

**DESENVOLVIMENTO CONJUGAL, COMUNICAÇÃO E FELICIDADE EM RECÉM APOSENTADOS PORTUGUESES**  
**MARITAL DEVELOPMENT, COMMUNICATION AND HAPPINESS IN PORTUGUESE NEWLY RETIREES**  
**DESARROLLO CONYUGAL, COMUNICACIÓN Y FELICIDAD EN LOS RECIÉN JUBILADOS PORTUGUESES**

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## RESUMO

**Introdução:** A reforma é um evento transicional, vivido por indivíduos de meia-idade, e as suas consequências podem interferir com o seu estado de saúde individual e familiar. A nível conjugal, quando os elementos do casal estão a passar por esta transição, poderá ser necessário redefinir a relação pois as identidades, padrões, papéis e expectativas alteram-se.

**Objetivo:** Analisar a relação entre a experiência de adaptação à reforma e o enriquecimento e desenvolvimento conjugal, comunicação e felicidade dos recém reformados portugueses.

**Métodos:** Estudo descritivo e quantitativo realizado, com casais de meia-idade selecionados ocasionalmente em unidades de saúde familiar. Mediante consentimento informado, foi aplicado o Inventário de Enriquecimento e Desenvolvimento Conjugal, Comunicação e Felicidade (ENRICH), tendo os dados sido analisados com recurso ao IBM® SPSS<sup>27</sup>. Todos os procedimentos éticos e formais foram cumpridos.

**Resultados:** Os 32 casais que responderam ao questionário e ao Inventário apresentavam uma média de idade de 61.31 (DP=5.08) anos. A amostra apresentou valores de enriquecimento, desenvolvimento conjugal, comunicação e felicidade dentro de parâmetros medianos, sendo a conjugalidade influenciada positivamente pela variável aposentação.

**Conclusão:** Os recém aposentados atribuem muita importância à família, particularmente ao cônjuge. Quando os cônjuges afetam a tomada de decisão do outro membro do casal, influenciam a sua satisfação com o novo estatuto. Há uma necessidade de promover a saúde familiar, em particular do subsistema conjugal, nesta fase do ciclo de vida.

**Palavras-chave:** aposentação; envelhecimento; família; cônjuges; comunicação; felicidade

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Retirement is a transitional event, experienced by middle-aged individuals, and its consequences can interfere with their health status. Changing family structures are also changing patterns and experiences related to retirement. When both members of the couple are going through this transition, it may also be necessary to redefine the relationship as identities, patterns, roles, and expectations change.

**Objective:** To analyze the relationship between the experience of adaptation to retirement and the Marital Enrichment and Development, Communication and Happiness of Portuguese recent retirees.

**Methods:** A descriptive and quantitative study was carried out with occasionally selected middle-aged couples in family health units. Upon informed consent, the Enrichment and Marital Development, Communication and Happiness Inventory (ENRICH) was applied, and data were analyzed using IBM® SPSS<sup>27</sup>. All ethical and formal procedures were followed.

**Results:** The 32 couples who responded to the questionnaire and Inventory had a mean age of 61.31 (SD=5.08) years. The sample presented values of enrichment, marital development, communication and happiness within median parameters, and the conjugality was positively influenced by the retirement variable.

**Conclusion:** Newly retired people place enormous importance on family, particularly their spouse. When spouses affect the other member of the couple's decision making, they influence their satisfaction with their new status. There is a need to promote family health in a systemic way at this stage of the life cycle.

**Keywords:** retirement; aging; family; spouses; communication; happiness

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** La jubilación es un acontecimiento transitorio que experimentan los individuos de mediana edad, y sus consecuencias pueden interferir en su estado de salud. Los cambios en las estructuras familiares también están modificando las pautas y experiencias relacionadas con la jubilación. Cuando ambos miembros de la pareja atraviesan esta transición, también puede ser necesario redefinir la relación a medida que cambian las identidades, los patrones, los roles y las expectativas.

**Objetivo:** Analizar la relación entre la experiencia de adaptación a la jubilación y el Enriquecimiento y Desarrollo Marital, la Comunicación y la Felicidad de los recién jubilados portugueses.

