

Breaking Myths About the Sexual Rights of Older Adults: A Narrative Literature Review*

[English Version]

Rompiendo mitos sobre los derechos sexuales de los adultos mayores: una revisión narrativa de la literatura

Romperar mitos sobre os direitos sexuais dos adultos mais velhos: uma revisão narrativa da literatura

Received on 05/06/2025. Accepted on 14/11/2025

› How to cite:

Villada, J. S et al. (2026). Breaking Myths About the Sexual Rights of Older Adults: A Narrative Literature Review. *Ánfora*, 33(61), 239-270. <https://doi.org/110.30854/anf.1261>
Universidad Autónoma de Manizales. L-ISSN 0121-6538. E-ISSN 2248-6941. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

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* From the project *Technical guidelines for the promotion and guarantee of the sexual rights of older people with a gender, intercultural and intersectional approach, within the framework of current Colombian regulations and the National Public Policy on Aging and Old Age*, concluded in 2023, developed between the Pan American Health Organization, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Colombia and the University of Caldas (Contract No. 2023-040). Funding: PAO. Declaration of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. Data Availability: All relevant data are included in the article.

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Abstract

Objective: Analyze literature on the promotion and guarantee of sexual rights for older adults from a gender-based, intercultural, and intersectional approach. **Methodology:** An exploratory integrative review was conducted in five stages: 1) Problem identification guided by the SPIDER question framework; 2) Bibliographic search according to the PRISMA flowchart; 3) Evaluation of the quality of the studies using SANRA; 4) Analysis using Atlas.ti software; and 5) Presentation of the results. **Results:** Three categories emerged 47 papers: 1) Structural and health system elements focus on service access, medical training, and health policies on sexuality in old age; 2) social and cultural elements related to norms, taboos, and stigmatization; and 3) individual elements centered on personal factors such as beliefs, experiences, and physical and mental health status. **Conclusions:** To address sexuality in older adults, it is important to eliminate aging prejudices and stigmas. The guarantee of sexual rights at this stage of life demands inclusive health systems with policies on education, prevention, and diversity. The implementation of a gender, intercultural, and intersectional approach is important to promoting dignified and healthy development.

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Key words: Older adults; Sexuality; Social Representation; Sexual and Reproductive Rights; Health Policy (obtained from the DeSC/MeSH Thesaurus).

Resumen

Objetivo: analizar la literatura científica sobre la promoción y garantía de los derechos sexuales de los adultos mayores, adoptando un enfoque de género, intercultural e interseccional. **Metodología:** se realizó una revisión exploratoria integradora en cinco etapas: 1) Identificación del problema guiada por el marco de preguntas SPIDER; 2) búsqueda bibliográfica según el flujograma PRISMA; 3) evaluación de la calidad de los estudios mediante SANRA; 4) análisis mediante el software Atlas.ti; y 5) presentación de los resultados. **Resultados:** de los 47 artículos identificados surgieron tres categorías: 1) elementos estructurales y del sistema de salud, centrados en el acceso a los servicios, la formación médica y las políticas sanitarias sobre sexualidad en la vejez; 2) elementos sociales y culturales relacionados con normas, tabúes y estigmatización; y 3) elementos individuales centrados en factores personales como creencias, experiencias y estado de salud física y mental. **Conclusiones:** para el abordaje de la sexualidad en las personas mayores es importante liberar prejuicios de edad y estigmas. La garantía de los derechos sexuales en esta etapa de la vida requiere de sistemas de salud inclusivos con políticas centradas en la educación, la prevención y la diversidad. Para la promoción del desarrollo digno y saludable es crucial implementar el enfoque de género, intercultural e interseccional.

Palabras clave: personas mayores; sexualidad; representación social; derechos sexuales y reproductivos; política sanitaria (obtenidos del tesoro DeSC/MeSH).

Resumo

Objetivo: analisar a literatura científica sobre a promoção e garantia dos direitos sexuais de pessoas idosas, adotando uma abordagem de gênero, intercultural e interseccional. **Metodologia:** foi realizada uma revisão integrativa exploratória em cinco etapas: 1) identificação do problema guiada pelo quadro de perguntas SPIDER; 2) busca bibliográfica de acordo com o fluxograma PRISMA; 3) avaliação da qualidade dos estudos utilizando o SANRA; 4) análise utilizando o software Atlas.ti; e 5) apresentação dos resultados. **Resultados:** dos 47 artigos identificados, emergiram três categorias: 1) elementos estruturais e do sistema de saúde, centrados no acesso aos serviços, formação médica e políticas de saúde sobre sexualidade na velhice; 2) elementos sociais e culturais relacionados com normas, tabus e estigmatização; e 3) elementos individuais

centrados em factores pessoais como crenças, experiências e estado de saúde física e mental. **Conclusões:** para abordar a sexualidade entre idosos, é importante romper com preconceitos e estigmas ancestrais. A garantia dos direitos sexuais nesta fase da vida requer sistemas de saúde inclusivos, com políticas focadas em educação, prevenção e diversidade. Para promover um desenvolvimento digno e saudável, é crucial implementar uma abordagem de gênero, intercultural e interseccional.

Palavras chaves: Idosos; Sexualidade; Representação Social; Direitos Sexuais e Reprodutivos; Políticas de Saúde (obtidos do tesouro DeSC/MeSH).

