

Work in the (Trans)formation of the Quality of Life of Older Adults: An Integrative Review

O Trabalho na (Trans)formação da Qualidade de Vida da Pessoa Idosa: Revisão Integrativa

El Trabajo en la (Trans)formación de la Calidad de Vida de las Personas Mayores: Revisión Integrativa

RESUMO

Objetivo: Analisar a influência da inserção do idoso no mercado de trabalho para promoção da qualidade de vida e envelhecimento saudável. **Método:** Revisão integrativa mediante dados secundários, dos quais foram feitas buscas combinadas em bases de dados, entre 2019 a 2023. **Resultados:** Foram identificados 470 artigos, dos quais onze foram selecionados para análise final. A inserção do idoso no mercado de trabalho é de grande valia para seus aspectos físicos, psicológicos e financeiros. Os idosos ativos e em atividade laboral apresentaram aumento da qualidade de vida, preservando a autonomia pessoal e sentimento de propósito. O desenvolvimento de habilidades e aprendizado auxilia no desenvolvimento de suas faculdades mentais, diminuindo chances de doenças psicológicas e outras comorbidades. **Conclusão:** O trabalho é essencial para a qualidade de vida da pessoa idosa, promovendo autonomia, engajamento social e bem-estar, mas sua inserção no mercado ainda é pouco discutida na saúde, exigindo mais estudos e visibilidade.

DESCRIPTORIOS: Idoso; Envelhecimento; Qualidade de vida; Mercado de trabalho.

ABSTRACT

Objective: To analyze the influence of the inclusion of older adults in the labor market on promoting quality of life and healthy aging. **Method:** Integrative review using secondary data, which were searched in databases between 2019 and 2023. **Results:** A total of 470 articles were identified, of which 11 were selected for final analysis. The inclusion of older adults in the labor market is of great value for their physical, psychological, and financial well-being. Active older adults who are employed have shown an increase in quality of life, preserving personal autonomy and a sense of purpose. The development of skills and learning helps in the development of their mental faculties, reducing the chances of psychological diseases and other comorbidities. **Conclusion:** Work is essential for the quality of life of older adults, promoting autonomy, social engagement, and well-being, but their inclusion in the labor market is still little discussed in health, requiring more studies and visibility.

DESCRIPTORS: Older adults; Aging; Quality of life; Labor market.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Analizar la influencia de la inserción de las personas mayores en el mercado laboral para promover la calidad de vida y el envejecimiento saludable. **Método:** Revisión integradora mediante datos secundarios, para lo cual se realizaron búsquedas combinadas en bases de datos entre 2019 y 2023. **Resultados:** Se identificaron 470 artículos, de los cuales se seleccionaron once para el análisis final. La inserción de las personas mayores en el mercado laboral es de gran valor para sus aspectos físicos, psicológicos y financieros. Las personas mayores activas y en actividad laboral presentaron un aumento de la calidad de vida, preservando la autonomía personal y el sentido de propósito. El desarrollo de habilidades y el aprendizaje contribuyen al desarrollo de sus facultades mentales, lo que reduce las posibilidades de padecer enfermedades psicológicas y otras comorbidades. **Conclusión:** El trabajo es esencial para la calidad de vida de las personas mayores, ya que promueve la autonomía, el compromiso social y el bienestar, pero su inserción en el mercado aún se debate poco en el ámbito de la salud, lo que requiere más estudios y visibilidad.

DESCRIPTORIOS: Personas mayores; Envejecimiento; Calidad de vida; Mercado laboral.

RECEIVED: 07/03/2025 APPROVED: 07/20/2025

How to cite this article: Molina CJF, Sales RVF, Ribeiro EB, Pereira ND, Moura DRO, Santos AL. Work in the (Trans)formation of the Quality of Life of Older Adults: An Integrative Review. *Saúde Coletiva (Edição Brasileira)* [Internet]. 2025 [acesso ano mês dia];15(98):16538-16553. Disponível em: DOI: 10.36489/saudecoletiva.2025v15i98p16538-16553

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INTRODUCTION

Population aging is a global phenomenon, present in both developed and developing countries⁽¹⁾. In Brazil, it is estimated that by 2030, approximately 13.4% of the population will be composed of individuals aged 65 years or older, totaling about 30 million people^(1,2). Given this scenario, important social, economic, political, and health changes are emerging, highlighting the challenge of ensuring that older adults have spaces and opportunities that enable them to experience aging with a better quality of life (QOL)⁽³⁾.

