

Effective activities in the primary prevention of depression in older adults: an integrative review

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To systematize the scientific evidence on effective primary prevention activities to address depression in older adults. **Materials and methods:** An integrative review that involved searching bibliographic sources in PubMed, BVS, SciELO and Google Scholar databases, published between 2018 and 2024, in Portuguese, English and Spanish languages. **Results:** Thirteen articles were collected, and their findings show that physical, recreational and ludic activities are the main ways to prevent depression and help older people to obtain health and comfort. **Conclusions:** The main prevention of depression in older adults is physical activity, combined with music therapy, recreational activities and traditional games. With its educative approach to mental health, the role of nursing is relevant at the primary health care level.

Keywords: interventions; depression; older adult; physical activity.

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (1) defines depression as the mental condition characterized by persistent distress and disinterest in previously satisfactory activities, leading to disabilities and long-term consequences that significantly affect life. Depressive disorder in old age poses a high risk in the healthcare and economic system, affecting 5.7% of this population. This is due to the underestimation of their condition, which leads to social isolation and loneliness, with an unfavorable prognosis for other chronic diseases.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations indicated that in 2022 13.4% of the population exceeded the age of 60. This percentage is expected to increase to 16.5% by 2030 and reach 30.0% by 2060, which would be 2.5 times higher than in 2022. Therefore, it is necessary to address this issue within public policies (2). In Peru, the National Institute of Statistics and Informatics (INEI) (3) reported that in the first half of 2024, 13.9% of the population was 60 years old or older. Among

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this age group, 80.3% suffered from a chronic health condition, with projections indicating that by 2050, one in five individuals will be an older adult (3).

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of isolation on the life of older adults have become evident, increasing their vulnerability to depression, anxiety, irritability, sleep disorder, stress, and other preexisting conditions. Over the last decade, there has been a rise in longevity accompanied by inequities in access to healthcare services, education, and pensions, along with issues of violence and discrimination against the elderly. Based on this evidence, the Peruvian government has taken measures to establish a legal framework through the enactment of the Law of the Elderly (4), which outlines the rights of individuals in this stage of life and the responsibilities that society has toward them. As part of the comprehensive care model, senior citizen clubs have been implemented since 2023. These clubs provide education on healthy lifestyle models, life skills, physical and recreational activities within a specific social, psychological, and economic context, as well as manual workshops that serve as part of their physical therapy.

Preventive strategies for the mental health of the elderly should be oriented to promote healthy aging, by generating physical and social environments that foster well-being in this stage of life, along with essential support and education interventions (5).

Undoubtedly, several initiatives and interventions have achieved positive outcomes in this regard. However, these efforts have not been analyzed collectively, making it difficult to establish comparisons or points of coincidence among them. For this reason, a study was conducted with the aim of systematizing the scientific evidence on effective primary prevention activities for depression in older adults.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Integrative review that was prepared from January to March 2024, taking into account the following phases:

Preparation of the PICO question

The research question was formulated using the PICO format, with the following guiding question: What does the literature say about effective activities for primary prevention of depression in older adults? The population (P) corresponds to older adults. The phenomenon of interest (I) has to do with effective

interventions. And the *outcome* (O) refers to the prevention of depression.

Literature search

As for the literature search and sampling, the following databases were used: PubMed, BVS, SciELO and Google Scholar were used, covering the period 2018-2024, in English, Spanish and Portuguese. Inclusion criteria were established, considering open-access original articles with a defined methodology. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria included articles from editorials and studies not related to the research study.

Data collection

The descriptors used were MeSH and Boolean operators AND and OR. The search strategy was as follows: (interventions OR intervenciones), (depression OR depresión), (activity OR actividades), AND (older adult OR adulto mayor). The articles were downloaded, duplicate references were removed, filtered by relevance, and finally organized by titles and abstracts. Data organization was carried out using an Excel matrix to record the properties of the studies.

Critical analysis of the included studies

The articles were reviewed by the researchers, and divergences were resolved through group consensus. A total of 50 articles were found, with 25 excluded due to restricted access, leaving 25 articles relevant to the topic of study. Then a thorough review of each one was conducted, where 2 were excluded for being duplicates, 4 for various reasons, and 6 for lacking significant contributions. Ultimately, 13 eligible articles were selected to be included in this study.

A descriptive analysis of the studies was conducted using a summary table that included the main attributes of the studies: author, year, sample, intervention, and results.

Discussion of results

The study was contrasted with the existing literature to analyze the differences and similarities in preventive interventions for depression in older adults, considering the socioeconomic and cultural context.

