

SOCIAL POLICY AND PROMOTION OF THE WELL-BEING OF THE ELDERLY THROUGH BALLROOM DANCING IN A SOCIAL ASSISTANCE ENTITY



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Jaise Nayelle Maues Monteiro¹, Joel Silva da Silva², Nayara Matoso Van Silva³ and Anibal Correia Brito Neto⁴.

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the effects of ballroom dancing on the promotion of the well-being of elderly people assisted by a social assistance entity in Belém do Pará. The research, of a descriptive and qualitative nature, was carried out through interviews with 15 elderly people who regularly participate in a social ballroom dance project. The data obtained indicate that the practice brings benefits in three interrelated dimensions: social, emotional and psychomotor. Socially, dance facilitates interaction between the elderly, combating isolation and promoting a sense of belonging to the group. Emotionally, the activity is seen as a source of pleasure and euphoria, improving self-esteem and providing a therapeutic experience. From a psychomotor point of view, an improvement in coordination, memory and functional independence was observed, as well as muscle strengthening. The study concludes that ballroom dancing not only contributes to the physical health but also to the emotional and social health of older adults, offering an effective way to combat loneliness and promote social integration. The results suggest that dance can be incorporated into social policies aimed at the elderly, evidencing its importance in promoting active and healthy aging.

Keywords: Social Policy, Well-Being, Quality of Life, Elderly Person, Ballroom Dancing.

¹ Graduated in Full Degree in Physical Education
University of the State of Pará

E-mail: jaysenayelle.jn@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2392-6769>

Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/0868451115212837>

² Graduated in Full Degree in Physical Education
University of the State of Pará

Email: joelsilvadasilva@hotmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5744-8054>

Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/7284343484910076>

³ Specialist in Pedagogy of Body Culture

University of the State of Pará

Email: nayara.matoso@hotmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4680-2057>

Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/9171395716461604>

⁴ Doctor of Education

University of the State of Pará

E-mail: anibal.neto@uepa.br

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6618-6299>

Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/3700657249309537>

INTRODUCTION

Issues related to the elderly population have gained increasing relevance in recent years, especially due to the rapid process of population aging. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), by 2050, the number of individuals aged 60 and over in the world will reach the expressive mark of 2.1 billion, while the total number of people aged 80 and over is expected to reach 426 million (WHO, 2024).

In Brazil, updated data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), obtained through the 2022 Census, registered 32.1 million people aged 60 and over (IBGE, 2023). This scenario reinforces the need to treat population aging as a comprehensive public health and social assistance issue, especially in view of the bodily limitations associated with aging, which impact motor coordination, quality of movement, and general vitality.

According to Costa (2011), aging is a regressive process that involves biological, psychological and social dimensions, characterized by a decrease in vital capacity throughout life. This decline is influenced by factors such as lifestyle, genetics, accumulated damage, and psychological changes associated with emotions and affections.

In this context, ballroom dancing emerges as a valuable ally. This practice, in addition to being a physical activity, allows the elderly to explore their limits, respect their feelings, develop self-knowledge and improve motor skills through the movements that their body can (re)produce. Such benefits positively impact self-esteem, promoting improvements in quality of life and general health (Souza *et al.*, 2010).

The promotion of the well-being of the elderly, in addition to being a Brazilian constitutional guarantee provided for in Article 230 of the Federal Constitution (Brasil, 1988), has gained prominence in political agendas and scientific studies, highlighting the need for new perspectives on this stage of life. It is essential to explore ways to ensure improvements in this period, expanding perspectives and possibilities. In this context, the present study seeks to reflect on the relationship between quality of life, ballroom dancing and aging, focusing on the feasibility of this practice according to the experience of its practitioners. The objective is to foster new reflections that can influence social policies, as well as guidelines and practices in the field of Physical Education.

In the reality of Belém do Pará, several social projects, usually conducted by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), develop actions aimed at the elderly public. This study highlights a social assistance entity located in a peripheral neighborhood of the city,

which offers ballroom dancing as one of its activities. In this context, the research sought to answer the following question: what are the effects of ballroom dancing in promoting the well-being of the elderly assisted by this social assistance entity in Belém do Pará?

Thus, the objective of the study was to analyze and systematize the dimensions related to the promotion of quality of life and health present in the discourses of elderly people who practice ballroom dancing regularly in a social assistance entity in the city of Belém do Pará, considering their experiences and the impacts of this activity on their lives.

METHODOLOGY

It is a field study that, according to Gil (2008, p. 57), addresses "a single group or community in terms of its social structure, that is, emphasizing the interaction of its components". In addition, it is characterized as a cross-sectional research, with descriptive purposes, which, according to Gil (2008), involves the evaluation of the information acquired, describing the phenomenon and establishing relationships between the variables.

The study was carried out in a social project of a social assistance entity located in the city of Belém do Pará, configured as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) of administrative nature and non-profit. Although the entity serves different audiences, the focus of this research was centered on a social project aimed at the elderly public.