Introduction

Sexuality is a main aspect of the human condition throughout life including the old age. Sexual practices and experiences evolve over the years in response to hormonal and anatomical changes that come with aging (regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation), it prompts a new search for ways of pleasure (PAMI, 2023).

It is essential to understand that sexuality in older adults encompasses a wide range of biological, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions that extend beyond genital organs, even more when aging is socially associated with a decline in sexual activity. This understanding demands to be apart from a medical perspective limited to the absence of disease or dysfunction. The need for interaction, intimacy, and affection does not disappear with age; in fact, interest in sexuality and sexual activity is an important quality of life indicator in older adults (Guadarrama *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, a positive and respectful approach to sexuality when aging is essential to ensure safe and pleasurable sexual experiences, free from coercion, discrimination, and violence (World Health Organization, 2006).

Sexual health is essential for healthy aging; however, the full exercise of older adults' sexual rights is limited by stigma and discrimination. The origins of these barriers are associated with cultural, social, and administrative factors, rather than physiological changes. Nowadays, public policies and education on sexual rights have begun to consider the changing nature of gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual practices, emotions, and desires throughout life. However, older adults have been excluded from these considerations rendering them invisible in discussions and strategies for the protection of their sexual rights (PAMI, 2023).

Demographic changes worldwide have led to an aging population. United Nations (UN) (2022) reveals a growing part of people over 60 years, with a fast increase in people aged 80 and over. In Latin America and the Caribbean, this accelerated demographic transition has reshaped the population structure. According to the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE, 2024), in 1950, only 5.2% of the regional population was 60 years or older. The percentage has grown steadily since 1970, reaching 88.6 million in 2022, or 13.4% of the population (CELADE, 2024). It is estimated that by 2030, this will rise to 114.9 million, or 16.5% of the total population of the region (UN DESA, 2024).

In Colombia, the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE, 2022) reported that in 2021, the population over 60 years increased to 7,107,914 (13.9% of the total population), with a female predominance of 55.1%. This growth trend is expected to be higher in the coming years.

For public health, population aging has significant implications in sexual health, as scientific evidence suggests that older adults are interested in and have active sexual life, and maintain specific needs. It challenges the widespread perception that interests in sexuality declines with age (Crema & Tilio, 2021).

Over the past few decades, several international organizations have remarked the importance of recognizing the sexual rights of older adults, mainly in women. In 1979, the CEDAW Convention (Aboderin, 2014) highlighted the lack of research and policy implementation on the health of postmenopausal women. In 1995, the UN reaffirmed that human rights include control over sexuality and health throughout life, not excluding old age (United Nations, 1995). As older people were still marginalized, in 2013, governments were called upon to guarantee these rights, but progress is slow (UNFPA, 2013). The Inter-American Convention on the Protection of the Human Rights of Older Persons (OAS, 2015) promotes inclusive sexual health policies based on equality and non-discrimination, and the United Nations Plan for the Decade of Healthy Aging 2020-2030 (WHO, 2020) proposes transforming the perception of aging by ensuring comprehensive care and access to adequate services.

Colombia has advanced in recognizing the sexual rights of its population, integrating this right into the 1991 Constitution and into health policies based on human rights. However, cultural taboos, gender inequalities, and the lack of interest of the health system remain barriers to the full exercise of sexuality by older adults. Sexuality promotion and care programs are limited for this population group, and few trainings for health professionals, absence of spaces open to diversity, affect sexual health care (Ezhova *et al.*, 2020; Stowell *et al.*, 2023). Health professionals often do not address the topic, and older adults do not always feel comfortable talking about it (McKay *et al.*, 2022).

The SABE research in Colombia states that 50% of older adults consider sexuality a main aspect of their lives, especially those with better socio-economic conditions and a high level of education (Ministry of Health and Social Protection, 2016). As life expectancy increases, sexuality in old age has gained greater relevance in scientific and social contexts.

Thus, it is necessary to develop technical guidelines for the promotion and guarantee of the sexual rights of older adults, especially, with a gender-based, intercultural, and intersectional approach, within the framework of current Colombian regulations, and the National Public Policy on Aging and Old Age. This would pave the way to protecting the sexual rights of older adults as an extension of human rights in sexuality and sexual health, thereby upholding their dignity and ensuring an inclusive and respectful approach.

The understanding of the relationship between aging and sexuality demands a perspective that involves generational, historical, and sociocultural

factors. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the literature on promoting the guarantee of sexual rights for older adults from a gender-based, intercultural, and intersectional perspective.

Methodology

An exploratory integrative review was conducted to examine the evidence for the promotion and guarantee of older adults' sexual rights, with a sampling framework as differential. This process included five stages that guided the design: problem identification, literature search, data evaluation, data analysis, and presentation (Manterola *et al.*, 2023; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

Stage 1: Problem Identification

Sexual health, holistically, includes physical, mental, and social dimensions that guarantee of sexual rights as an extension of human rights. The cultural perceptions and aging taboos often state more significant barriers to sexual enjoyment in aging than the physiological changes associated with age. In Colombia, despite legislative and public policy advances since the 1991 Constitution, older adults still face challenges in fully enjoying their sexuality, due to stereotypes and institutional disinterest. Based on this, the following review question is stated:

What evidence does the literature provide on the promotion and guarantee of the sexual rights of older adults from a gender-based, intercultural, and intersectional perspective?

