THE FEASIBILITY OF A RETIREMENT PREPARATION PROGRAM BASED ON RESOURCES FOR THE BRAZILIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

The aging of the world population, especially in Brazil, is an achievement of contemporary society, although it presents challenging social, economic, and psychological impacts. Therefore, the increasing number of retirees in Brazil makes retirement an important area of study in psychology, as its transition brings significant changes in lifestyle, which are interpreted positively or negatively by individuals. Perception of retirement, satisfaction, and well-being during this phase are influenced by various factors, and retirement well-being, as proposed by the Resource Theory, results from the adaptations of individuals' physical, financial, social, emotional, cognitive, and motivational resources. In this perspective, an analysis of retirement is conducted focusing on the positive aspects present in individuals' lives, with the aim of strengthening these personal resources. Thus, Retirement Preparation Programs (RPP) emerge as an intervention possibility, seeking to deconstruct prejudices and reinforce the potentials of pre-retirees, helping them to redefine this phase of life, support their decision-making, and generate well-being. Given the importance of RPPs, the research aimed to adapt a program model based on the resource theory for the Brazilian context, in order to provide the experience of retirement preparation for Brazilians. The developed RPP consisted of two experimental groups, and the intervention model comprised six pre-structured weekly sessions with the pre-retiree group. The first session was conducted to introduce the program, its objectives, and to reflect on the roles associated with work and retirement. The second session focused on discussing the individual resources present in each participant's life. The third session aimed to explore goals for retirement, while the fourth session addressed the identification of strategies for adapting to changes. The fifth session involved formulating potential actions to overcome retirement obstacles, and the sixth session served to conclude the group and reflect on insights derived from the program. The feasibility assessment of the study was conducted utilizing an evaluation form for the sessions by the facilitators and a final satisfaction form filled out by the retirees. The results enabled the identification of the feasibility of implementing the retirement preparation program based on resources in the Brazilian context. Building upon the initial feasibility evidence from the first groups, an expansion of the sample size and the implementation of a quasi-experimental longitudinal study are necessary to assess its effectiveness and psychological impact on the participants.

Keywords: Retirement, retirement preparation, well-being, intervention.

1. Introduction

1.1. Retirement, resource theory, and retirement preparation programs

The aging of the population in much of the world is a significant achievement of contemporary societies. In Brazil, it began in the 1970s, and currently, there is an increasingly large portion of the population in the 60 years old or older age group, with a life expectancy projected to be 79.9 years in 2040 (Miranda, Mendes & Silva, 2016). Although this development is positive for society, these continuous changes in the demographic pyramid bring concerns, as the country is not prepared to deal with its social, economic, and psychological effects and ensure quality of life for older citizens (Miranda et al., 2016). Due to this growth in the number of elderly individuals and consequently retirees, retirement becomes an increasingly relevant area of study and intervention for psychology.

Retirement can be conceptualized as the partial or complete exit of an individual from the workforce, accompanied by a decrease in psychological commitment to work (Wang & Shi, 2014). Given that work plays a central role in people's lives in contemporary society, retirement brings significant lifestyle changes and can be viewed in various ways by individuals. Some may associate retirement with uselessness and old age, others with a new stage of life, and still others as a moment of insecurity in the

face of losses (Macêdo, Bendassolli & Torres, 2017), associated with either more losses or more gains (França & Vaughan, 2008). Satisfaction and well-being in this phase are multifaceted, influenced by factors such as health, economic situation, gender, marital status, interpersonal relationships, voluntariness of retirement, length of retirement, and engagement in leisure activities (Amorim & França, 2019; Wang & Shi, 2014).