**Métodos:** Se realizó un estudio descriptivo y cuantitativo con parejas de mediana edad seleccionadas ocasionalmente en unidades de salud familiar. Previo consentimiento informado, se aplicó el Inventario de Enriquecimiento y Desarrollo Conyugal, Comunicación y Felicidad (ENRICH) y se analizaron los datos con el IBM® SPSS<sup>27</sup>. Se siguieron todos los procedimientos éticos y formales.

**Resultados:** Las 32 parejas que respondieron al cuestionario y al Inventario tenían una edad media de 61.31 (DT=5,08) años. La muestra presentó valores de enriquecimiento, desarrollo conyugal, comunicación y felicidad dentro de los parámetros medios, estando la conyugalidad positivamente influenciada por la variable jubilación.

**Conclusión:** Los recién jubilados conceden gran importancia a la familia, en particular al cónyuge. Cuando los cónyuges afectan a la toma de decisiones del otro miembro de la pareja, influyen en su satisfacción con el nuevo estatus. Es necesario promover la salud familiar de forma sistémica en esta etapa del ciclo vital.

**Palabras Clave:** jubilación; envejecimiento; familia; cónyuges; comunicación; felicidad

## INTRODUCTION

Family plays a leading role in all processes of its members' development. In a continuous and irreversible process such as aging, family should play an even more relevant role (Nogueira et al., 2022).

As the individual gets older, his/her role in the family unit will change. The role with which they identified and which established their place in the family is modified by aging (Lourenço, 2006). These changes may lead to a strengthening of the family ties or, on the contrary, to the isolation of those who grow old. This isolation may be due to a lack of understanding or unavailability of the other family members or because the individual does not want to share himself/herself with the family (Kowalet al., 2021). Thus, the individual lives his/her aging socially, taking into account the different contexts in which he/she is inserted, particularly the family. By playing their role in the family, they may feel respected, integrated and useful, maintaining their self-confidence, living fully and taking advantage of the greater availability of time. However, if you feel segregated or unwanted by your family, you may experience old age as an unhappy stage.

In the systemic view of the life cycle of a family, there are five stages of excellence in the formation and development of the family system (Loureiro et al., 2022; Silva et al., 2022): the formation of the couple, the family with young children, the family with children at school, the family with adolescent children and the family with adult children (or the empty nest stage).

Thus, ageing fits in the last stage of the life cycle. The stage when adult children leave home is when the members of the couple are often confronted with their own old age. At this stage, some adaptations are expected, namely to the physical and psychological decline, the bereavement of significant others and friends, and also the confrontation with their own finitude (Mukku et al., 2018). However, there are positive aspects in this stage of the life cycle, such as the greater availability to the family. In the conjugal context, there are two stages in which the couple is the exclusive element of the system: at the beginning and at the end of life (Yemiscigil et al., 2021).

In the process of joint aging, it is important for the individual to exist as a self, outside the relationship so that he/she can continue to live with meaning upon the death of the spouse. Thus, growing old together also means maturing personally and maintaining the self (Yorgason et al., 2020). Therefore, aging impacts on conjugality, as well as conjugality impacts on aging, affecting each other mutually. Conjugality seems to be a source of well-being. In the married population, the level of mortality is lower and the level of well-being is higher than in the unmarried population (Choi et al., 2020). Several indicators seem to support this theory: fewer cases of mental health treatment, more positive indications of psychological well-being, and fewer negative indicators; illnesses, hospitalizations, and mortality rate are significantly lower in the married population (Alvarez-Bueno et al., 2021). The distribution of income shows that positive marital status is also associated with a more economically distressed life (Yorgason et al., 2020).

While aging was seen as an exclusively individual problem, there was no questioning of issues of a social nature such as retirement, illness, poverty, or social isolation (Nogueira et al., 2022). The concept of retirement has been changing and is now characterized by the longevity revolution, where individuals work for more years but are also retired for more years. The growing number of retirees impacts both society and the economy, globally (Scharn et al., 2018). Changing roles and identities in midlife and beyond can be a very unsettling period, similar to adolescence (Li et al., 2021). There is, at this stage, a questioning of the meaning of life. Historically, retirement is a relatively new phenomenon. The concept and process of retirement are evolving rapidly. Retirement is an interdisciplinary topic and one whose research has been growing. One of the factors that have led to a growth in retirement research is the rapid aging of populations in most developed countries resulting from low birth rates, increased longevity, and the arrival at the retirement age of people from the baby boom cohort (Scharn et al., 2018).