Several aspects have been highlighted in the literature as related to QoL in older adults, including perception of satisfaction with life and health, well-being, social inclusion and sense of belonging, maintenance of functional abilities, ability to manage finances, good emotional state, ability to interact socially, maintenance of cognitive activities, autonomy, family support, security, and being part of the workforce, that is, feeling active^(4,5).

In this sense, the growing participation of the elderly in the economically active population (EAP) in recent decades is a relevant factor, as QoL in this age group is strongly linked to maintaining functionality⁽⁶⁾. Remaining in the labor market after the age of 60 can increase life expectancy, promote self-esteem, identity, and a sense of purpose⁽⁷⁾. Thus, successful aging is relat-

ed to the lifestyle adopted, including physical and mental health and social function, with an emphasis on labor market participation^(8,9). Thus, it can be inferred that work for the elderly can be considered a promoter of physical, mental, and cognitive health, which allows for greater social integration, personal fulfillment, income, and, consequently, QOL⁽³⁾.

As a result, the World Health Organization (WHO) points out in its 2015 World Report on Aging and Health that the ability of older adults to seek employment or be integrated into the labor market contributes to active aging⁽⁷⁾. It is understood that retirement and cessation of work are often linked to declines in physical, psychological, and cognitive abilities, as well as losses in autonomy, independence, social support, and interpersonal relationships^(10,11).

Aware of the importance of work for the quality of life and dignity of older persons, the Statute of Older Persons guarantees, in Article 26, the right to engage in professional activities, respecting the physical, intellectual, and psychological conditions of the individual. In addition, Articles 27 and 28 guarantee the possibility of continuing in the labor market^(12,1). Employment is also a positive factor in controlling diseases associated with aging, since older people who are professionally active tend to use health services less and have a lower incidence of comorbidities and

psychological disorders⁽¹³⁾.

However, although this is a relevant topic in the context of aging and the pressing demand for better QoL among this age group, there is a severe lack of studies on the subject. Therefore, this study aims to understand the inclusion of older adults in the labor market as a tool for promoting QoL and active aging.

METHOD

This is an integrative review based on current scientific production, aiming at the inclusion of the elderly in the labor market as a tool for promoting QOL and active aging. To this end, we used the model proposed by Graner and Cerqueira⁽¹⁴⁾, which establishes the following steps: 1) definition of the theme, formulation of a guiding research question: "What is the importance of the inclusion of older adults in the labor market as a tool for promoting QOL and active aging?" and the outline of descriptors; 2) definition of criteria for inclusion and exclusion of publications; 3) search for studies in databases in order to answer the question, following defined descriptors; 4) selection of publications found, according to the established criteria; 5) analysis of publications to extract data for discussion; 6) writing of the discussion of results and conclusion of the work. The following guiding question was defined: What is the importance of including old-

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er adults in the labor market as a tool for promoting quality of life and active aging? To support the research, the Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS) of the Virtual Health Library (VHL) were used: “Labor Market,” “Quality of Life,” “Aging,” “Work,” and “Elderly.”