Among the activities developed, the research focused on the specificity of ballroom dancing, performed with a group of 15 elderly people in the morning, in weekly meetings, usually held in an air-conditioned room of adequate size or in the institution's auditorium.

The inclusion criteria established for the participants were: to be actively participating in the ballroom dance project since its origin; have a frequency of at least 75%; and consent to participate in the research by signing the Informed Consent Form (ICF). On the other hand, the exclusion criteria considered: subjects who presented a diagnosis related to emotional imbalances and/or any physical discomfort. The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, under opinion No. 3.540.982 and CAAE No.

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The data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which, according to Gil (2008, p. 109), is defined as "the technique in which the investigator presents himself to the investigated and asks him questions, with the objective of obtaining the data that are of interest to the investigation". The instrument used included questions related to the promotion of quality of life in its relationship with the specificity of ballroom dancing.

For data analysis, content analysis was used, considered by Bardin (2011) as a method that uses communication analysis techniques to describe the content of messages.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As a widely discussed concept, quality of life is sometimes understood as a synonym of health, sometimes as a broader notion, which varies according to the area of interest of the investigations. In this work, we follow the theoretical precepts of Silva (1999), who divides the concept into six dimensions: physical, emotional, professional, social, intellectual and spiritual. In the present study, dance is associated with the promotion of well-being and quality of life of the elderly, considering all these dimensions as interrelated elements.

Despite the losses inherent to advanced age, the elderly maintain psychological, social, affective and physical needs similar to those of the other stages of life. Therefore, it is essential to have greater recognition and appreciation of this population. According to Neri (2004 *apud* Costa, 2011), studies on the well-being of the elderly are relatively recent, driven by population aging in developed countries and by awareness of the high costs that pathologies in this age group entail for both the individual and society.

Throughout life, we face several transitions until old age, a stage marked by health challenges, both physical and psychological, which can be prevented or mitigated with the practice of physical activities (Gaspar *et al.*, 2017). Although aging is a natural and inevitable process, the way each individual ages is unique, leading to reflection on the parameters indicated by Costa (2011, p. 29) for active aging: "to reduce the probability of diseases or limitations resulting from pathologies; maintain cognitive and physical abilities; and actively engaging with life."

Thus, the need for greater attention to the preservation of the health and global well-being of this population is evidenced, aiming to ensure dignified aging. It is essential to overcome the view that the elderly are disconnected from society, as this perception marginalizes and invalidates their contribution, as still occurs in the labor market.

In this context, dance, understood by Nanni (1995) as a harmonious and universal form of expression, in which body, spirit and emotion connect, stands out as an ally for the promotion of well-being during aging. This bodily manifestation, whose historical evolution reveals multiple styles and applications, also includes sociocultural objectives aimed at promoting quality of life.

According to Schlichta and Tavares (2005, p. 93), there is evidence of this bodily practice since the dawn of humanity. The authors state that "all peoples, in all times and places, danced. They danced to express revolt or love, to revere or drive away gods, to show strength or repentance, to pray, to conquer, to distract, in short, to live!".

In turn, according to Carvalho *et al.* (2015), dance is an activity that provides fun, affective contact, social interaction and physical and psychological benefits, reflecting positively on the quality of life. These authors highlight that people who practice dance tend to engage more frequently in physical activities compared to participants in traditional programs.

Hermann and Lana (2016, p. 22) point out that "in any age group, even in the most advanced ones, maintaining a daily routine of physical activities results in biological and psychosocial benefits". In this sense, dance is understood as a physical activity that contributes to the health, personal expression and social interaction of the elderly. Through music, dance awakens emotions, feelings, and pleasures, promoting physical, mental, and social well-being (Carvalho *et al.*, 2015).

Santos (2002, *apud* Bistrattin, 2005, p. 27) states that "our elders have an enormous potential to be developed, possibly due to the lack of past experiences that were not offered to them or due to a certain timidity to be overcome". This observation leads us to reflect on the possibilities of Physical Education teachers' work with the elderly, using dance as a strategy to promote quality of life.

Ballroom dancing, in particular, presents itself as an option that stimulates socialization, motor coordination and body awareness, providing evident and subtle benefits to practitioners. Although aging is still stigmatized and often associated with unproductivity, reinforcing negative representations, the practice of ballroom dancing can contribute to strengthening the recognition of the cultural and social role of the elderly.

In the legal sphere, the National Policy for the Elderly, instituted by Law No. 8,842, of January 4, 1994 (Brasil, 1994), and currently regulated by Decree No. 9,921, of July 18, 2019 (Brasil, 2019), expanded the rights of this population, establishing principles such as the guarantee of citizenship, the fight against discrimination, and the recognition of the elderly as a central agent of the actions of this policy. These principles promote the participation and inclusion of the elderly, contributing to a new conception of the human aging process.

The Statute of the Elderly, approved by Law No. 10,741, of October 1, 2003 (Brasil, 2003), reinforces that culture and leisure are social rights, ensuring, in its Article 20, that "the elderly have the right to education, culture, sport, leisure, entertainment, shows, products and services that respect their peculiar condition of age".