Presentation of the integrative review

The search phase and article selection process are explained in the PRISMA diagram (6) (Figure 1).

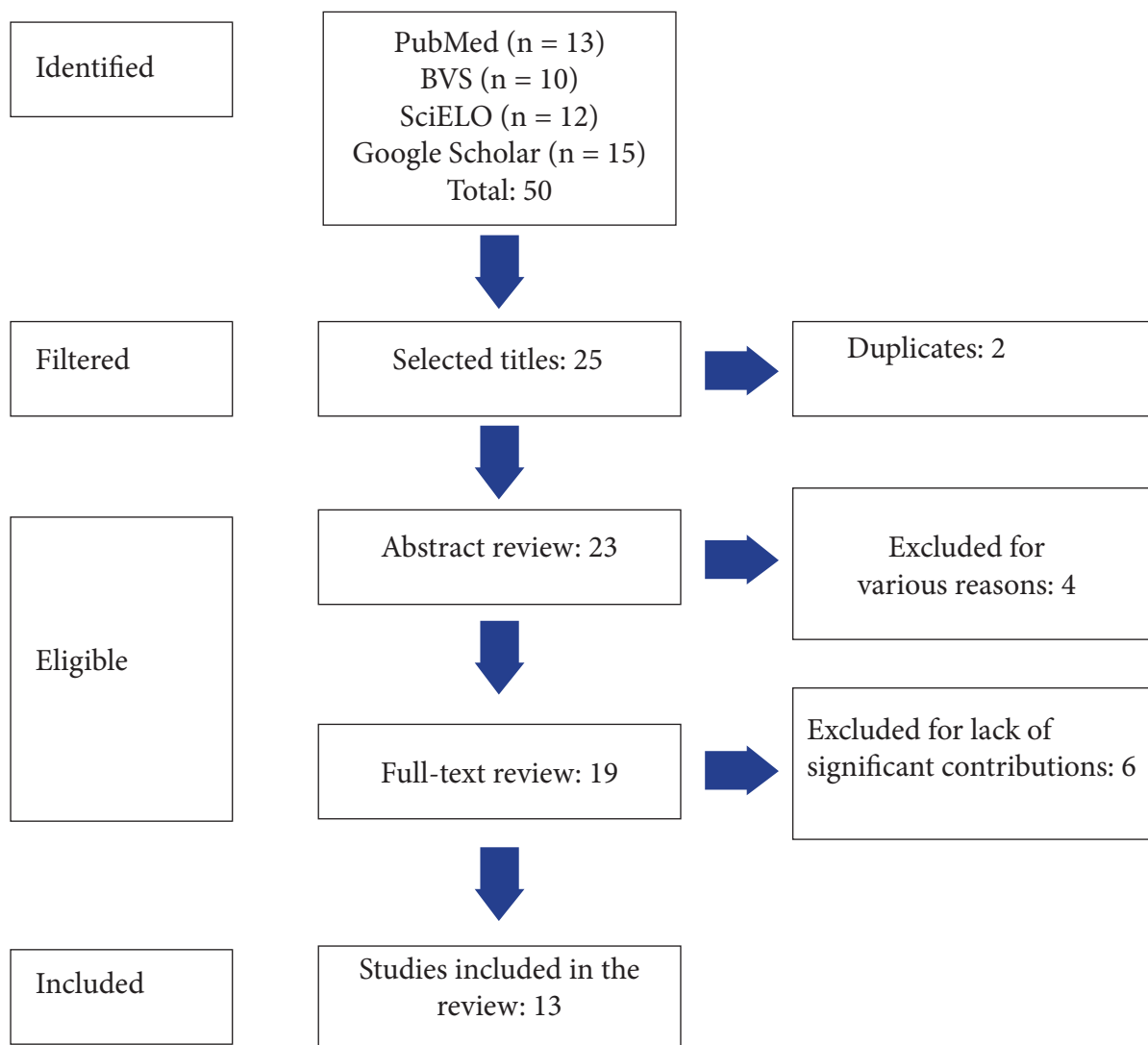


Figure 1. Flowchart of the PRISMA search and selection strategy.