Considering these differences in individuals' perceptions of retirement and the outcomes on individual well-being, Wang (2007), drawing from Role Theory, Continuity Theory, Life Course Perspective, and Hobfoll's Resource Theory (2002), proposed the Resource Theory for retirement. According to Hobfoll (2002), resources could be defined as an individual's total capacity to satisfy their core values and needs. The Resource Theory for retirement suggests that this total capacity in retirement includes physical, financial, social, emotional, cognitive, and motivational resources. Well-being could then be seen as the result of changes in these personal resources (Wang, 2007). Thus, the Resource Theory integrates aspects of some of the main theories on aging to provide a possible explanation for why satisfaction and well-being in retirement differ among individuals and how each environmental and psychological factor can affect each one. In this view, retirement is analyzed based on the positive aspects existing in individuals' lives, aiming to strengthen these personal resources.

Considering the socio demographic change in Brazil, the diversity of perceptions towards retirement, the various factors impacting well-being in retirement, and the need to preserve personal resources in this stage of life, preparatory actions for this moment are essential to maintain elderly individuals psychologically healthy. From a positive view of aging, Retirement Preparation Programs (RPPs) emerge as an intervention possibility. These programs aim to deconstruct prejudices, strengthen the potentials of pre-retirees, help cope with stressors involved in the retirement process, promote greater autonomy, and enhance quality of life (Macêdo et al., 2017; Durgante, Navarie e Sá & Dell'Aglio, 2019; Cassanet, McKenzie & McLean, 2023). These programs are of great importance as retirement is a complex decision-making process that can be greatly influenced by planning (Wang & Shi, 2014), supporting retirees in decision-making and well-being promotion (Amorim et al., 2019; Pazzim & Marin, 2018).

RPPs exist in various structures, including sustained intervention, which refers to RPPs with a longer period, usually eight to 20 weekly sessions, brief intervention, which is a short-term preventive action of approximately three sessions, and intensive action characterized by immersion in activities concentrated over a few days (Seidl, Leandro-França & Murta, 2014). In Brazil, the first RPPs emerged in the 1980s, but they were mainly focused on lectures for workers about health, finances, leisure, and entrepreneurship, lacking the possibility of reflection on the process and deepening debates (Seidl et al., 2014). Currently, RPP development in the country is more extensive and profound, but there is still a great difficulty in implementing these programs at the national level and few studies seeking to measure their effectiveness (Durgante et al., 2019). Considering the beneficial potential of RPPs for retirees and the scarcity of RPP models for the Brazilian context, the main objective of this study was to adapt a retirement preparation program model based on Resource Theory for the Brazilian context and verify its implementation feasibility.

1.2. Program description: preparing resources for retirement

The "Preparing Resources for Retirement" Program was built based on the program by Seiferling and Michel (2017), chosen for its solid theoretical foundation focusing on Resource Theory, its format of sustained interventions, its longitudinal follow-up with participants, and its significant effects on the reported quantity of resources by participants, expectations regarding retirement, and intention to master the retirement transition.

The developed RPP consisted of two experimental groups, each composed of 6 and 4 participants, respectively. Each group had a total of 6 pre-structured weekly meetings lasting two hours each, based on guidelines from other programs (Pazzim et al., 2018; Seiferling et al., 2017, 20; Cassanet et al., 2023). The general structure of the meetings consisted of an initial rapport, presentation of the meeting's theme, application of a dynamic, discussion, assignment of homework, and closure. The sessions included future-oriented exercises and techniques that encouraged participants to develop a clear and positive, yet realistic, picture and expectations about their retirement transition (Seiferling et al., 2017). For the program adaptation, techniques already used in other Brazilian programs were analyzed and selected to fit the theoretical objectives established by the resource-based RPP.

The first meeting was held to provide an overview of the intervention's objectives, content, and procedure and to reflect on the roles related to work and retirement and coping strategies for difficulties, based on Role Theory (Ashforth, 2001). The second meeting was used to discuss the individual resources existing in each participant's life and to help participants define goals, based on Resource Theory (Wang, 2007). The third meeting aimed to explore and define retirement goals, based on Locke and Latham's

Goal Setting Theory (1990). The fourth meeting was used to discuss the concepts of selection, optimization, and compensation and apply them to participants' trajectories, in order to help identify current strategies or develop new ones to manage the transition and adapt to life changes, based on Life Span Development Theory (Heckhausen et al., 2010) and Selection, Optimization, and Compensation Theory (Baltes & Rudolph, 2013). The fifth meeting was held to formulate potential actions to combat obstacles and setbacks to their retirement visions. This reflection on setbacks is essential for effectively coping with potentially stressful events and increasing feelings of capability and self-efficacy, thus facilitating retirement transition and adaptation. Finally, the sixth meeting was conducted to conclude the group, recap previous sessions, reflect on new insights and ideas from the program, and define rituals that could help structure psychological transitions, based on Psychological Transition Rituals (Bridges, 2009).