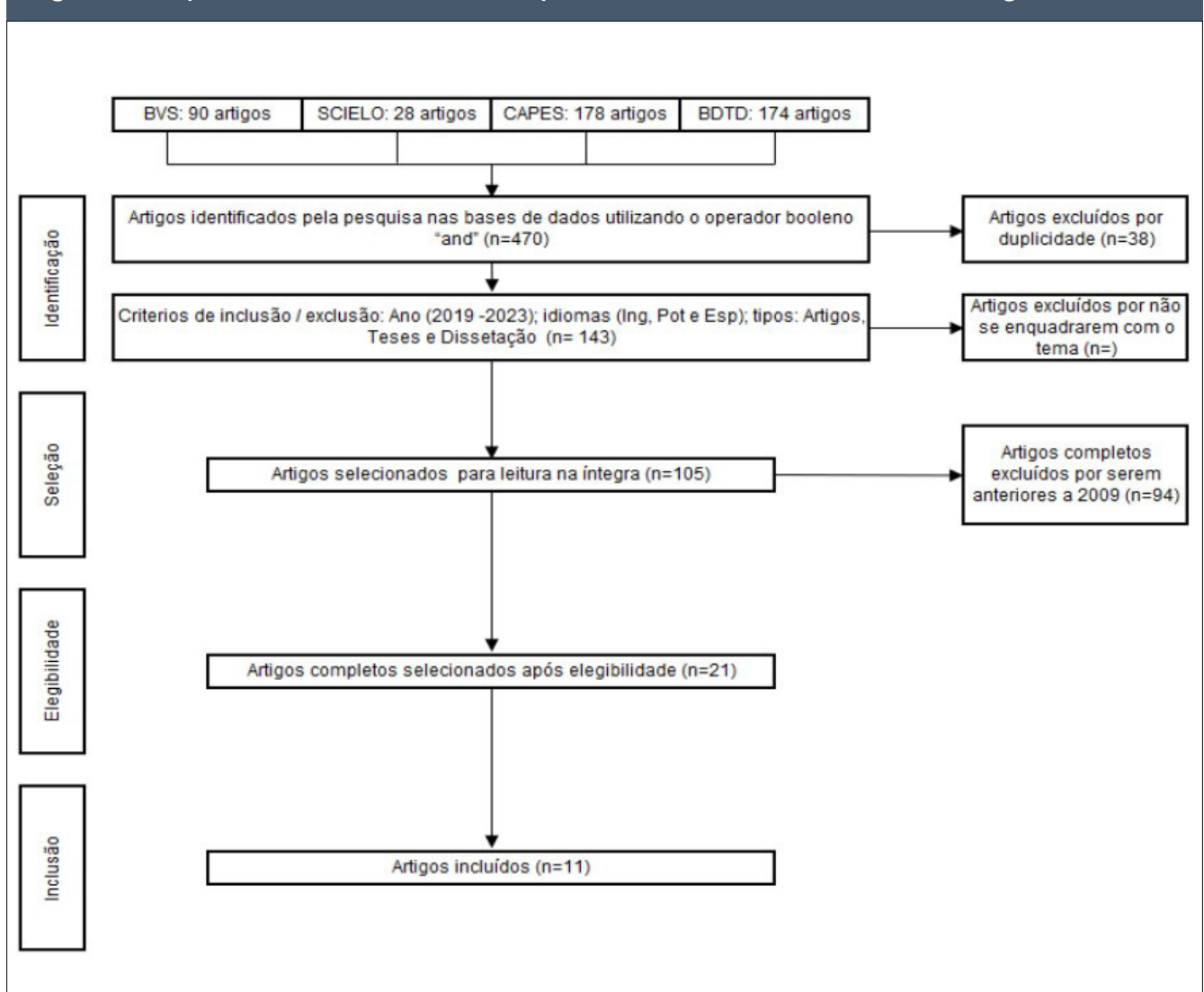
The searches, conducted between April and October 2023, used the Boolean operator “AND”, combining the descriptors in the following databases: Virtual Health Library (BVS), Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and

Dissertations (BDTD), and CAPES Journal Portal. The search strategies were: in BVS, “Elderly” AND “Labor Market” AND “Quality of Life”; in SciELO, “Aging” AND “Work” AND “Quality of Life”; in CAPES, “Aging” AND “Labor Market” AND “Quality of Life”; and in BDTD, “Elderly” AND “Aging” AND “Work.”

