.<sup>38</sup> The program was evaluated positively, especially for the listening space and health promotion, but there was criticism of the initial approach.

**Question 2 - How did the program help?**

#### Knowledge about Covid-19

The elderly highlighted the importance of information for prevention and the intention to pass on what they had learned.

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[...] You helped me a lot, doctor!  
Just like I should prevent myself  
[...]

Professional support was essential to minimize the spread of the disease.<sup>39,40</sup>

## Relief from loneliness

The project served as emotional support, providing comfort and interaction.

[...] It was someone else to talk to, someone else to get to know and it taught me a lot of things. [...]

Loneliness is a risk factor for mental health in older adults and can lead to depression. Support programs are effective in promoting well-being.<sup>41,42</sup>

## Social inclusion

The feeling of invisibility was alleviated by participating in the program.

[...] It helped me not to become invisible. I was invisible [...]

Social inclusion is essential for the dignity and quality of life of the elderly. Public policies and programs are fundamental to this process.<sup>5</sup>

## Quality of life

The elderly reported changes in their habits and greater self-care.

[...] I took better care of myself. You brought me a lot of good things [...]

Quality of life in aging is a widely debated topic, and studies point to the importance of interventions to promote well-being and healthy habits.<sup>43,44</sup>

## Question 3 - What did you like most?

### Elderly people in the digital age

The need for technological adaptation has brought challenges, but some

elderly people have reported positive experiences with teleconsultations.

[...] I had never had a teleconsultation either. And I'm enjoying it [...]

Studies show an increase in the use of digital platforms by seniors during the pandemic.<sup>29</sup>

## Interaction and listening space

Human contact and the possibility of dialogue were valued.

[...] What I liked most was talking [...]

Research indicates that social interaction is essential to facing the challenges of aging.<sup>45</sup>

## Learning moment

The exchange of information was highlighted as one of the main benefits of the program.

[...] The program is full of information [...]

Studies reinforce the importance of educational programs for the elderly.<sup>46</sup>

## Question 4 - What did you like least?

### Difficulty with technologies

Adapting to the use of digital tools was challenging for some participants.

[...] I don't think it's really the teleconsultation's fault. It's just that I don't know about it very well [...]

Research shows the resistance of the elderly to new technologies and the importance of adequate support.<sup>23,45</sup>

### Duration of activities

Some seniors considered the program long.

[...] I found it a little long because

it was divided into many weeks [...]

## Ageism

The wording of the initial questions was criticized for reinforcing ageist stereotypes.

[...] At sixty years old, politicians think we've lost our minds [...]

Ageism manifests itself in various ways, including the underestimation of the capabilities of older people.<sup>47</sup>

## Question 5 - Suggestions

Extension of the program and increase in the frequency of meetings

The interviewees expressed the desire for the program to continue.

[...] I think it should continue [...]

[...] It should be at least twice a week [...]

Telehealth has been recognized as an effective tool in supporting the elderly.<sup>48</sup>

## Program Expansion

Suggestions included expanding to other groups and greater geographic coverage.

[...] I wanted it to be offered to all of Brazil [...]

The pandemic highlighted the need to expand access to health services through telehealth.<sup>47,48</sup>

Analysis of the responses shows that the program had a positive impact, promoting inclusion, information and emotional support, with suggestions for its expansion and continuity.

## CONCLUSION

Telehealth, which has been used for decades in administrative areas, gained

prominence during the Covid-19 pandemic, being integrated into health programs with proven effectiveness in different social groups. This study analyzed the importance of this technology from the perspective of elderly people participating in a health prevention program, allowing them to express their perceptions about the actions planned for this population.

The profile of the participants in the

Elderly Health Prevention Program in Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, in Recife, revealed a predominance of women, aged between 60 and 69 years, with between 9 and 11 years of education and income of 1.1 to 2.9 minimum wages. The interviews showed that the elderly recognized benefits such as learning about Covid-19, support, space to speak and relief from loneliness. However, some reported difficul-

ties, such as language barriers and information that was not appropriate for their level of education.

The findings of this research can contribute to improving care for the elderly population, since the experience with Telehealth offers support for the development of new projects and approaches more appropriate for this audience, expanding access to more inclusive and effective care.

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