INTERGENERATIONALITY: BRINGING TOGETHER THE ELDERLY AND THE YOUNG

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to understand the ways in which the relationships between elderly and young adults of the same family occur, from their own perspectives, using the focal group as a source of expression. Specifically, it was intended: 1) Describe the characteristics of the intergenerational relationship between the elderly and young adults; 2) Propose possibilities of interventions that facilitate this relationship. This is a qualitative cross-sectional study with a sample for convenience. Participants were seven elderly people between 62 and 69 years old, and five young adults between the ages of 22 and 28 years. Two instruments were used to collect data: a sociodemographic questionnaire and the focus group. The results were evaluated through the Thematic Content Analysis technique and demonstrated that: 1) about the perception of the characteristics of the relationship between the two generations, the distance vision prevailed; 2) as a proposal to facilitate the relationship, it was suggested that the young adult prioritize a time to dedicate to the elderly, among other possibilities.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary way of living with their demands has provoked a distancing between the generations of the elderly and young people (Côrte, 2016; Moral Jiménez, 2017 and Oliveira, 2017). More specifically, Miranda[4] proposes that this distancing is a phenomenon of contemporaneity, provoked by a society that establishes a series of "exclusive" spaces to attend the different age groups. Also argues that the family, which has always been a privileged place to foster intergenerational relations, has undergone important changes in its structure and, consequently, the lesser interaction between generations may result in mutual misunderstanding.

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Thus, it complements the aforementioned author, that distancing reinforces stereotypes that prevent the rapprochement between people. For this reason, he points out that our culture is impregnated by generational conflicts and age-based prejudice, named as idadism[5] or ageism (English). This last term was introduced by Robert Butler[6] and includes prejudices (negative evaluations), stereotypes (beliefs) and discrimination behaviors (eg: exclusion). Therefore, idadism is part of the social imaginary, which confers to the young people qualities as strength and activity, and reserves to the elderly the losses and the needs, as well as the fragility and the passivity (Miranda, 2013). These conceptions can pervade intergenerational relationships in a harmful way, thus hindering the interaction between them. In this sense, the intergenerational relationship between the elderly and young adults is a fertile field of studies, especially at a time when the

elderly population has reached levels never before seen in human history, especially in emerging countries, among them Brazil, which in 2025, will be the sixth country in the world in the number of elderly people (Camarano, 2004; OMS, 2015 and ONU2018). The aging of the Brazilian population has resulted in families with up to four or more generations (Vicente, 2012). In turn, longevity has been promoting substantial changes in multiple dimensions of life, and particularly in family and extrafamilial relationships (D'Alencar, 2012). As a result of this population growth and the contemporary way of life, many demands have arisen, among them the loneliness, isolation and depression that has affected many elderly and young people, which leads them to feel defenseless and vulnerable, and can be the source for the significant number of suicides in these two age groups (Han, 2017 and Zapata López, 2015). Otherwise, it is pointed out that the distancing between the generations, as a result of this way of life, can lead to social isolation and possible depression in the elderly and young people. This causes great concern, given epidemiological data showing that depression will be the leading cause of disability in the elderly in the emerging countries, and the second, in developed countries, in the year 2020 (Frank, 2016; Minayo, 2018 and Brasil, 2007). In addition, international and national studies point out that older people living alone may present more depression (McKinnon, 2013). On the other hand, the proximity of family and friends protects the elderly and young people against this subjective malaise (Tiedt, 2016). Given the above, this research had as general objective to understand the ways in which the relationships between elderly and young adults of the same family, from their own perspectives, happen. Specifically, it was intended: 1) Describe the characteristics of the intergenerational relationship between the elderly and young adults; 2) Propose possibilities for interventions that facilitate this relationship.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The qualitative method was selected to carry out the research. It responds to very particular questions since he works with the universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values and attitudes (Deslandes, 2008).