For the final selection of publications, the following inclusion criteria were adopted: a) publications with full text available free of charge; b) publications between 2019 and 2023; c) in

English, Portuguese, and Spanish; d) articles, theses, and dissertations related to the research topic. As exclusion criteria, duplicate publications and studies whose focus on aging exceeded the thematic limits of this review were discarded. The organization and presentation of the search process followed the recommendations of the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) model, as illustrated in the flowchart in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Description of the inclusion and exclusion process for articles used in the research. Maringá, Paraná, 2023



Source: Prepared by the authors.

After a preliminary search of the databases with the selected descriptors, the titles and abstracts of articles, theses, and dissertations were screened based on the previously defined criteria. The productions selected in this stage were analyzed in their entirety. The information extracted was submitted to thematic content analysis, according to Bardin's method⁽¹⁵⁾,

structured in four stages: pre-analysis, with exploratory readings and hypothesis formulation; exploration of the material, with thematic categorization; treatment and interpretation of data, balancing objectivity and subjectivity; and, finally, discussion of the results in light of the relevant literature.

RESULTS

Based on the data presented in Figure 1, 11 articles were selected for inclusion in the discussion, with the aim of analyzing the main factors that influence older adults in the labor market as a tool for promoting QoL.

Table 1. Description of the articles used in the research. Maringá, Paraná, 2023

AUTHOR / YEAR	TITLES (translated into English):	COUNTRY / LANGUAGE / DATABASE	METHOD	MAIN RESULTS
FERNANDES-ELOI; DIAS; NUNES; SILVA. 2019	Affects and Perceptions of Elderly University Students Regarding the Labor Market in Old Age	Brazil / Portuguese / VHL	Exploratory, qualitative method. Affective maps were used on people aged between 51 and 71 years old, of both sexes, attending higher education at a private university in Fortaleza, Ceará.	In search of a better quality of life, many older adults enroll in undergraduate courses in order to improve their working conditions, self-esteem, personal fulfillment, renewal, happiness, family security, and independence.
FIALHO; MAFRA; PIO; SILVA; ZANUNCIO. 2019	The Elderly and the Labor Market: An Analysis Based on the 2014 PED in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte	Brazil / Portuguese / VHL	Qualitative and descriptive study involving 3,793 older adults. It used the database of the Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies (DIEESE), with microdata from the Employment and Unemployment Survey (PED) for January to June 2014 in Belo Horizonte.	Depending on the social status of the elderly, remaining in the labor market can be enjoyable or a necessity. Elderly people who need to work to contribute to the family income do not always have a good quality of life.
SILVA; HELAL. 2019	Ageism in Organizations: Questions for Debate	Brazil / English and Portuguese / CAPES	Theoretical Essay. Sought to discuss the causes and effects of ageism, as well as reflecting on discrimination against the inclusion of older people in organizations.	Discusses the aging process and the need to understand this process as a positive phase in which individuals retain their full capacity to develop their autonomy.
ZANUNCIO; MAFRA; FRANÇA; FERREIRA. 2019	Why Continue Working in Old Age? The Case of Hephaestus and His 95 Years	Brazil / English and Portuguese / BDTD	Qualitative exploratory descriptive study using the life history method. Guided by semi-structured interviews with intentionally selected participants. The study was conducted in Viçosa, Minas Gerais.	It states that older people who are active in the labor market bring benefits to their employers, given that young people bring a high level of knowledge and training, while older people with lower levels of training bring extensive experience from previous activities.
CASTRO; LIMA-COSTA; NEVES; ANDRADE; SAMPAIO. 2020	Determinants of Paid Work Among Older Brazilians Using Structural Equation Modeling: Evidence from ELSI-Brazil	Brazil / Portuguese / SciELO	Longitudinal cross-sectional study using data from the baseline survey of the Longitudinal Study of Health in the Brazilian Elderly (ELSI-Brazil). Non-institutionalized elderly Brazilian population, through interviews, between 2015 and 2016. The sample included residents from 70 municipalities in the five regions of the country.	Endogenous and exogenous situations were compared between men and women regarding their permanence in the labor market after age 50, with a higher number of male workers.
SATO; LANCMAN. 2020	Public Policies and the Inclusion of Older Adults in the Brazilian Labor Market	Brazil / Portuguese / BDTD	Qualitative documentary research. A bibliographic survey was conducted on the Capes Periodicals Portal of studies on Brazilian public policies aimed at older people between 2000 and 2020, available in full in Portuguese. There were 416 articles, of which 67 were selected.	Ageism can lead to competition between younger and older workers, generating positive or negative competition in the face of aging, which can have an intrinsic impact on environmental and organizational interaction and functional capacity.