2. Methods

The present study is a feasibility study to verify the potential success of the intervention and propose changes based on the collected data, followed by an efficacy study of the intervention. Feasibility criteria were determined based on guidelines suggested by Durgante and Dell'Aglio (2018), which include: demand, adherence, processes and technical issues, and program satisfaction. The demand variable was collected by measuring attendance frequency and through the registration form, consisting of a sociodemographic questionnaire with 11 questions about relevant criteria for intervention application. Adherence, processes, and technical issues variables were collected through a form completed by the mediators at the end of each session, containing 7 objective Likert scale questions ranging from 1 to 5, and 3 descriptive questions, based on Durgante et al. (2019). The satisfaction variable was collected through a form filled out by the participants at the end of the intervention, containing 15 questions, with 2 descriptive and the rest objective, varying on a scale from 1 to 5, based on Durgante et al. (2019).

The feasibility study was conducted with a total of 10 retired participants divided into two experimental groups, each led by 2 mediators, psychology students (one responsible for conducting the session and one for taking notes). Participants were selected through the dissemination of the registration form on WhatsApp groups, Instagram, and LinkedIn of the research group, as well as on social media and press releases from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG). Inclusion criteria for the sample were: being within 5 years of retirement or already retired, agreeing to participate in the feasibility assessment, and signing the Informed Consent Form, in accordance with the ethical guidelines established by the UFMG Research Ethics Committee. Inclusion criteria for the mediators were: being psychology undergraduates from the eighth semester onwards at UFMG, having received theoretical training on program procedures and evaluation methods, and participating in weekly supervision meetings with the program's responsible faculty member.

Regarding the socio demographic data of the participants, 90% of them were female, and 80% were within two years or less of retiring. In terms of education, 2 participants had a bachelor's degree, 5 had a specialization, 2 had a master's degree, and 1 had a doctorate. The monthly income of 60% of the participants ranged between R$ 4,001 and R$ 8,000, while the remaining 40% had incomes between R$ 8,001 and over R$ 10,000. These findings suggest that the participants were mostly from the middle to upper class of the Brazilian population. Out of the total participants, 70% did not have retirement preparation programs in their workplace, and 30% were unsure about this information. The average age of the participants was 58.1 years (SD = 4.4).

Due to the small number of participants making group comparisons difficult and the study's objective being to assess the general feasibility of intervention application, evaluations were conducted considering the group as a whole. Descriptive analyses and content analyses of the data were used for data analysis.

3. Results

In terms of demand, there were 30 individuals interested in the program. Out of the 14 selected to participate in the intervention, 10 completed the program (71.43%). Among the dropouts, three reported quitting due to their work schedules and requested to be included in the next group, and one reported that their expectations were not met. The remaining 16 interested individuals were placed on a waiting list for the efficacy study. The number of attendances (n=50), considering the program completers (n=10), was satisfactorily lower than the number of absences (n=10), achieving an 83.33% attendance rate.

Regarding adherence, processes, and technical issues, the total score assessed by the mediators was calculated as the average of the evaluation scores for each session, resulting in X=3.94 (SD=0.44). This indicates that, overall, in terms of adherence, procedures, and techniques, the mediators' evaluation

indicated satisfactory performance in the sessions, with an acceptable variation in evaluation scores among mediators. The average evaluation scores for each session were as follows: X=3.64 (SD=0.3), X=3.3 (SD=0.4), X=4.64 (SD=0.3), X=4.07 (SD=0.3), X=3.7 (SD=0.8), and X=4 (SD=0.4). Thus, all sessions received evaluation scores above 70% with acceptable variations among mediators.