Participants: Were invited 12 elderly people and 12 young adults, who had a kinship relationship, considering the nuclear family, the extensive and comprehensive family (which includes people who are not related but maintains affective bonds)[20]. All the participants had several elderly relatives and young people in the family, but they affirmed to have a special proximity with one and, thus, the dyads were formed. The variables were not controlled: sex, social layer, religion, marital status, profession and schooling. However, with regard to the elderly, their cognitive conditions were observed to participate in the group. Due to adverse situations (time, work, illness, emergence of another commitment, among others) only 12 were part of the research, being three grandchildren, two nephews, three grandmothers, three uncles and one mom. Fictitious names were used to preserve their identities.

Instruments: Sociodemographic questionnaire: for the elderly and the young adult, composed of information about participants such as age, sex, schooling, social class, marital status, religion, profession and degree of kinship.

Focal Group: According to Borges and Santos (2005), the Focus Group is one of the several modalities available for group interview and/or group discussion (guided by triggering issues). The participants discuss a particular topic, when they receive appropriate stimuli for the debate. According to Minayo (2014), the Focal Group is a type of interview or small and homogeneous group discussion. "It aims at obtaining information, deepening the interaction between the participants, either to generate consensus or to explain divergences" (p.269). The main value of this technique is based on the human capacity to form opinions and attitudes in the interaction with other individuals (Krueger, 1988).

Procedure for collecting data: Initially, the project was approved by the Ethics Committee under the number of opinion 1.947.588, on March 2, 2017, and then the first researcher began field research, which ran from March 3, 2017 to July 30 of the same year. As a convenience sample, young adults and the elderly were indicated by people of the researcher's knowledge. The invitation was made to the participants individually. By agreeing to participate, each meeting was individually arranged. On the day, time and place marked, the participant was invited to read the Term of Free and Informed Consent (TCLE) and, in agreement, signed it. Then, they answered, individually, to the Sociodemographic Questionnaire, orally. Subsequently, they were also invited to participate in the Focus Group, which happened at another time, in a single meeting. The duration of the session was one hour and twenty minutes. At the time, they answered two triggering questions that were elaborated from the objectives of the research, listed below: 1) How do you perceive the relationship between the elderly and young adults? 2) In your perception, what can be done to improve the relationship between the elderly and young adults in the same family?

The group was assembled in a suitable place for the research, which was of better access for all the participants, located in the city of Recife / PE. It was emphasized the guarantee of confidentiality of the information. All the participants were informed of the filming, recording of their speeches and the annotation and transcription of the contents.

Data analysis procedure: The analysis procedure adopted in the research was the Thematic Content Analysis. It brings us back to the notion of *theme*, which is linked to a statement about a particular subject. It bears a bundle of relationships and can be graphically presented through a word, a phrase, a summary. It consists in discovering the *nuclei* of meaning that make up a communication, whose *presence* or *frequency* means something to the analytic object. Operationally, the thematic analysis unfolds in three phases, that is, the first stage: *pre-analysis* (composed of floating reading, constitution of the *corpus* and formulation of hypotheses); 2nd stage: *exploration of the material* (consists of finding the categories of analysis) and 3rd stage: *analysis and interpretation of the material* (Minayo, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, it will be discussed the main data obtained in the research, which will be presented in thematic axes selected from the specific objectives.

Thematic Axes: Through the focus group it was possible to list two thematic axes, according to the specific objectives: 1) The

perception about the characteristics of the intergenerational relationship between the elderly and young adults; 2) The possibilities envisaged that can contribute and facilitate the intergenerational relationship between the elderly and young adults. These categories will be analyzed and discussed below:

Perception of the characteristics of the relationship between the elderly and young adults: The majority of the participants showed a perception of distancing caused by some factors, among which were mainly: contempt, abandonment and prejudice; the lack of young adult time and new technologies.
As for *contempt, abandonment and prejudice*, suffered by the elderly and portrayed in the speeches of the interviewees, Silva and Dias (2016) affirm that this scenario is real, and as Sanches, Lebrão and Duarte (2008) point out, is based on the socio-historical and cultural construction of what it means to be old. What, according to Souza, Freitas and Queiroz (2007), is a universal problem. In other words, it is about idadism, which includes negative evaluations; the use of stereotypes that refer to the beliefs and behaviors of discrimination and exclusion[6]. They target the elderly, referring to negative assessments made on the elderly, which are essentially based on the age that individuals have (Couto, 2016). In this sense, already in 1990, Beauvoir (Beauvoir, 1990) denounced how society refused to face the phenomenon of aging, denying old age with practices of abandonment and disrespect to the elderly and not valuing the social roles that were previously attributed to the elderly person. Beauvoir pointed out that there was a disregard of society in relation to old age, which gave rise to a "conspiracy of silence". In this same line of reasoning, Vieira and Lima (2015, p. 952) (Vieira, 2015) affirm that "brazilian society attributed to the elderly negative characteristics such as: useless, incapable, crippled, sick, unproductive, dependent, boring, unfit, worthless and that they represent an expense" and thus exclude and disrespect them. In this way, violence is silent, invisible and made invisible by the pacts of silence, especially in families, even because the victim fears reprisals, or even abandonment (Faleiros, 2009). To this phenomenon, Faleiros (2007, p.35) (Faleiros, 2007) denominated like "Collusion of the silence". Carvalho (2012) (Carvalho, 2012), reinforces what was said above by pointing out that current society tends to exclude the elderly, and they end up segregated and closed to contact with other generations, a fact that contributes to social isolation and the depletion of intergenerational relations. In contrast, by stimulating intergenerational activities, the elderly and other generations transform their concepts in relation to the elderly and the old age, promoting the inclusion of the elderly in the family and in the community.

Lack of time on the part of the young adult: The lack of time of the young adults was pointed out as one of the important factors for the distancing between them and the elderly. In this respect, scholars of human development (Berthoud, 2010; Papalia, 2013 and Piletti, 2017) understand that this moment in the lives of young adults is one in which they are involved in a complex of activities that will foster the basis of their future, and for this reason, a closer relationship with the elderly is impaired. Specifically, Berthoud and Bergami (2010) analyzed this moment of the adult's life course as the Acquisition Phase. In the authors' perspective, this phase includes the choice of partner, the formation of a new couple, the arrival of the first child (which transforms the young couple into a new family) and life with the young children. According to the authors mentioned, it is the stage of acquiring, in every way: material,

emotional and psychological. They add that this is the time when individuals are heavily involved in the complex movement of give and take; conquer and yield; being and becoming. They also reinforce that the transitions needed to adapt to this new phase of family life require maturity and time. Papalia and Feldman (2013) corroborate with the aforementioned authors, claiming that it is at this stage that humans build the basis for much of their later development. They point out that this is the time when most people leave their parents' homes, start their professional lives, marry or form other intimate relationships, have and raise children, and start contributing meaningfully to their communities. They also point out that young adults who are building careers and perhaps babysitting have limited time to spend with friends and family. They point out that the number of friends and the amount of time spent with them generally decrease over the course of the young adult's life cycle. However, friendships are important to them. The authors emphasize that people who have friends tend to feel a sense of well-being and that friendships at this stage tend to focus on work activities and parenting, as well as the exchange of confidences and advice.
It is worth mentioning that the sample of the present study was composed by retired elderly and pensioners, who have more free time to devote to social relations, and by younger adults in the Acquisition Phase who have less time. In the ocasion, all young adult participants were involved with their developmental tasks, which are necessary to foster the basis of the future (Berthoud, 2010 and Papalia, 2013).

In the light of the above, based on the reflections of Han (2017), it is understood that the contemporary way of life reinforces the lack of time of the young adult. This time, which is already diminished by the acquisition phase. Thus, the need to work and study more and more, has transformed young adults into "subjects of work, performance", leading them to exhaustion, in a society named as "the society of fatigue." In which young people feel tired and without time, in such a way that sometimes they are not able to have a closer bond with the elderly. And Han (2017, p. 176) infers that the person "is tired for you," tired to meet the elderly more often, for the excess of activities that are imposed on them, and then they don't even have desire to leave home.