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PAZOS. 2020	Old Age and Work: A Study on the Elderly Worker	Brazil / Portuguese / BDTD	A bibliographic research with a qualitative approach was conducted in the first stage, followed by an empirical study with a group of elderly workers aged 60 and over in Maricá, RJ.	The interviewees themselves suggested that the representativeness of older people in the labor market was the result of many factors, including social participation, contribution to family income, reaffirmation of usefulness, social occupation, and the need to be active.
BATISTA. 2021	Economically Active Elderly and Situations of Violence: A Study on Their Existence and Relations	Brazil / Portuguese / BDTD	Descriptive-exploratory, quantitative, and qualitative field research conducted in Viçosa, Minas Gerais.	Remaining in the labor market can mean economic and personal empowerment for the elderly, in addition to improving their quality of life. However, depending on the type of employment, it can be harmful to health, contributing to violence against elderly workers.
PAGLIARINI; ANASTÁCIO; TANAKA. 2019	The Impact of Quality of Life on Middle-Aged and Elderly Workers: An Integrative Review	Brazil / English and Portuguese / CAPES	Systematic review of integrative literature. Using the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SCIELO), Latin American Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS), PUBMED, and WEB OF SCIENCE databases.	It argues that companies should invest in their employees through occupational therapy so that they can have a good quality of life, while others argue that this aspect develops over the course of a lifetime.
BATISTA; TEIXEIRA. 2021	The Labor Market Scenario for the Elderly and the Violence They Suffer	Brazil / English and Portuguese / VHL	Systematic review of integrative literature. Using the descriptors: "Demographic Aging" AND "Violence" AND "Labor" OR "Workers age". In the Web of Science, Scielo, Pubmed, Science Direct, Scopus, PsychInfo, Jstor, Springer, and Nature databases. Conducted between August 2020 and January 2021.	Active older adults in the labor market generate benefits for maintaining quality of life. It was understood that the violence faced by older adults in the workplace stems from companies' lack of preparation to deal with the situation of these workers.
MACÊDO. 2021	Aging and Work Ability: An Integrative Review	Brazil / Portuguese / BDTD	Integrative review, without meta-analysis, conducted in the Scielo, PubMED, and LILACS databases, including studies in Portuguese, English, and Spanish.	The study showed that work is a determinant of quality of life in older adults, especially when they are given the right to choose whether to continue working or not.

Results of the qualitative approach

Through the analysis of the articles found, it was possible to understand the benefits of including older adults in the labor market in the context of improving their QoL and well-being. To this end, the results were grouped into two major thematic units: Integration into the labor market as a catalyst for a sense of purpose, productivity, and social engagement; and Work as a promoter of health and

quality of life.

DISCUSSION

Integration into the labor market as a catalyst for a sense of purpose, productivity, and social engagement.

The inclusion of older adults in the labor market as a tool for promoting quality of life and healthy aging should be understood as a process

that involves the whole human being, encompassing biopsychosocial, economic, cultural, identity, and relational dimensions⁽¹⁶⁾. The participation of older adults in the workforce is associated with the need to keep them productive, valued, and socially integrated, which directly reflects on the construction of identity and sense of purpose⁽¹⁾. Studies indicate that remaining in the labor market promotes well-being and a sense of

belonging by allowing older adults to perceive themselves as useful, collaborative, and socially integrated, which strengthens their self-esteem and perception of social value⁽¹⁶⁾.