The design of this review question was guided by the SPIDER framework:

- Sample: papers as the unit of analysis
- Phenomenon of Interest (PI): Sexual rights of older adults
- Design: Narrative review
- Evaluation: SANRA
- Research type: Qualitative

The inclusion criteria were papers published between 2013 and 2023, in English, Spanish, or Portuguese, and fully accessible. The exclusion criteria were book chapters, gray literature documents, reflection articles, and letters to the editor. The search for papers was conducted between June and August 2023.

The databases used were the Virtual Health Library (VHL), PubMed, Embase, Scopus, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect. Health descriptors (DECS BIREME) and MeSH terms in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, such as “aged”, “elderly”, “aging”, “sexuality”, “sexual health”, “social representation”, “intersectional framework”, “sexual rights”, “health policy”, and “practice guideline” were validated. The Boolean operators were "AND" and "OR" to combine key terms related to the study topic (Table 1).

Table 1. Search Strategies.

Data-base	Search	Results	Downloads
VHL	"Anciano" AND "Derechos sexuales"	26	1
	"Anciano" AND "Sexualidad" AND "Guía de práctica clínica"	68	5
	"Anciano" OR "Adulto Mayor" OR "Persona Mayor" AND "Sexualidad"	698	10
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Sexual Health"	293	3
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Social Representation"	12	0
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Intersectional Framework"	1	0
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Sexual Rights"	10	0
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Health Policy"	10	0
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Practice Guideline"	1	1
PubMed	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Sexual Health"	507	17
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Practice Guideline"	5	2
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Sexual Rights"	18	2
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Social Representation"	2	1
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Intersectional Framework"	5	0
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Health Policy"	60	5

Data-base	Search	Results	Downloads
Embase	'aged' AND 'sexual health' AND ([english]/lim OR [portuguese]/lim OR [spanish]/lim) AND [aged]/lim AND [embase]/lim AND [2013-2023]/py	1,694	25
	('aged'/exp OR 'aged') AND ('reproductive rights'/exp OR 'reproductive rights') AND ([english]/lim OR [portuguese]/lim OR [spanish]/lim) AND [aged]/lim AND [2013-2023]/py	15	0
	('aged'/exp OR 'aged') AND ('reproductive rights'/exp OR 'reproductive rights') NOT ('gender and sex'/exp OR 'gender and sex') AND ([english]/lim OR [portuguese]/lim OR [spanish]/lim) AND ([aged]/lim OR [very elderly]/lim) AND [embase]/lim AND [2013-2023]/py	5	0
	'aged' AND 'clinical pathway' AND 'sexual health' AND ([english]/lim OR [portuguese]/lim OR [spanish]/lim) AND ([aged]/lim OR [very elderly]/lim) AND [2013-2023]/py	5	0
	('aged'/exp OR 'aged') AND ('sexual health'/exp OR 'sexual health') AND ('program evaluation'/exp OR 'program evaluation') AND ([english]/lim OR [portuguese]/lim OR [spanish]/lim) AND ([aged]/lim OR [very elderly]/lim) AND [embase]/lim AND [2013-2023]/py	0	0
	('aged'/exp OR 'aged') AND ('sexuality'/exp OR 'sexuality') AND ('social representation'/exp OR 'social representation') AND ([english]/lim OR [portuguese]/lim OR [spanish]/lim) AND ([aged]/lim OR [very elderly]/lim) AND [2013-2023]/py	2	1
	('aged'/exp OR 'aged') AND ('sexuality'/exp OR 'sexuality') AND ('intersectionality'/exp OR 'intersectionality') AND ([english]/lim OR [portuguese]/lim OR [spanish]/lim) AND ([aged]/lim OR [very elderly]/lim) AND [2013-2023]/py	42	0
	'aged' AND 'sexuality' AND 'sexual rights' AND ([english]/lim OR [portuguese]/lim OR [spanish]/lim) AND ([aged]/lim OR [very elderly]/lim) AND [embase]/lim AND [2013-2023]/py	15	0
	'aged' OR 'elderly' OR 'aging') AND 'sexuality' AND ([english]/lim OR [portuguese]/lim OR [spanish]/lim) AND ([aged]/lim OR [very elderly]/lim) AND [2013-2023]/py	2,835	31
	'aged' OR 'elderly' OR 'aging') AND 'sexuality' AND 'sexual health' AND ([english]/lim OR [portuguese]/lim OR [spanish]/lim) AND ([aged]/lim OR [very elderly]/lim) AND [embase]/lim AND [2013-2023]/py	283	5
	'aged' OR 'elderly' OR 'aging') AND 'sexuality' AND 'social representation' AND ([english]/lim OR [portuguese]/lim OR [spanish]/lim) AND [aged]/lim AND [2013-2023]/py	1	1
	'aged' OR 'elderly' OR 'aging') AND 'sexuality' AND 'sexual rights' AND ([english]/lim OR [portuguese]/lim OR [spanish]/lim) AND [aged]/lim AND [2013-2023]/py	20	0
	'aged' OR 'elderly' OR 'aging') AND 'sexuality' AND 'health policy' AND ([english]/lim OR [portuguese]/lim OR [spanish]/lim) AND [aged]/lim AND [2013-2023]/py AND [embase]/lim	28	1
'aged' OR 'elderly' OR 'aging') AND 'sexuality' AND 'practice guideline' AND ([english]/lim OR [portuguese]/lim OR [spanish]/lim) AND [aged]/lim AND [2013-2023]/py AND [embase]/lim	39	0	