RESULTS

Out of a total of 50 articles, 13 were selected (Table 1). The findings obtained include authors, titles, methods, results, and conclusions:

Table 1. Findings obtained.

| Authors | Year | Article | Location | Methodology | Results and/or conclusions |
|---------------------|------|--|----------|---|---|
| Pérez et al. (7) | 2024 | Traditional games as an influence on improving the lifestyle of older adults | Ecuador | Literature review from indexed journals and bibliographic repositories of different local universities. | Traditional games have proven to be effective alternatives for enhancing the lifestyle of older adults, promoting well-being through psychological, social, and physical aspect, using motivation. |
| Vecillas et al. (8) | 2023 | Systematic review on depression and physical exercise in the elderly | Spain | Systematic review of databases assessing the association between depression and physical exercise. Data recorded included age, sex, sample size, assessment instruments, study duration, and association. | Physical exercise has proven to be an effective complement. Evidence suggests that it has a strong influence on many factors, including emotional states. It increases blood flow in the brain, enhancing emotional regulation and influencing the monoaminergic system, thereby generating effects on distraction and preventing decay in the elderly. |
| Aragón (9) | 2022 | Physical-recreational activity and depression in older adults: a systematic review | Ecuador | Narrative bibliographic systematic review using theoretical methods. | Depression is directly related to physical-recreational activity, showing a proportional relationship with physical activity, by which older adults can prevent certain diseases in recreational environments. |
| Copara et al. (10) | 2021 | Reflections on nursing intervention in adults with depressive episodes | Ecuador | Bibliographic review of scientific articles from various databases. | Nursing interventions for individuals with depressive episodes focus on reducing symptoms through integrated care in coordination with multidisciplinary team activities. |

Tabla 1. (Continuation).

| Authors | Year | Article | Location | Methodology | Results and/or conclusions |
|---|------|---|----------|---|---|
| Silva et al. (11) | 2021 | Depression in the elderly: The contribution of nurses to the recovery of depressed older adults in primary care | Brazil | Systematic review focusing on the contribution of nurses to the recovery of depressed older adults in primary care. | The work of nurses with depressed older adults should be humane and individualized, respecting their specific needs, stimulating their self-esteem, encouraging physical exercise, and involving the family to enhance health recovery. |
| Abarza & Zúñiga (12) | 2021 | Depression in older adults and its relationship with physical activity and sedentary lifestyle in Talca, Chile | Chile | Correlational, cross-sectional and descriptive study. The sample consisted of adults aged 65 and older, assessed through multiple visits in the city of Talca, Chile. | Physical activity influences depression, but the relationship is believed to be bidirectional. Findings show an inverse correlation between both variables, where increasing physical activity reduces depression, and vice versa. Sedentary lifestyle and physical activity are closely linked to depressive symptoms. |
| Fidelis & De Oliveira (13) | 2020 | Aging: Nursing interventions in older adults with depression | Brazil | Qualitative bibliographic review of scientific contributions. | The role of nurses demonstrates the importance of prevention and care for older adults with depression, identifying their condition and needs to enhance their well-being during the aging process. |
| Gómez & Cases (14) | 2020 | Care Plan for elderly patients with depression: a case study | Spain | Bibliographic search of scientific articles through different databases. | Nursing care is individualized and effective in preventing depression. Improving mobility is a positive component that helps reduce depression in older adults. |
| Rivera-Corvalán & Cartes-Velásquez (15) | 2020 | Strategies for the prevention of geriatric depression | Chile | Narrative bibliographic systematic review using theoretical methods. | Psychosocial and physical preventive methods are developed, including community health programs, active intellectual aging, recreation, eating habits and physical activity. In general, the adoption of active aging is the core of all preventive elements. |

Tabla 1. (Continuation).

| Authors | Year | Article | Location | Methodology | Results and/or conclusions |
|---------------------------|-------------|---|-----------------|---|--|
| López (16) | 2020 | Active group music therapy and depression in patients at the Psychiatric Hospital - CNS | Ecuador | The research was conducted from an explanatory approach with a quasi-experimental design, including pre-test, post-test and control group. | Active group music therapy significantly reduced depression levels in older adults, achieving a statistically significant percentage of 95%, both individually and in groups. |
| García et al. (17) | 2019 | Systematic review: Primary prevention of depression in older adults | Spain | Systematic review in the PubMed database in 2019, using the following keywords: 'depressive disorder', 'aged' and 'primary prevention'. | Prevention of depression at the primary level should be highly prioritized as a health policy. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is the most appropriate approach in primary prevention, with promising results of 20-30% in depressive symptoms. |
| Alomoto et al. (18) | 2018 | Intervention with physical-recreational activity for anxiety and depression in older adults | Ecuador | Correlational and pre-experimental research, conducted on a single group of older adults from the Social Security Institute of the Armed Forces of Ecuador in Quito, using the Hamilton test. | A significant reduction in depression levels was demonstrated among older adults. Therefore, a physical-recreational activity program adapted to the sociocultural context would improve psychological indicators in older adults. |
| Mostacero & Martínez (19) | 2019 | The role of nurses in active and healthy aging. Narrative review | Spain | Narrative review through bibliographic search in health science databases: PubMed, Lilacs, Cuiden, CINAHL and Cochrane Library, and in general search engines: SciELO Spain and Dialnet Plus. | Adopting a full life-cycle perspective by health system professionals is essential for promoting active and healthy aging, as well as ensuring equity in primary care and nursing care approaches, where the role of nurses is crucial. |

