

Special Thematic Section on "Aging and Health in Different Sociocultural Contexts"

Introduction to the Special Thematic Section on "Aging and Health in Different Sociocultural Contexts"

Sofia von Humboldt*^a

[a] William James Center for Research, ISPA – Instituto Universitário, Lisbon, Portugal.

Psychology, Community & Health, 2017, Vol. 6(1), 59–62, doi:10.5964/pch.v6i1.248

Published (VoR): 2017-08-04.

*Corresponding author at: William James Center for Research, ISPA – Instituto Universitário, Rua Jardim do Tabaco, 34, 1149-041 Lisbon, Portugal. E-mail: sofia.humboldt@gmail.com



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It is a privilege to be the Guest Editor of the Special Thematic Section: "Aging and Health in Different Sociocultural Contexts" in *Psychology, Community & Health*. With this Special Section we are pleased to highlight this journal's commitment to gerontological literature in a sociocultural perspective.

It has become common knowledge that the world's population is aging. Still, few realize that socio-cultural differences among different areas may greatly influence the speed and impact of the process of aging worldwide. Due to the limited number of studies on the juncture point between culture and aging, empirical evidence is greatly grounded on cross-sectional research from developed cultures. However, it must be noted that developing areas are among the largest and rapidly aging societies in the world.

This Special Section shows a number of important strengths. First, the multidisciplinary background of its authors, including researchers, students and health professionals, reflected the mission of *Psychology, Community and Health*. Second, the seven articles included in this Special Section show the diversity of research methods (qualitative and quantitative) that can be used to advance the science of aging and health. Third, these articles analyzed the crosscultural experiences of older adults in Mexico, Pakistan and Portugal. Together, this collection of papers provide a thought-provoking view of aging and health and demonstrated the impressive heterogeneity defining older adults, accentuating the value of a sociocultural view of old age in the perspective of older adults and caregivers and exploring in depth socio-psychological, health and lifestyle aspects of old age. These papers covered a wide variety of gerontological topics, including subjective memory complaints, experiences of caregivers towards older adults' sexuality, daily living functioning, social engagement, autobiographical memories, depressive symptoms, adjustment to aging, satisfaction with life, physical activity, terminal illness and family integrity.

This being said, it is a pleasure to introduce the seven original empirical articles of this Special Section.

[Sousa, Pereira, Costa, and Gomes \(2017, this section\)](#) characterize subjective memory complaints according to sociodemographic, clinical, cognitive, emotional and quality of life variables and found that subjective memory complaints may be an important symptom for the early identification of individuals at higher risk for developing a dementing process. In this mixed study, participants showed an increase in depressive symptoms and anxiety, the amounts of glycosylated hemoglobin and the number of medications, with particular emphasis on anti-hypertensives.

The second paper addresses the experiences of formal caregivers towards sexuality among the older adults, in qualitative study. [Monteiro, von Humboldt, and Leal \(2017, this section\)](#) explored the perspectives of FCs towards the sexuality in the older adults, and obtained a description of their beliefs and attitudes. This paper provides important recommendations future educational programs for older adults should improve their efficacy by clearly discussing and promoting sexual wellbeing.

In the subsequent article, [Zainab and Naz \(2017, this section\)](#) investigate the contributing role of daily living functioning and social engagement in enhancing wellness in older adults, and found that both these variables significantly predicted wellness. For example, older adults who are independent seem to have a higher satisfaction in life and are more adjusted to the effects of aging.

Based on the evidence that there is an overgeneralization of older adults' autobiographical memories, [Silvestre and Claudio \(2017, this section\)](#) studied the relationship between depressive symptomatology and the recall of autobiographical memories among older adults. These authors found that older people without depressive symptomatology did not differ significantly from the ones with depressive symptomatology in the evocation of specific, categorical and extended autobiographical memories, positive and negative emotional valence and latency times.

[Mendoza-Ruvalcaba and her colleagues \(2017, this section\)](#) aimed to compare adjustment to aging and life satisfaction in a Mexican and a Portuguese older sample. Mexicans considered that all aspects of adjustment to aging absolutely more important than their Portuguese counterparts. Mexicans also reported a higher SWL than Portuguese. Additionally, adjustment to aging and satisfaction with life were correlated in Mexican sample, but not in the Portuguese sample. These authors concluded that differences on adjustment to aging and life satisfaction between Mexican and Portuguese older adults are related to differences in cultural and social contexts, as well as socio-demographic characteristics.

[Morais and colleagues \(2017, this section\)](#) present the effects of an intervention based on health behaviour change models, designed to increase physical activity levels in older adults. These authors concluded that the 24-week physical activity program has proven useful increasing older adults daily walking behaviour.

The last article explored the experiences of elderly caregivers of a relative with terminal illness and analysed its influence on the construction of family integrity. [Marques and Mendes \(2017, this section\)](#) found that a number of elements that contributed to the development of family integrity were shown by the participants, such as, feelings of usefulness, the transmission of a symbolic family legacy, the division of family tasks and the responsibility for support and caring.

In brief, this issue is a valuable contribution to the research and practice in gerontology. We expect that this rich collection of papers may stimulate a scholarly dialogue about aging and health in a sociocultural perspective. In line with this, we welcomed articles that were conceptually based, theoretically sound, methodologically rigorous, and oriented toward practice. Considering that culture is diverse and that numerous psychological dimensions arise in the context of aging and health, this Special Section can be of interest to different audiences, such as researchers, students, health professionals and policy makers. Finally, I look forward to hearing from readers and encourage the scientific community to collaborate with us on innovative projects in age and health.

Funding

The author has no funding to report.

Competing Interests

The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

Acknowledgments

The author has no support to report.

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