The new technologies: Some participants affirmed that the new technologies, the speed they propose and the fact that the elderly, in general, are slower in relation to this new time, have contributed to the distance between the elderly and young adults, mainly of the same family. However, this is one of the characteristics of present-day societies, accompanied by individualism, dissolution of bonds, provisionality, loneliness and particularization of life (Bauman, 1998). In this sense, Oliveira, Villas-Boas and Ramos (2017) point out that the family network has been greatly affected by the technological changes of the last decades. The authors point out that these changes have hampered the family's ability and desire to provide the necessary social support to its members, especially the elders. In relation to the use of the new technologies, Doll, Machado and Cachioni (2016, p.1620) (Doll, 2016), in a study carried out in Brazil, found that the elderly still use little computer and the internet, "only 14% of people with more than 60 years use the computer, against 86% in the range between 10 and 15 years." The authors emphasize the importance of encouraging the participation of older people in the digital world, even though their minority participation is understandable, since internet access became regular only

when they were mature or elderly adults. On the other hand, they point out that it is the group that grows the most in relation to computer use.

Torres and Dias (2017, p.141) corroborate with the authors mentioned above when they affirm that "many elderly people are increasingly active and interested in the most varied forms of technology, demonstrating cerebral plasticity and constant capacity for learning." They point out that grandchildren and grandmothers are increasingly connected and that the bonds established between them have gained strength in the digital age. In this sense, they reinforce that, even though these generations are geographically distant, there is the possibility of communication through *cyberspace* that emerges as a strategy to ease the pain and longing caused by distance. However, there are older people who do not have the economic or cognitive, and even desire, to communicate *online*. For these situations, in fact, the new technologies can promote a distance between these generations. However, as Torres and Dias (2017) point out, technology/the internet allows the protagonism of older people as they can rewrite a new chapter of their lives in the 21st century. However, some older people prefer to live with minimal use of technology, using only those that are indispensable such as the cell phone (more to make calls than even using WhatsApp), the washing machine, the microwave, discarding technologies like, for example, computer, *smartphone*, *tablet*, *notebook*, GPS, among others. Thus, "one should not generalize when saying that it is necessary for all the elderly to be digitally included, since they do not all desire it, and respecting their decision is essential" (p.1620)[37]. In this sense, for these elderly people, aiming at the intergenerational approach, it is possible to stimulate them to participate in intergenerational programs so that they are not marginalized, even using intergenerational meetings where young people can teach the new technologies to the elderly. In this regard, Pires (2013) conducted an intervention with young computer students and elderly relatives of them, and obtained a good result in relation to the elderly, who learned to use the new technologies, having been taught by the students. The author points out that it is necessary for young people to seek to overcome prejudice, in order to understand the limitations of the elderly (be slower) and help them to enter the technological world. Although lack of time and the use of technology are characteristic of today's society[12], it is necessary to reflect on the possibilities of interventions that facilitate the coexistence between the elderly and young adults, bringing the generations closer, in the attempt to minimize the consequent damages of the contemporary way of living.

Possibilities of interventions that facilitate the coexistence between the elderly and young adults: Most of the participants indicated three possibilities to facilitate coexistence between young adults and the elderly: young adults spend more time interacting with the elderly, and implant a process of continuous awareness about the importance of the intergenerational relationship among the elderly and young adults. In addition, they recognized the need for clarification on the aging process and old age, if possible, from childhood. In terms of having more time to interact with the elderly, it is understood that the demands of the developmental stage of the emerging young adults (study, job search, love relationship, among others), somehow make a closer relationship with the elderly unfeasible (Berthoud, 2010

and Papalia, 2013). On the other hand, *cyberspace*, for the elderly who have access, can bring them closer (Torres, 2017). Regarding the implementation of a process of continuous awareness about the importance of intergenerational relationships, since childhood, education being an important factor for a people's way of life (Pires, 2013), points out that if Brazil will be, in the near future, a "country of old" is important to lead the youth to understand the aging process and accept it, valuing the experiences of the elderly. Thus, it is fundamental to exchange experiences, to learn with, to teach, because the social life of the elderly is very rich.