DISCUSSION

The main results of the integrative review indicate that it is essential to understand the risks of depression in order to address it effectively. Aragon's study (9) states that depression is directly linked to physical and recreational activities and that there is a proportional connection between physical activity and depression, which prevents diseases and fosters a healthy environment through the implementation of physical and recreational activity programs. The study by Vecillas et al. (8) concludes that physical activity plays a cost-effective and efficient role, as it provides numerous benefits to older adults, making it essential in healthcare protection programs. In addition, it aligns with the research by Abarza & Zúñiga (12), which indicates that moderate and vigorous physical activity is associated with fewer depressive symptoms.

Pérez et al. (7) state that the older adult population needs to improve their biopsychosocial well-being, so it is essential to seek alternatives to promote healthy lifestyles. Another finding is that elderly healthcare at the primary level requires addressing several aspects. Traditional games, such as spinning tops, marbles and jump rope, promote the physical health of older adults, as they involve physical movement and enhance agility, muscle strength and well-being. These pastimes reduce the likelihood of developing chronic diseases. Physical function improves mobility and functional competence to have more autonomy in their daily lives.

In his study, López (16) also found that depression is a highly common mental health condition worldwide and that active group music therapy reduces it by acting on sensory, cognitive-affective functionality and essentially on behavior. Music facilitates the expression of emotions within group interactions, helping to extend those attitudes into their daily lives. During the process, group music therapy was found to have a positive impact on reducing anxiety, as the type of music used was adapted to the mood and temperament of older adults, along with the use of percussion instruments made from natural sound materials.

Copara et al. (10) state that nursing interventions in individuals experiencing depressive episodes aim to reduce symptoms through effective patient engagement, as well as by integrating these interventions into the activities of the multidisciplinary team. Fidelis & de Oliveira (13), regarding nursing actions to prevent depression in older adults, conclude that the role of nursing is not only to answer questions

about medication, but also to listen, understand and guide them in a simple and clear manner, facilitating understanding and caring for their family. The role of a nurse demonstrates the importance of prevention and care of old individuals with depression, providing specialized attention tailored to the needs and conditions in their aging. Gómez & Cases (14) found that organizing an individualized care plan achieves a comprehensive approach, ensuring that interventions are effective and promoting physical mobility in the prevention of depression.

Furthermore, the study by Alomoto et al. (18) shows that recreational physical activities provide a variety of health-related benefits for older adults, including psychological benefits. Physical activity can reduce stressors linked to other psychological issues that negatively influence the mental health framework of older adults. Physical activity, in particular, can help achieve the desired effect (20), as observed in older adults who attend senior care centers (CIAM, for its initials in Spanish), and show fewer symptoms of depression.

Limitations were identified in the research process, as the search was restricted to articles published in specific databases and in three languages (Spanish, English and Portuguese), which may have excluded studies published in other languages or in databases not included in the review. Another significant limitation was the lack of long-term follow-up studies, making it difficult to assess whether preventive interventions remain effective over time.

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence gathered in this integrative review supports the effectiveness of physical activity, music therapy, and recreational activities as key interventions for preventing depression in older adults. These interventions not only promote mental well-being, but also enhance the physical and social health of this population. The role of nursing is crucial in the implementation of these programs at the primary care level, not only in the promotion of active lifestyles, but also in mental health education and in the innovation of areas that foster overall well-being.

In terms of public policy, the findings of this study highlight the urgent need to expand depression prevention programs for older adults by integrating these activities into public health initiatives. Further longitudinal studies are required to assess the long-term impact of these interventions and explore how they can be tailored to the individual and

cultural characteristics of patients. This will enable the development of more effective and accessible strategies to prevent depression in aging.

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JMCH: conceptualization, formal analysis, research, methodology, validation, visualization, writing - original draft, writing - review & editing.

JMTP, JRIC: data curation, research, validation, writing - original draft.

EMCC: data curation, research, writing of original draft.

DBC: research, project management, validation, writing - original draft.

GMC: formal analysis, research, validation, writing - original draft.

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