Data-base	Search	Results	Downloads
Scopus	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Sexual Health"	2,945	10
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Sexual Rights"	56	2
	"aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging" AND "Sexuality" AND "Intersectional Framework"	1	1
	"Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Social Representation"	65	2
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Health Policy"	91	3
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Practice Guideline"	109	0
JSTOR	"aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging" AND "sexuality"	6,800	7
	("aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "health policy"	773	3
Science-Direct	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality"	2,270	10
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Sexual Health"	522	3
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Social Representation"	16	6
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Intersectional Framework"	28	0
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Sexual Rights"	36	1
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Health Policy"	132	0
	("Aged" OR "elderly" OR "aging") AND "Sexuality" AND "Practice Guideline"	14	0
Total		20,558	159

The thematic analysis of the selected papers was conducted using Atlas.ti version 9 (licensed by the University of Caldas). The unit of analysis consisted of meaningful text segments (sentences, paragraphs, or thematic fragments) that addressed older adults' sexuality and sexual rights.

Based on the three pre-defined analytical families—(1) structural and health system elements, (2) social and cultural elements, and (3) individual elements—an initial codebook was constructed deductively. During iterative reading of the 47 papers, this codebook was refined inductively by merging

redundant codes, adjusting code names, and incorporating new codes that emerged from the material.

The coding process involved assigning one or more codes to each relevant text segment, and then regrouping them into subcategories, and final categories within each analytical family. Atlas.ti was used to retrieve coded segments, organize them by theme, and support the synthesis of findings through code frequencies, code co-occurrences, and thematic relationships. This procedure ensured transparency and traceability between the original texts, the codes, and the three main categories.

Quality criteria: The review was conducted in line with the Scale for the Assessment of Narrative Review Articles (SANRA) by Baethge *et al.* (2019), which includes six items: 1) importance to readers (this was a need expressed by the Ministry of Health and PAHO); 2) objective of the narrative review (described in the introduction); 3) complete description of literature search (described in materials and methods); 4) references; 5) scientific reasoning; and 6) adequate presentation of the data (described in results).

This research followed the guidelines given in the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2024). Ethical approval for the research was granted by the Faculty of Health Sciences of the Universidad de Caldas (CBCS-052) on October 2, 2023.

Results

159 papers were selected through the search strategies, most of them were found in Embase (n=64). As a first step, papers with solid scientific evidence published in journals classified as Q1 and Q2 were collected. The articles were classified into three categories related to barriers to sexual health in older adults: structural and health system-related elements, social and cultural elements, and individual elements. Finally, 47 papers met the inclusion criteria (Figure 1).

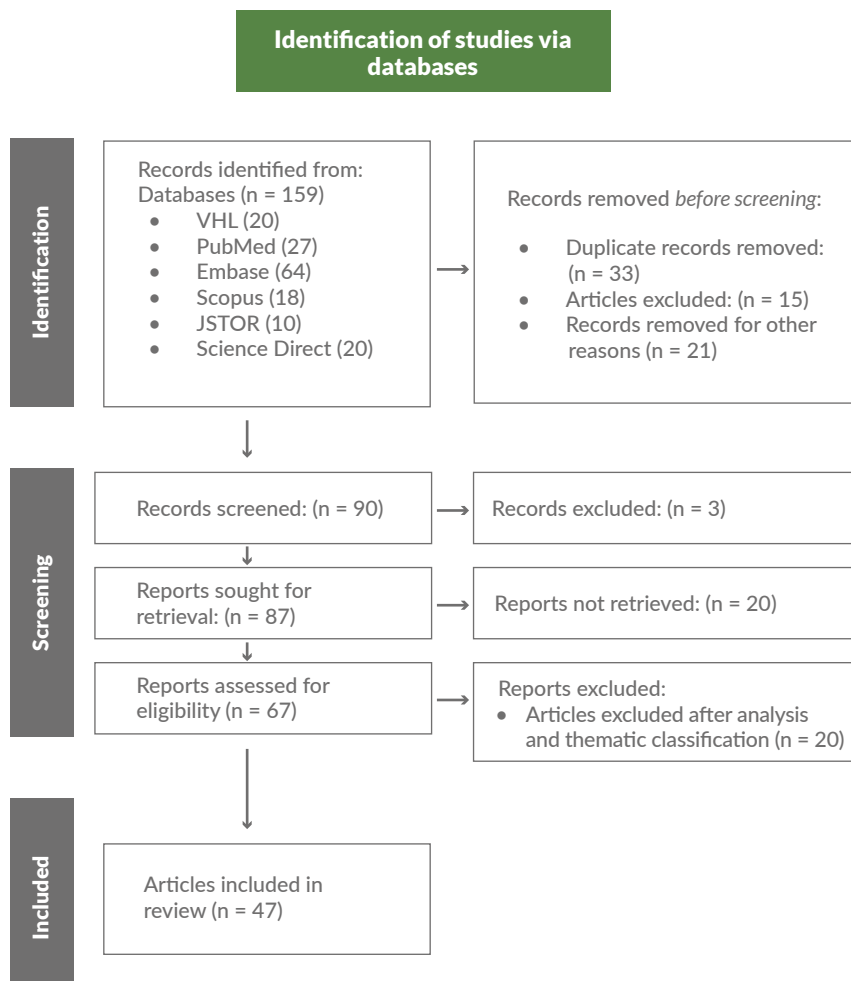


Figure 1. Selection Flowchart.

