Care for institutionalized elderly suffering from dementia with regard to their intimacy and sexuality needs

A philosophical-ethical analysis

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sexuality in elderly residents = a troubling issue

- The potential vulnerability of institutionalized elderly
- The taboo nature of aged sexuality
- Pathological ↔ non-pathological sexual behavior

- Wide variety of ethical issues and legal concerns
- Ethical guidelines are rare and often inadequate
Introduction - Objectives - Methodology - Phase 1 - Phase 2 - Phase 3

Objectives

- To gain insight into the knowledge and attitudes of nursing staff towards the sexuality expressed by institutionalized elderly

- To gain insight into relevant ethical concepts and moral reasoning regarding aged sexuality within a nursing home environment

- To develop a framework that can guide ethical reasoning regarding aged sexuality within a nursing home environment
Introduction - Objectives - Methodology - Phase 1 - Phase 2 - Phase 3

Normative approach

Empirical approach
PHASE 1

Knowledge and attitudes of nursing staff

- Literature review
- Instrument development
- Survey study

Empirical approach
Objective

To test the content and face validity and internal consistency of the Dutch version of the ASKAS

Findings

- Content validity
- Face validity
- User-friendliness
- Reliability

Mahieu, L., Dierckx de Casterlé, B., Van Elssen, K., Gastmans, C. Nurses’ knowledge and attitudes towards aged sexuality: validity and internal consistency of the Dutch version of the Aging Sexual Knowledge and Attitudes Scale [Submitted]
**Objective**
To gain insight into the knowledge and attitudes of Flemish nursing staff

**Design**
Descriptive correlational study – Cross-sectional survey

**Instrument:** ASKAS (adapted and translated version)

**Research setting:** Flemish nursing homes

**Population:** all nursing staff employed by Flemish nursing homes

**Sample:** 2x101 nursing homes (stratified random sample)

**Preliminary Findings**
Response rate: 150/202 nursing homes [43 positive responses ]
1192/2228 nurses
PHASE 2

Ethical concepts and moral reasoning

- Argument-based literature review
- Philosophical-ethical analysis
**Argument-based literature review**

**Objective**
To explore the ethical concepts and arguments grounding the debate on aged sexuality within a nursing home environment.

**Design**
Electronic database search: Medline, Cinahl, Embase, Psychinfo, Web of Science, Philosophers’ Index, Atla, Invert and Google Scholar.

**Findings**
- **Related to principles**
  - Respect for autonomy!
  - Non-maleficence
  - Beneficence
  - Justice
- **Related to care**
  - Care
  - Dignity
  - Vulnerability
  - Singularity
  - Historicity
  - Relationality
  - **Embodiment?**

Philosophical-ethical analysis

Objective
To broaden the ethical concepts and arguments grounding the debate on aged sexuality within a nursing home environment

Design
Literature study
Merleau-Ponty, Zaner, Levinas,...

Preliminary findings
Anthropological foundation:
- The decentered self
- Human embodiment
- Being-in-the-world
- ...
The decentered self

The self is not something we can ever possess since it is “irremediably infected with an otherness” that despite its fundamental inaccessibility constitutes our “own”-ness.¹
Human embodiment

It is through our lived bodies that we can manifest ourselves to the world.

- tacit knowledge
- to touch and to be touched
  the body at risk
- the abyss of being no-body
  illness
  old age
  ➔ from transparency to an obstinate force
Being-in-the-world

“The world is not what I think, but what I live through”

embodied habits and practices
Phase 3

Ethical framework

- Applied ethical analysis
- Practical guidelines
**Applied ethical analysis**

**Objective**
To develop an ethical framework based on:
- **phase 1** (empirical research)
- **phase 2** (philosophical-ethical reflection)

**Practical guidelines**

**Objective**
To develop some practical guidelines that can be used by nursing homes to optimize patient care.
Thank you for your attention!

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