Changing family structures are also altering patterns and experiences related to retirement. For example, more and more couples are trying to retire at the same time. In addition, many women postpone the birth of their children and their parents increasingly live longer, so some women find themselves caught between the demands of caring for children and parents. There are clear gender differences in how men and women cope with these demands in the final stages of their careers (Pedreiro et al., 2021). Women are more likely to look for a new job or retire when the demands start to become overwhelming, while men tend to adjust schedules in order to remain in the same job while responding to the demands of caring for family members (Scharn et al., 2018). Marital status influences the individual's well-being, with married individuals reporting higher levels of happiness than unmarried ones. Partners are important resources in the adjustment process to stressful life events, such as illness, disability, or retirement. Partners provide resources, such as companionship and social support, that make adjustment easier (Choi et al., 2020).

Spouse influence increases after retirement as couples spend more time together and social networks diminish due to the loss of work-related contacts (Li et al., 2021). Spouses can influence each other's health behaviors in a variety of ways.

Many couples in this age group do not talk about the next stage, retirement. Although communication is key to a healthy relationship, there are several factors that influence the lack of communication. They do not talk because it is difficult to have time together, they assume they will disagree and do not want to open "Pandora's box", they do not want to think about the future because it forces them to confront their own mortality or they lack communication skills (Choi, 2021).

This article aims to present the analysis of the interrelationship between the experience of adaptation to retirement and marital enrichment and development.

## 1. METHODS

### 1.1 Sample

The target population of this study was composed of individuals enrolled in 18 randomly selected health units belonging to the Regional Health Administration of the Center – Portugal. The inclusion criteria was the condition of having been retired for less than 5 years. Age, gender, reason for retirement or area of practice from which they had retired were not considered exclusion criteria. Individuals without Portuguese nationality were excluded.

In the randomly selected health units, family nurses were contacted so that they could identify potential participants. These individuals were subsequently invited and the sample was composed of the individuals who volunteered to participate in the study and met the selection criteria.

The final sample was composed of 64 people, corresponding to 32 heterosexual couples. The group of couples who answered the questionnaire and the scale had a mean age of 61.31 years with a standard deviation of 5.08. Their marital status was, in the vast majority of cases, married/cohabiting (96.8%) as this was one of the requirements to participate in this phase of the project: being married, living in a non-marital partnership or living with a partner. The remaining 3.2% correspond to couples in which one of the members was divorced and the other member was widowed.

With regard to academic qualifications, the participants were quite heterogeneous. 26.6% of the participants had primary education qualifications while 25% had higher education qualifications (Table 1).

**Table 1** - Academic qualifications of the sample

Academic Qualifications	Number of Participants	Percentage
1-4 grade	17	26,6
5-9 grade	14	21,9
Above 9th grade but without higher education	17	26,6
With higher education	16	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100</b>

The participants were mostly retired. The 19 participants who are not retired are members of a couple in which the other member is retired. We found that 15.6% are retired between 1 and 2 years and 17.2% are retired for more than 5 years. There were two participants (3.1%) who have been retired for less than one year.

The 45 participants who are retired (70.3% of the sample) have held the position from which they retired, on average, for 29.41 years, with a standard deviation of 9.67.

### 1.2 Data collection instruments and procedures

In order to meet the objectives of this study, a descriptive and quantitative study was carried out in 2019 through the completion of a sociodemographic questionnaire and the Inventory of Enrichment and Marital Development, Communication and Happiness (ENRICH), a version adapted and validated for the Portuguese population by Lourenço and Relvas (Lourenço, 2006). The sociodemographic questionnaire had questions regarding age, gender, academic habilitations, if the person was retired and for how long and questions regarding satisfaction with retirement.

The main measurement instrument of this study was the ENRICH Inventory (Enriching & Nurturing Relationship Issues, Communication & Happiness), in its Portuguese adaptation and validation version. This instrument is composed by 115 items and allows the assessing of problematic areas and resources of the couple in various dimensions of the relationship (Lourenço, 2006). The internal consistency of this instrument is 0.93, measured by Cronbach's Alpha (Marques, 2001). It is divided into twelve categories, with different maximum scores: Idealization, Satisfaction, Personality Aspects, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Financial Management, Leisure Activities, Sexual Relationships, Children and Marriage, Family and Friends, Role Equality, and Religious Orientation. The several categories of the scale have different maximum scores. The mean value of those scores represents the cut-point.