Work is one of the pillars of an individual's identity, as it reaffirms their place and social contribution; however, the breakdown of this bond can lead to feelings of uselessness, loneliness, and low self-esteem. Thus, the work environment represents a privileged space for the development of potential, skills, and personal improvement. In the case of older adults, this meaning is even more pronounced, since remaining in or returning to regular work promotes feelings of commitment, responsibility, and belonging, in addition to fostering social interaction, contributing significantly to health, personal fulfillment, and quality of life⁽¹⁷⁾.

The participation of older adults in the world of work occurs for several reasons, including the need to remain productive and socially valued⁽¹⁸⁾. Social engagement and a sense of belonging, especially among older men, are directly related to participation in work activities and social interaction, as well as being influenced, albeit indirectly, by socioeconomic trajectory throughout life⁽²⁰⁾. Gender differences can be observed in this context: while men tend to be involved in organized activities and civic associations, women more often participate in interactions with relatives and close friends, these relationships being equally important for the sense of belonging and social integration^(20,16).

Reinforcing the theme of belonging, the meaning attributed to work is directly related to the construction of identity and the context in which the individual is inserted⁽¹⁶⁾. Thus, work goes beyond productivity, being a space that allows the development of potentialities, the improvement of the way of being, and social recognition, contributing to the feeling of

belonging and reaffirming the social role of the individual. In this context, there is a growing number of older people in the workforce^(1,17).

A study on public policies and the inclusion of the elderly in the labor market reveals that this permanence is not only due to the need for supplementary income, but also to the desire to remain active, productive, socially integrated, and to occupy time in a meaningful way⁽²⁰⁾. Work, therefore, influences multiple dimensions of life—personal, social, and environmental—and is directly related to individual satisfaction and quality of life, while contributing to overcoming stigmas associated with aging, such as the idea of uselessness and incapacity. Older adults have reported that continuing to work is an incentive to live, bringing purpose, commitment, personal gratification, and reduced loneliness, since work provides learning, interaction, and appreciation⁽⁷⁾.

In addition to the aspects already mentioned, work is synonymous with identity, forming the essence of the individual, and it is through work that people find their social place. Consequently, the absence of work in an individual's life is harmful because, in addition to the loss of purchasing power and social relationships, older adults lose their identity and meaning in life, as described in a study conducted with former executives. It was confirmed that for this group, work is associated with dignity, social relationships, happiness, and identity⁽²¹⁾.

Work as a promoter of health and quality of life

The benefits of older people participating in the labor market go beyond psychological dimensions and a sense of belonging, also reflecting on physical health and reducing health problems. Analysis of studies reveals that economically active older adults have better access to health services,

longer life expectancy, and better overall health⁽¹⁸⁾, in addition to a positive association between paid work and health status throughout life⁽¹⁹⁾.

Considering that quality of life (QOL) involves multiple axes—such as personal and relational aspects, leisure, and access to consumer goods—it is possible to affirm that work directly influences QOL, regardless of age⁽¹³⁾. In this context, active aging, understood as the process of aging with a better quality of life, incorporates work as a central element, as it contributes to personal satisfaction, the maintenance of social ties, and the promotion of health⁽¹⁷⁾.

Continuity in regular work provides older adults with existential meaning, social value, personal satisfaction, and better health¹⁸. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes that older adults remaining in the workforce is a factor that promotes health and quality of life⁽²⁰⁾. Studies indicate that remaining in or re-entering the labor market after retirement helps prevent diseases associated with inactivity and promotes cognitive health^(7,22). In this sense, the category “health maintenance” has emerged as a motivating factor for older adults to continue working, demonstrating that remaining in the workforce is associated with both life satisfaction and the perception of the health benefits of work⁽²¹⁾.

The working life of older adults is associated with several benefits, among which self-esteem and personal satisfaction stand out, which directly impact quality of life. Active aging, especially with regard to lifelong learning, is closely related to the context of occupation or inactivity of the elderly, with employability being an essential factor for well-being and personal growth⁽¹⁸⁾.