Source: Authors own elaboration based on the flow diagram from the PRISMA model

Of the total publications, 81% were found in category Q1 journals and 19% in category Q2.

The United States (n=17), Australia (n=6), and the United Kingdom (n=5) were the countries with the most publications. The year with the highest publication was 2023 (n=11) (Figure 2). The review revealed a growing interest in sexual rights of older adults, the continent with the greatest representation was America (n=18), followed by Europe (n=17). However, no Latin American

publications were found that met the selection criteria. Regarding the approach and type of research, 32 quantitative studies, 13 qualitative studies, and 2 mixed-methods studies were identified (Table 2).

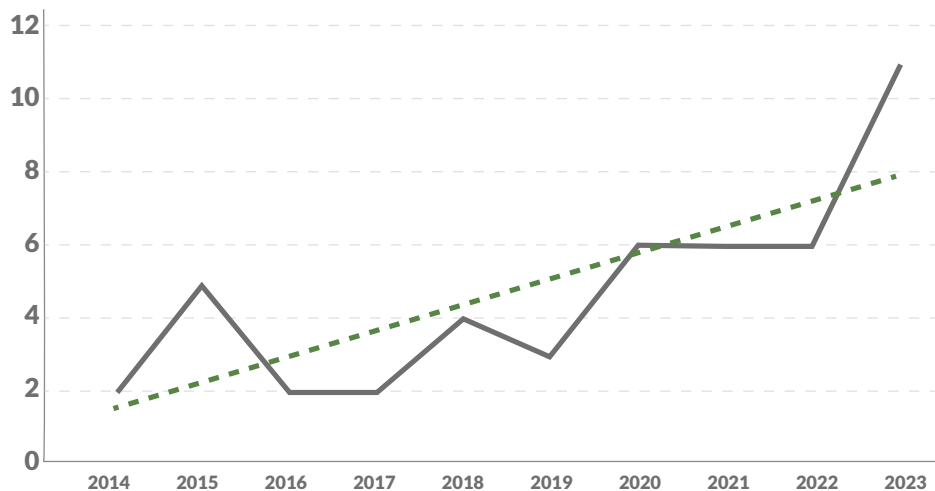


Figure 2. Trend in Scientific Publications.

Table 2. Characterization of Publications.

Year	Number of Articles	Language	Country	Journal & Publindex Classification (2022)	Thematic Classification	Type of Research
2014	2	English (n=2)	England (n=1)	Reprod Health Matters. Q1	Structural elements	Quantitative
			United States (n=1)	J Sex Med. Q1	Individual elements Health system-related elements	

Year	Number of Articles	Language	Country	Journal & Publindex Classification (2022)	Thematic Classification	Type of Research	
2015	5	English (n=5)	United States (n=4)	American Journal of Public Health. Q1	Individual elements	Quantitative	
				Journal of Women's Health. Q1	Health system-related elements		
				The American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry. Q1	Health system-related elements		
				Appl Nurs Res. Q1	Individual elements	Qualitative	
			Australia (n=1)	J Aging Stud. Q1	Structural elements	Qualitative	
2016	2	English (n=2)	United Kingdom (n=1)	Arch Sex Behav. Q1	Individual elements	Qualitative	
			United States (n=1)	Reprod Health Matters. Q1	Structural elements	Qualitative	
2017	2	English (n=2)	Australia (n=1)	Australas J Ageing. Q1	Structural elements	Qualitative	
			United Kingdom (n=1)	Int J Environ Res Public Health. Q1	Structural elements Individual elements Social and cultural elements Health system-related elements	Quantitative	
2018	4	English (n=4)	United States (n=2)	Gerontol Geriatr Educ. Q2	Health system-related elements	Qualitative	
				J Womens Health. Q1	Individual elements		
				Tanzania (n=1)	Sex Roles. Q1		Social and cultural elements Individual elements
				Iran (n=1)	Int Perspect Sex Reprod Health. Q2		Social and cultural elements

Year	Number of Articles	Language	Country	Journal & Publindex Classification (2022)	Thematic Classification	Type of Research
2019	3	English (n=3)	United States (n=1)	Int J Aging Hum Dev. Q2	Structural elements	Quantitative
			Germany (n=1)	Psychol Aging. Q1	Individual elements	
			England (n=1)	Sex Med. Q1	Individual elements	
2020	6	English (n=6)	Israel (n=1)	Isr J Health Policy Res. Q2	Health system-related elements	Qualitative
			Norway (n=1)	Int J Sex Health. Q1	Health system-related elements	
			South Korea (n=1)	Sex Med. Q1	Individual elements	Quantitative
			Spain (n=1)	European Journal of Ageing. Q1	Health system-related elements	
			Australia (n=2)	Australas J Ageing. Q1	Structural elements Social and cultural elements Health system-related elements	
				Study. Sex Med. Q2	Social and cultural elements Individual elements	