For the purpose of this study, 7 questions referring to the category Children and Marriage were removed as they did not fit the life phase of the participants under study. Because 7 questions were removed, the scale used in this study had 108 items. The authors who adapted and validated this inventory (Lourenço, 2006) for the Portuguese population previously authorized this procedure.

The ENRICH is a self-answer instrument on a Likert-type scale with 5 options: "Strongly Disagree", "Moderately Disagree", "Neither Agree nor Disagree", "Moderately Agree" and "Strongly Agree". The answers are scored with each category having a maximum score and where high and low scores have different interpretations.

Firstly, the results by each of the dimensions of the scale were analyzed, with analysis by couple. Afterwards, analysis was made taking into consideration different variables that may influence conjugality, as well as analysis between individuals who were not yet retired and those who were already retired.

The questionnaire and the scale were filled face to face, in the presence of the two members of the couple and of the researcher. The Ethics Committee of UICISA: E approved the study: (P131-01/2013). All participants signed informed consent before participating in the study.

### 1.3 Statistical analysis

Data were tabulated and analyzed using program IBM® SPSS<sup>27</sup>. A paired samples t-test was used to do the analysis per couple, with a 95% confidence level adopted. According to the authors who validated the scale for the Portuguese population (Lourenço, 2006), it is rated by adding up the values of each subscale. However, there are items in which the values are inverted (for example, 1 became 5 and 5 became 1). These items are duly marked in the version translated and adapted by the above-mentioned authors. The chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) was used to assess the association between the variables gender, age and academic qualifications and the variable retirement in the different dimensions of the ENRICH. The objective was to assess the relationship between gender, age and education in relation to being retired or not. Since some sub-samples are less than five elements, we analyzed the significance provided using the Monte Carlo test.

## 2. RESULTS

In what concerns Idealization, this category measures the subject's idealization of the marital relationship. The maximum score in this category is 25 points, with high results indicating a high level of idealization and low results indicating a more realistic attitude. The average score of this sample was 18.09 points, indicating that they are at a high level of idealization of the relationship. However, the authors of the original scale reveal that this subscale shows high correlation with other scales that measure the tendency of individuals to answer questions in the socially desired direction (Lourenço, 2006).

In the Satisfaction category, the maximum score is 50 points, with high scores reflecting compatibility and satisfaction with many aspects of the marital relationship, while the opposite shows dissatisfaction with those same aspects. The scale assesses ten areas of the marital relationship: personality traits, roles of responsibility, communication, conflict resolution, finances, free time management, sexual relationship, parental responsibilities, relationships with family and friends, and religious orientation. The mean satisfaction in this sample was 30.65 points, slightly above the mid-point of the scale.

In Personality Aspects, the maximum score is 50 points. This subscale assesses the individual partner's perception of behavioral issues and the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction about them. These items take into account traits such as lack of punctuality, temperament, melancholy, stubbornness, jealousy and possessiveness as well as public display of affection and smoking and alcohol habits, addiction and tendency to dominate. High scores reflect adjustment to the partner and satisfaction with their behavior while inversely low scores indicate a low level of acceptance. The mean of this sample was 27.98 points, indicating discomfort with the behavior of the spouse.

In Communication, linked to individual feelings, beliefs and attitudes about communication in the relationship, the maximum score is 50 points. High scores indicate satisfaction with the level of communication in the relationship while low scores indicate deficit in the level of communication. The sample average is 30.39 points, indicating that communication is not at satisfactory levels.

With regard to Conflict Resolution, the maximum score is 50 points. This subscale assesses individual attitudes, feelings and beliefs regarding the existence and resolution of conflicts in the relationship. High scores indicate comfort with the way conflicts are resolved in the relationship while low scores indicate dissatisfaction. The sample mean score is 28.60, which demonstrates an ineffective approach to conflicts in the relationship.