Work not only provides skills development, but also reinforces a sense of inclusion and social participation, promoting higher self-esteem

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among those who remain productive. In a study on the inclusion of older adults in the labor market, the feeling of belonging and personal value was the most cited benefit, reflecting improvements in individual and family quality of life⁽¹⁶⁾. Corroborating this perspective, another study showed that active older adults reported greater satisfaction with their profession, life, and work environment, revealing a positive perception of their condition⁽²³⁾.

Consequently, work has a significant influence on the construction of individuals' identity, with the professional role being one of the pillars of self-esteem, identity, and sense of purpose⁽¹⁷⁾. In the case of older adults, remaining in the labor market is associated with autonomy, financial independence, and well-being^(21,23). Economic activity contributes to cognitive development, strengthens independence, and improves quality of life, especially when compared to inactivity⁽²¹⁾.

Older adults seek to remain active not only for economic reasons, but also for subjective benefits, such as avoiding feelings of uselessness, delaying the effects of aging, and preserving their identity⁽²¹⁾. Thus, work occupies a central place in the lives of older adults, as it promotes the maintenance of autonomy, financial independence, and active engagement with society⁽¹⁶⁾.

Both at the macro level, in the broader social context, and at the micro level, within the family, the economic contribution of working older adults is significant, often transforming their income into support for the family unit. The older adult workforce acts as a compensatory mechanism, ensuring their own income and contributing to the family income⁽¹⁸⁾. Employment generates security for the elderly population, promoting feelings of stability and belonging⁽¹⁶⁾. Entry or re-entry into the labor mar-

ket is strongly influenced by factors such as personal fulfillment, financial need, and responsibility for one's own livelihood and that of dependents⁽¹⁸⁾.

In this sense, work is related to the status of provider, functioning as a form of socialization, maintenance of power, and increase in family income, which favors the autonomy, independence, and freedom of older adults. For many, it is also an essential supplement to retirement and a way to stay active, busy, and dignified, strengthening their sense of belonging⁽²²⁾.

According to research conducted through conversation circles, work is perceived by older adults as a source of income that supplements retirement, in addition to enabling social reintegration and personal development. Remaining in the labor market, therefore, is directly associated with financial factors⁽⁷⁾. Being economically active contributes positively to the health, quality of life, and financial empowerment of older adults. In a study on economically active older adults and situations of violence, financial need emerged as one of the main reasons given for remaining in or re-entering the labor market⁽²¹⁾.

Recognizing the role of the work environment in promoting the health, well-being, quality of life, and social participation of older adults is essential to fostering a culture of respect and learning, including intergenerational learning⁽²⁴⁾. By encouraging older adults to remain in or re-enter the labor market, not only are their financial conditions improved, but their personal development, subjective satisfaction, and social value are also promoted, contributing to their integrity, dignity, and sense of belonging.

In this context, older people who remain in the workforce even after retirement tend to maintain better physical and psychological health, have a lower incidence of comorbidities and mental illnesses such as de-

pression, and remain mentally active with continuous access to learning. These aspects favor active aging with quality of life.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the studies showed that, in addition to the factors previously discussed, work occupies a central place in the lives of older adults, as it guarantees fundamental elements for their quality of life, such as autonomy, personal and financial independence, social engagement, subjective satisfaction, maintenance of functional abilities, and social appreciation. Given this, there is a clear need to broaden the debate on the role of older adults in society, especially with regard to their participation in the labor market. This issue involves multiple dimensions, ranging from personal and emotional well-being to financial stability, social belonging, and improved health conditions.

However, it was observed that the inclusion of older adults in the workforce as a strategy to promote quality of life and active aging is still under-explored in the health field, with scarce and sometimes outdated references, despite its relevance for the comprehensive promotion of older adults.

Finally, it is hoped that this research will contribute to broadening understanding of the importance of integrating older adults into the labor market, encouraging new studies that strengthen academic knowledge and promote greater visibility for older adults in relation to their right to work and quality of life.

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