Year	Number of Articles	Language	Country	Journal & Publindex Classification (2022)	Thematic Classification	Type of Research
2021	6	English (n=6)	United States (n=1)	Aging Ment Health. Q1	Social and cultural elements	Quantitative
			Portugal (n=1)	Sex Res Social Policy. Q1	Individual elements	
			United Kingdom (n=1)	Soc Sci Med. Q1	Individual elements	Qualitative
			Australia (n=1)	J Appl Gerontol. Q1	Health system-related elements	Quantitative
			Sweden (n=1)	Sex Med. Q1	Individual elements	
			Germany (n=1)	Age Ageing. Q1	Structural elements Social and cultural elements	
2022	6	English (n=6)	United States (n=2)	Gerontologist. Q1	Health system-related elements	Quantitative
				Int J Environ Res Public Health. Q1	Health system-related elements	
			China (n=2)	J Aging Stud. Q1	Structural elements	Qualitative
				J Sex Med. Q1	Individual elements	Quantitative
			United Kingdom (n=1)	Age Ageing. Q1	Health system-related elements	Mixed method
			Belgium (n=1)	J Sex Med. Q1	Individual elements	Quantitative

Year	Number of Articles	Language	Country	Journal & Publindex Classification (2022)	Thematic Classification	Type of Research	
2023	11	English (n=11)	United States (n=5)	Gerontologist. Q1	Structural elements	Quantitative	
				Pre Sci. Q1	Health system-related elements Individual elements		
				J Women Aging. Q2	Individual elements		Qualitative
					Health system-related elements Social and cultural elements		Quantitative
				Gerontologist. Q1	Structural elements Social and cultural elements		
			United Kingdom (n=1)	Sex Transm Infect. Q1	Health system-related elements	Quantitative	
			Germany (n=1)	J Med Philos. Q1	Social and cultural elements		
			Australia (n=1)	Br J Occup Ther. Q2	Health system-related elements		
			Italy (n=1)	Healthcare. Q2	Social and cultural elements		
			Turkey (n=1)	Eur J Obstet Gynecol Reprod. Q2	Individual elements		
Canada (n=1)	Gerontologist. Q1	Health system-related elements					

Figure 3 presents, in a tree map format, the classification of scientific publications on the sexual rights of older adults into three main categories: structural and health system elements, social and cultural elements, and individual elements. This classification helped in analyzing the diverse factors that influence both the sexual health and sexual rights of older adults.

The most frequently category was structural and health system elements, with main emphasis on access to health services, and training of healthcare professionals. Health policies on sexuality in old age have received little attention. This was followed by the category of individual elements, indicating that research has focused on personal factors such as beliefs, experiences, and physical and mental health status. Finally, the category of social and cultural elements includes research on social norms, taboos, stigmatization, and the impact of society on the experience of sexuality in old age.

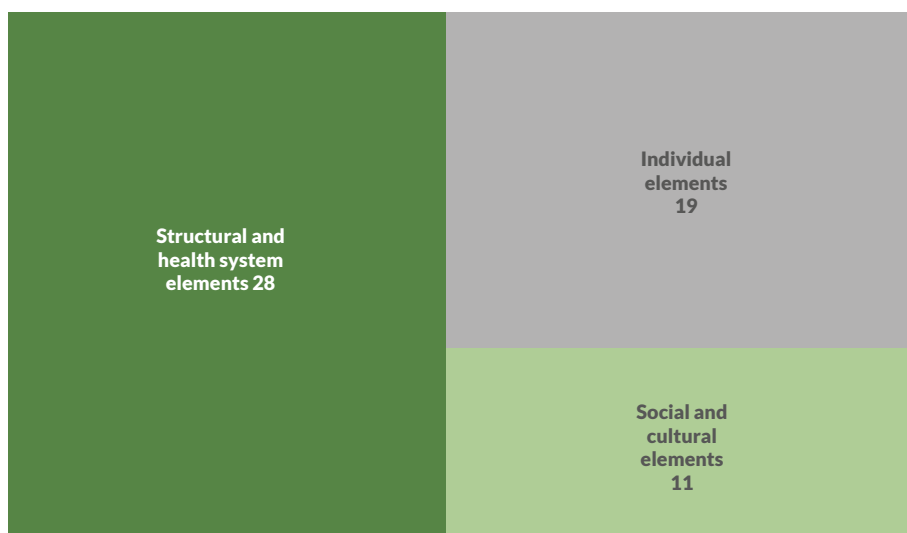


Figure 3. *Thematic Classification of Publications.*

This classification allowed the analysis to be directed as shown in Figure 4.

