
Women In The Mirror: Conceptions About Old Age, Re-Elaboration Of Self-Image And Psychosocial Support Networks For Elderly Women Living With The Families Or In An Old-Age Care Institution

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The goal of this study was to investigate the representations and issues that influence quality of life in old age. Ten women, aged between 65 and 89 years, participated in the research and were assigned to two groups: women living with their families (G1) and women living in an old-age care institution. The study consisted of a descriptive, exploratory study, using a non-probabilistic convenience sample and conducted according to a qualitative research approach. Semi-structured interviews were accomplished, recorded and transcribed in full and analyzed according to the comprehensivist methodological referential. The findings revealed that family, work, social interaction and religion constituted the mainstream of psychosocial support networks and were referred to contribute to improve quality of life. It was concluded that both groups valued family support network, with greater emphasis from the elderly women living with their families. Even so, it provides insufficient elements in face of the isolation and feelings of loneliness reported by most of the women in both groups. Regarding the importance attributed to work and occupation, no significant differences

were observed among the surveyed women. It was noticed that social interaction was present and referred as beneficial by the interviewed women. Moreover, contact with the opposing sex, increased at the institution, stimulates the care for self-image. Religion was the most homogeneous support network between the groups, and appeared as an adjunctive instrument in face of the approaching death. The outcomes of this study confirmed the importance of stimulating the introduction of community programs directed towards this developmental stage, as well as the need for revising the current conception of old-age care institution.