Thus, with the increase in free time after retirement, leisure takes on a central role in the aging process, promoting autonomy, self-esteem and well-being. Ballroom dancing, also recognized as a leisure activity, contributes significantly to the strengthening of these dimensions, allowing the elderly to experience a fuller and more satisfactory aging.

RESULTS

The multiple meanings attributed to the experiences of ballroom dancing by the elderly, as well as the reports on the various repercussions of this practice on the way of life of those involved, converged to evidence the effects of this body practice on the promotion of the well-being of practitioners. As priority factors mentioned by the informants, three interrelated dimensions emerged: social, emotional and psychomotor.

With regard to the social dimension, ballroom dancing proved to be a promoter of significant benefits. The reports indicated that this practice helps to overcome the social isolation typical of old age, by promoting the construction of bonds and the strengthening of friendships. This process contributes to the feeling of loneliness being replaced by a sense of belonging to the group. Some excerpts from the interviews illustrate the social role of dance:

Dance is an exercise that makes me unwind. It's very good to be with our friends, to forget a little... That is a lot of work that I have, a lot! Then we are here, together, dancing with friends, then it relaxes! (Informant No. 4).

I feel happier when I'm dancing, because I'm in the middle of my classmates, then a joke on one side and the other on the other, then I burst out laughing and everyone has fun with my laughter (Informant nº 10).

According to Pinto (2008), the image of loneliness and social withdrawal often associated with old age is linked to prejudices and stereotypes. The present study demonstrated that ballroom dancing creates a favorable environment for social interaction, encouraging sociability, whether in pairs, groups or individually.

Regarding the emotional dimension, the interviewees highlighted feelings of pleasure, happiness and euphoria provided by the practice of ballroom dancing. The environment marked by musicality, gestures and spontaneity contributed to the breaking of

psychological blocks and the improvement of self-esteem, giving dance therapeutic characteristics. One of the informants described this experience:

It's something we have fun with... something that makes us happy, everything disappears, and we keep counting on getting to that day to see the new dances of the day (Informant nº 7).

According to Leal and Haas (2006), the effects of dancing tend to foster joy and pleasure, aspects of great relevance in old age, especially when combined with aspects related to the development of the psychomotor dimension. Many older adults reported improvements in motor coordination, rhythm and body expression, aspects initially perceived as challenges. Perna (2005) observes that dance promotes body self-knowledge and expands individual expression. An important statement from informant No. 10 reflects this dimension:

[...] when I'm dancing, for all the pain, I don't feel anything, from the tip of the head to the tip of the foot I don't feel pain (Informant nº 10).

In addition, the repetition of movements during classes favored attention and memory, as described in the study by Rosa (2012). Although memorization was initially pointed out as a difficulty, the reports show progress with the continuity of classes:

I had a lot of headaches and forgot a lot, now I don't have so much. And my memory is good, thank God, and I pray to God that it will be better and better because the worst thing is that we don't have our memory (Informant No. 7).

Finally, the elderly reported gains related to functional independence and muscle strengthening. According to Costa, Miguel and Pimenta (2007), ballroom dancing is an aerobic activity that improves physical fitness and psychomotor development. The reports corroborate this view:

Dance has improved because I'm 78 years old and I walk around everything, and it almost doesn't get enough of me (Informant nº 1).

[...] well, very good, even at home I do these exercises alone, all this movement, I no longer feel pain in my neck, but now I move it everywhere (Informant nº 7).

The interviewees pointed out the search for a motivating physical activity as one of the main reasons for starting ballroom dancing. Garcia *et al.* (2009) highlight that the practice can improve muscle strength, self-esteem and disposition for daily activities.

During the practice of the classes and in the interviews carried out, it was possible to perceive the evolution of these indicators in the context of dance. The statements of the interviewees clearly revealed that all the learning acquired in the classroom was transformed into teachings applied to daily life.

CONCLUSION

The analysis carried out in this study showed that ballroom dancing, as a body practice, offers multifaceted benefits to the elderly population, promoting the quality of life and well-being of practitioners. Through social interaction, the elderly experienced overcoming isolation and strengthening affective bonds, contributing to greater sociability and, consequently, to combating the loneliness characteristic of this phase of life. In addition, dance proved to be effective in emotional stimulation, providing pleasure, high self-esteem and psychological well-being, while favoring psychomotor development, with significant gains in motor coordination, body expression and memory.

The participants' reports highlight the positive impact of dance on functional autonomy, contributing to the improvement of muscle strength and willingness to perform daily activities. These results reinforce the importance of the practice of motivating physical activities for the elderly, particularly those that favor both the physical and the social and emotional aspects.

In view of this, this study suggests that ballroom dancing is a valid and efficient strategy for promoting the health and well-being of the elderly, and can be incorporated as an important component in Physical Education programs aimed at the elderly population. However, it is essential that new studies deepen the investigation on the multiple benefits of this practice, expanding the discussions on active aging and quality of life in old age. The continuity of research on this topic is essential to contribute to public policies and social practices that favor healthier and fuller aging.

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