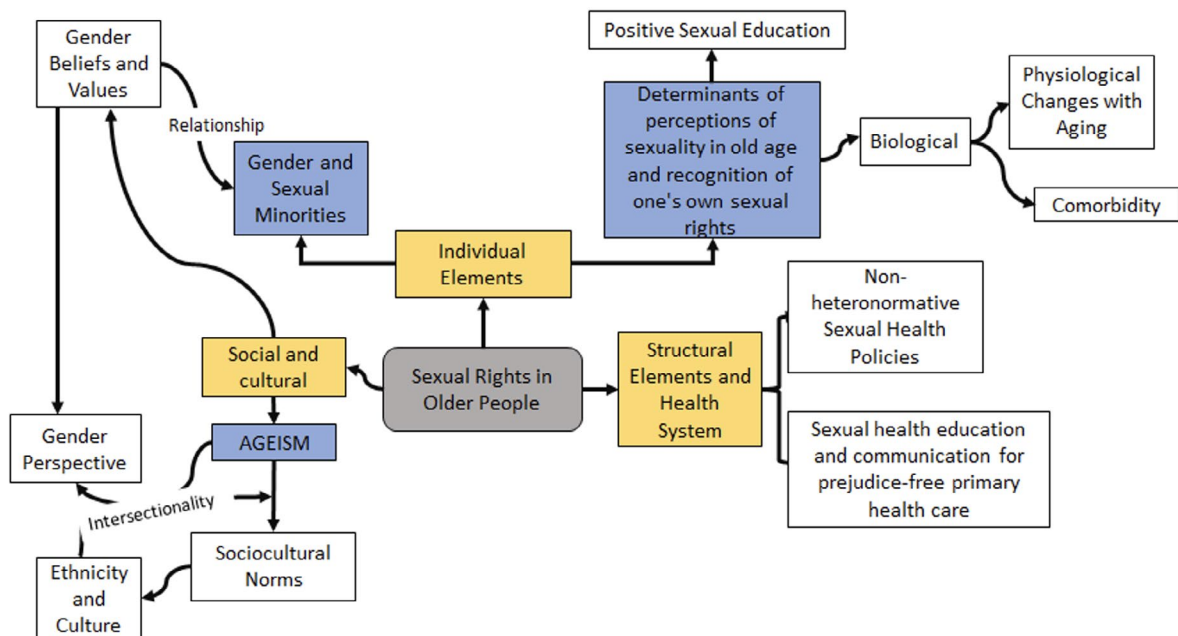


Figure 4. Thematic Categories.

Discussion

Individual Elements

Sexual activity is an important and frequent aspect of aging (Boyacıoğlu *et al.*, 2023; Cismaru *et al.*, 2022; Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2023; Khan *et al.*, 2023; Stentagg *et al.*, 2021; Towler *et al.*, 2021), it is associated with health, physical, and psychological well-being (Chung *et al.*, 2020; Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2023; Kolodziejczak *et al.*, 2019; Lee, *et al.*, 2016; Li *et al.*, 2022; Portellos *et al.*, 2023; Rowntree & Zufferey, 2015; von Humboldt *et al.*, 2021), refute the myth of asexuality in older people (Roney & Kazer, 2015; Rutagumirwa & Bailey, 2018). Moreover, sexuality at this stage gets a new meaning, it highlights on intimacy between a couple that differentiates sexual practices from other age groups (Buczak-Stec *et*

al., 2021; Dalmer & Marshall, 2023; Emerson *et al.*, 2023; Roney & Kazer, 2015; Rutagumirwa & Bailey, 2018; Towler *et al.*, 2021; Villar *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2015).

According to Fredriksen-Goldsen *et al.* (2023), the sexuality of many older adults is a private and personal issue with aging conceptions that leads them to assume that sexual dysfunctions are normal aging changes. They find it easier to discuss sexuality with healthcare professionals of the same sex who demonstrate a genuine interest in their sexual health.

Macleod *et al.* (2020) states that being an older woman entails double discrimination, as sexist perceptions of female sexuality relate only to reproductive capacity, reducing pleasure to a non-transcendental issue in the postmenopausal age. Menopause, a critical determinant of sexual satisfaction, is rarely addressed in medical consultations with older women.

From a differential perspective, research on sexually diverse older adults is scarce and mostly focused on homosexual men. These individuals bear a greater burden of discrimination and internalized stigma that limits the expression of their sexual orientations and needs. It increases the risk of health problems and leads to less trust in healthcare providers (Crockett & Cooper, 2016; Henning *et al.*, 2015; Jung *et al.*, 2023; Lyons *et al.*, 2021; McKay *et al.*, 2022; Ports *et al.*, 2014; Smith *et al.*, 2019). All of these factors make the sexually diverse older population a vulnerable group of particular interest for future research.

Structural Elements and Health System

Based on the perceptions and experiences of older adults, research such as those by Stentagg *et al.* (2020) suggest that medical and psychiatric comorbidities are negatively related to sexual activity. This supports the concept of sexual activity as a marker of healthy aging and a determinant of physical and psychological well-being (Portellos *et al.*, 2023). Some authors (Gewirtz-Meydan *et al.*, 2020; Schaller *et al.*, 2020; Syme & Cohn, 2021) highlight the discomfort and lack of training among healthcare professionals in addressing these issues as a limitation for sexual health in older adults. This stems aging perceptions and beliefs, and taboos about sexuality in old age. This reveals a need for training healthcare professionals in non-heteronormative sexuality, and from the perspective of sexual orientation diversity. Such an approach promotes a positive view of sexuality in older adults as a normal activity, free from a medicalized perspective and not focused mainly on dysfunction. This would empower healthcare professionals to communicate and promote actions that seek comprehensive development in sexual health.