Although the objective evaluation of the sessions yielded overall positive results, some comments in the descriptive questions indicated some issues with this initial implementation. There were reports that in some sessions, there was not much engagement from the participants and difficulties in explaining some concepts. One of the mediators indicated difficulties in commitment from the other mediator, having to take on the majority of session facilitation, as well as difficulties from participants in completing homework tasks. On the positive side, it was reported that in other sessions, participants seemed generally interested in discussions and were able to engage deeply with topics. Additionally, it was reported that over the course of the sessions, the group developed cohesion among themselves.

Lastly, satisfaction assessed in the final participation form yielded overall positive results, with the score calculated as the average of ratings among group participants, X=4.6 (SD=0.17). This indicates that overall participant satisfaction exceeded 90% with minimal variation among participants. The question "What is your overall satisfaction with the program?" obtained an average of X=4.88 (SD=0.35), the question "How would you rate the group coordination?" obtained an average of 4.75 (SD=0.46), and the question "How was your understanding of the content covered during the sessions?" obtained an average of X=4.38 (SD=0.52). These responses indicate that, although mediators faced perceived difficulties in facilitating sessions, for pre-retirees, the perception of satisfaction, coordination, and content of the sessions was positive. The question "Was it easy to attend all sessions of the program?" X=4.00 (SD=1.06) had the lowest average among participants and the highest standard deviation, which may be due to participants' work schedules and varying levels of flexibility. Some comments from the descriptive questions such as "Very well-prepared and oriented team, committed to the group's purpose" "I learned a lot and clarified my ideas regarding setting goals to emotionally prepare for retirement" and "It was the first time I opened up to the possibility of retirement; I always had resistance to the subject, here I prepared myself emotionally above all," reveal this overall satisfaction.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Based on the findings, there is generally a feasibility of implementing the "Preparing Resources for Retirement" program for the Brazilian context. Regarding demand, the fact that a waiting list was generated indicates that the intervention is of interest to the population and has a well-established potential target audience. The majority of participants being female from middle to high class backgrounds may indicate a greater demand for this type of program among this demographic, but it could also be a result of limited outreach efforts. Therefore, it is proposed that outreach methods be expanded for future groups. The program received relatively high demand (n=30), resulting in a waiting list, and the completion rate was satisfactory (71.43%), but it is suggested that for the efficacy study, interviews be conducted before the start of the groups to explain the program in detail and reduce the number of dropouts. This measure could be effective, as among the completers, there was an 83.33% attendance rate, indicating that those who engaged with the program maintained a high level of attendance.

Regarding the evaluation of the mediators on adherence, processes, and technical issues, although the evaluation averages were good, some changes are suggested to address the issues presented. It is necessary to conduct a more thorough selection of mediators to reduce engagement difficulties. Additionally, more extensive training for these mediators is ideal to decrease their difficulty in facilitating the sessions. In terms of participant satisfaction with the program, the evaluations were generally very positive, both in objective and descriptive questions, indicating that the perception of pre-retirees was that the group brought benefits to their retirement planning. One point that could be changed to facilitate participation in more sessions and completion of homework tasks would be to send reminders via WhatsApp one day before the sessions to remind them of these activities. Based on participant suggestions, it is suggested that texts on the topics discussed be sent via WhatsApp in future groups.

Some limitations of the present study included the small number of participants (n=10) and the solely descriptive analysis of the results, which are justifiable for a feasibility study. Thus, the results indicate that the implementation of the program is feasible in the proposed context and tends to align with the benefits proposed in the literature by retirement preparation programs (Pazzim et al., 2018; Seiferling et al., 2017; Durgante et al., 2019; Cassanet et al., 2023). Therefore, it is proposed that a quasi-experimental study be conducted next to assess the effectiveness of the program in a larger sample of pre-retirees.

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