Also, within the process of awareness, it is possible to learn as experienced in intergenerational practices. In this sense, intergenerational relations can be optimized through initiatives that take into account the interaction, exchange of experiences and recognition of the other as different, singular and subject bearer of rights, which are possible through group reflection[24]. In particular, intergenerational programs are aimed at bringing generations together, breaking down generational barriers, eliminating prejudices and overcoming discrimination, as well as providing well-being to the generations, among many other benefits (Côrte, 2016; Oliveira, 2007 and Sánchez, 2013). One can also think of psychoeducational interventions, which, according to Silva and Dias (2016) (Silva, 2016), have a very positive effect on the awareness process. Finally, it was emphasized, and it is believed to be important to emphasize that young people also need attention. Erich Fromm (1995)[41] already stated that every young adult needs help, warmth and protection. In many ways, these needs differ and yet resemble those of a child[33]. In this sense, there is also the lack of the young adult who was opportunely expressed by a participant. Thus, all the way covered in this research shows the need to devise strategies that will contribute to facilitate the intergenerational relationship between the elderly and other generations, in which all will benefit. Thus, the proposal of intergenerational programs is currently one of the most successful.

Final Considerations

The general objective of this study was to understand the ways in which the relationships between elderly and young adults of the same family occur, from their own perspectives, discussed in a focus group. Specifically, it was intended: to describe the characteristics of the intergenerational relationship between the elderly and young adults; and propose possibilities for interventions that facilitate this relationship. With regard to sociodemographic data, the following stand out: 1) The participation of only one elderly male person; 2) The affective bond that surpasses the consanguineous bonds, since a young adult chose a grandmother by affinity, although having several elderly in the own family; 3) Most were dyads of granddaughter-grandchildren, followed by uncles and nephews; 4) Most of the participants chose elderly or young adults with whom they had paternal attachment. Regarding the perception of the intergenerational relationship between the elderly and young adults, including those of the same family, a perception of distance between these generations prevailed, caused by factors such as the lack of time of the young adult (due to the involvement in the tasks of their development phase); contempt, abandonment and prejudice of the young person in relation to the elderly; and new technologies. As the main possibilities to be worked to minimize distancing and facilitate the relationship between these two generations were

suggested: the young adult prioritize a time to dedicate to the elderly, as well as the realization of a process of awareness about aging and the importance of the relationship intergenerational, starting in childhood. In general terms, it is observed that the focus group offers numerous benefits to the participants, such as: exchanges of experiences and difficulties, expansion of the social network, learning, emotional support, favoring positive feelings, sharing of concerns, doubts and fears and emergence of creative solutions to the problems faced in everyday life. In this way, focus groups use group interaction to produce data and insights that would be difficult to achieve outside the group. These data take into account the group process, taken as greater than the sum of individual opinions, feelings and points of view at stake. In this line of reasoning, it is understood that meetings, psychoeducational and socio-educational interventions, as well as intergenerational programs appear as proposals with great potential to bring the generations closer together. It is perceived that this is a promising way to rescue the ties fragmented by the demands of modern life, restoring the homeostasis of the family and social systems, specifically regarding the intergenerational relationship. The present study has its limitations, given the small number of participants and sessions, and it is not possible to generalize the results. However, it is hoped to give visibility to the importance of the intergenerational relationship between the elderly and young adults and to provide theoretical and practical subsidies to professionals working with the elderly, young adults and families, especially with the intergenerational relationship thematic. It is also hoped that it will inspire further research on this subject, in the hope of minimizing distance between the elderly and other generations.

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