

SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF EATING BEHAVIOUR IN OLDER ADULTS, EXPLORING NUTRITION COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES TO PROMOTE HEALTHY EATING – A SCOPING REVIEW WITH EVIDENCE MAPPING

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INTRODUCTION

According to the European Commission, in a few years elderly persons will constitute about thirty percent of the global population. It is important to find solutions that improve the health and quality of life of this target group while considering sustainability issues. Nutrition is one of the major determinants of quality of life in the elderly. For this reason, it is important to develop suitable nutrition communication strategies that improve the food choice of the elderly. Eating behaviour results from a complex interaction of factors related to the individual and the surrounding environment, so this is an intricate task. According to the socio-ecological model developed by Story M. et al. (2008) in 'Creating Healthy Eating Environments: Policy and Environmental Approaches', individual, social, physical and macro-level factors need to be targeted to develop successful nutrition communication strategies. The objective of this scoping review is to get a broad view on research about social-ecological determinants of eating behaviour in the elderly and hypothesise suitable nutrition communication strategies adapted for the different characteristics of older adults.

METHODOLOGY

This review was performed according to the PRISMA protocol for scoping reviews. Literature related to determinants of eating behaviour, food choices or eating habits in independent elderly persons living at home was identified with a specific combination of keywords on Medline, Pubmed and Google Scholar. The articles were required to be published between 2000 and 2020. To explore the most important terms present in literature an *a posteriori* bibliometric analysis was performed with Vos Viewer. This analysis was done with the full articles and chronologically, dividing the publications in clusters of years (2000-2004, 2005-2009, 2010-2014 and 2015-2020). The determinants reported in literature were also classified *a priori* according to the social-ecological model and keywords given in the abstracts.

RESULTS

From the 4026 articles obtained, 87 articles were selected. Research about the eating behaviour of elderly persons evolved over the twenty first century by becoming broader and looking at the 'overall picture' in a detailed way. On the individual level, important factors are age, sex, taste and smell impairments, oral health, preferences, motivations, self-efficacy, cost concerns and education level. On the social level, support from friends and family through food sharing, help in preparing meals and eating together seem important. Community and government initiatives are less accepted due to the feeling of intrusion into private issues that these may bring. Physical-level determinants included differences between rural and urban environments that influence the characteristics of the neighbourhood, access to food shops, affordability and availability of transportation. On the macro level, the socio-cultural and ethnic environment in which elderly persons are inserted was decisive for their food choice; older adults also referred to provision of information from healthcare professionals and media channels such as newspapers, radio, TV and the internet as being good means of obtaining nutritional information.

DISCUSSION

Over the years, a move towards a holistic view of eating determinants in elderly persons, considering not only the individual but also the surrounding food environment, is observable. There is also a move towards studying dietary patterns and not specific foods or nutrients. These changes better depict the real-life situations in which various nutrients and foods are consumed simultaneously and many determinants interact to influence food choice. Regarding nutrition communication opportunities, messages targeted at elderly persons should be easy to understand, clear, short and actionable. They need to be tailored for differences in gender, taste and cognitive and health status. In addition, more than focusing strictly on biological factors, older adults' culture, life experiences, motivations, preferences, self-efficacy, attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and socioeconomic factors need to be targeted. It is also imperative that elderly persons be included in a citizen science approach, to incorporate their own perspectives into policies regarding elderly nutrition. Lastly, it is necessary to explore what communication channels and contents should be used so that elderly persons consider the information actionable, trustworthy and adapted to them.