There is a clear need for the inclusion of the older population in public sexual policies from a non-medicalized perspective that promotes the normalization of sexuality in old age. This could be achieved through educational initiatives out of care settings aimed at eliminating aging stigmas surrounding sexuality (Brennan-Ing *et al.*, 2018; Fileborn *et al.*, 2017; McAuliffe *et al.*, 2020). These policies should consider the specific needs of the LGBTIQ+ population, encompassing older adults in all their diversity and reducing the social stigma that becomes a barrier to accessing quality sexual health care (Flesia *et al.*, 2023; Fredriksen-Goldsen *et al.*, 2023; Kittle *et al.*, 2023; Nazroo, 2017; Suen, 2022). This highlights the need for healthcare professionals to be trained on sexual diversity of older adults, both in the community and in long-stay care units (Horne *et al.*, 2022; Lee *et al.*, 2019).

Social and Cultural Elements

Ageist and negative perceptions of old age significantly impact views on sexuality. The social representation of sexuality as a characteristic of youth leads to the stigmatization of eroticism in old age, it is seen as abnormal and pathological, and in older women, inappropriate, as it is not performed for procreative purposes. This leads to a sense of shame that may be experienced by older women when the topic is addressed (Thames *et al.*, 2018). This view is strongly influenced by religious conceptions that confine sexuality to marriage and family formation, where the woman's role is to please the man, and may partly explain why the sexual and relational outlook of a widowed man differs from that of a widowed woman (Thames *et al.*, 2018).

The discussions about female sexual health are often limited to reproductive age, leading to a failure to recognize the needs of older women (Hughes *et al.*, 2015; Macleod *et al.*, 2020; Moghasemi *et al.*, 2018). Thus, sociocultural factors limit sexuality to marriage, with a clear gender division, women are subjugated to men's desires and their eroticism beyond marriage and reproduction is not recognized (Roney & Kazer, 2015).

Ageist leads to the perception of aging as an asexual stage of life, causing older people to normalize their dysfunctions (Cismaru *et al.*, 2022). However, findings shows that the asexuality of older adults is a myth and that, although aging is associated with changes in sexuality, old age is a stage in which it can be redefined overcomes biological issues and emphasis on love and relationships (Benítez *et al.*, 2023). These aging social norms and representations associated

with loss is widely present in LGBTIQ+ population's understanding of aging and sexuality (Souza *et al.*, 2019; von Humboldt *et al.*, 2021).

These findings should lead to the promotion of non-aging sexuality, free from prejudices based only on age, understanding that in old age, sexuality remains a normal and important topic and can provide positive elements for greater enjoyment for older adults, moving away from a heteronormative and genital centered perspective.

Age, gender, and ethnicity are intersectional categories necessary for the comprehensive analysis of older adults' sexual rights (Weßel & Schweda, 2023). From a gender perspective, there are gaps in education and income levels. Women are the most vulnerable population, and they are also the group that suffers the most from sexual violence (Macleod *et al.*, 2020). This, coupled with ageist conceptions that ignore the possibility that older women can be victims of sexual violence, means that the sexual rights of older women are doubly denied, especially if they belong to ethnic minorities.

A limitation of the research was the absence of Latin American papers meeting the predefined selection criteria. Although most included papers were published in journals with low indexation, they provide relevant insights into safeguarding the sexual rights of older adults. The literature highlights the need to normalize sexuality in later life through social and educational interventions, including campaigns led by and targeting healthcare professionals, to promote positive perceptions of aging sexuality (Laganá *et al.*, 2021; Medina *et al.*, 2021; Ruiz *et al.*, 2023). In addition, eliminating ageist attitudes toward sexuality is essential, as such biases among healthcare providers negatively affect sexual health care delivery and erode older adults' trust in the healthcare system (Syme & Cohn, 2021). Finally, training healthcare professionals in assertive, unbiased communication—particularly regarding sexual health—is critical (Ruiz *et al.*, 2023).

Conclusions

Sexuality is a normal and significant aspect throughout the life cycle and is associated with benefits for older adults' physical and psychological health. The addressing of their sexual health needs must be a priority in public health, mainly from the perspective of sexology and gerontology. This implies recognizing sexual rights as inherent to the condition of older adults. Aging comes with a transformation of sexuality, where it is redefined and decoupled from the purely

genital, but it does not disappear. Therefore, it is necessary to discard discourses that stigmatize sexuality in old age based on ageist prejudices.

In providing sexual health care to older adults, it is essential to have solid foundations, such as education and prevention within a context of diversity, this guarantees sexual rights and strengthens trust in the health system. Specifically, the sexually diverse older population faces a series of risks that combine stigmas related to sexual orientation and age discrimination. Therefore, one way to ensure their sexual rights is through health systems that understand, recognize, and are prepared to address the precise needs.

Sexuality in old age is shaped by gender, identity, culture, and other conditions that influence its experience and recognition. Older women, LGBTIQ+ people, and ethnic communities face additional barriers to full sexual health. The inclusion of an intersectional and intercultural perspective into public policies allows inclusive sexual rights that are appropriate for the diversity of aging experiences.

It is necessary to generate information on the concept and perception of sexuality in older adults, which will allow for the development of inclusive sexual health policies that are free of prejudice, and recognize the importance of sexuality in the aging process as a source of well-being and quality of life.

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