In Financial Management, which focuses on attitudes and concerns about how economic issues are managed in the couple, has a maximum score of 45 points. High scores indicate satisfaction with the couple's financial management and low scores indicate the opposite. The mean score for this sample was 23.58 points. This average just above the middle of the subscale indicates concerns with the couple's financial management.

In the subscale Leisure Time Activities, the maximum score is 45 points. Individual preferences in the use of leisure time are evaluated and high scores indicate compatibility on the use of leisure time activities while low scores indicate the opposite. Here the average of the sample was 28.93 points, which may indicate some consensus in the realization of leisure activities.

In Sexual Relationships, the maximum score is 50 points, being evaluated the individual feelings and concerns about the affective and sexual relationship with the partner. High results indicate a positive attitude on the role of sexuality in the couple, while low results indicate the opposite. The mean score of the sample was 31.75 points which indicates satisfaction with the expressions of affection and satisfaction with the role of sexuality in the relationship.

In the dimension Children and Marriage, and because we decided to remove 7 items, the maximum score is 10 points. High scores indicate satisfaction with parental roles and responsibilities while low scores reflect low consensus and concern about the impact of children on the couple's relationship. The average of the sample was 3.45 points indicating dissatisfaction with this aspect of the relationship.

With regard to Family and Friends, the maximum score is 45, assessing feelings and concerns about relationships with relatives and friends. High scores indicate satisfactory relationships with family and friends while low scores indicate discomfort with these same relationships. The sample mean score was 24.09, indicating satisfactory perceptions about the presence of family and friends in the couple's relationship.

In Role Equality, the maximum score is 50 points. Beliefs, feelings and attitudes about the various marital and family roles are assessed. High scores indicate equitable sharing of roles while low scores do not indicate lack of satisfaction but indicate that respondents value traditional roles and areas of responsibility for men and women. The sample mean score is 26.13, indicating a valuing of traditional roles for men and women.

In Religious Orientation, which assesses individual attitudes, feelings and concerns about the significance of religious beliefs and practices in the context of marriage, the maximum score is 45 points. High scores indicate that the respondent has a more traditional view that religion is an extremely important component of marriage while low scores indicate the opposite. The sample mean score is 27.09, indicating that in these couples' religion is an important component of the relationship.

Student's t-test was used to compare the two groups in the various dimensions that make up the ENRICH scale with the retirement variable. Thus, it was possible to conclude that in no dimension there are statistically significant differences between participants who have not yet retired and those who are already retired.

The chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) was used to assess the association between the variables gender, age and academic qualifications and the variable retirement in the different dimensions of the ENRICH. Since some sub-samples are less than five elements, we analyzed the significance provided using the Monte Carlo test. This test predicts the results for a population of 10,000 samples (Table 2).

**Table 2** - Chi-square test to assess the relationship between gender, age, and academic qualifications as a function of being retired or no.

	Pearson Chi-Square value	gl	Sig.	Sig. Monte Carlo
Retirement*Gender	6.472	1	.016	NA
Retirement*Age	7.938	1	.005	NA
Retirement*Academic Qualifications	3.087	2	.214	.261

The results indicate statistically significant differences for the variable retirement according to gender and age. Being retired, regardless of gender or age, is positive for the marital relationship in the dimensions assessed by ENRICH, indicating that retirement positively influences the marital relationship. These differences are not found for the educational attainment variable. We used a univariate analysis for each of the dependent variables according to gender, retirement, age and academic qualifications in order to analyze the different dimensions of the ENRICH.

No statistically significant differences were found in the Personality Aspects dimension. However, the value of the intercept between retirement and academic qualifications is slightly higher than the value used to indicate statistically significant differences ( $p = .06$ ). In the Communication dimension, we find differences according to the moment in which the participant is ( $p = .03$ ). Communication decreases when the participant retires.

In the dimension Family and Friends, there are statistically significant differences for the variable gender with a  $p=.04$ . These differences are also visible in the intersection between the variables retirement and academic qualifications ( $p=.03$ ). In the gender variable, women were more comfortable with the role of family and friends in the marital relationship before retirement, decreasing dramatically after this transition. Men presented an inverse behavior. In other words, women are less comfortable in family relationships after retirement, while men are more comfortable.

In the dimension Equality of Roles, statistically significant differences were observed in the educational level variable ( $p=.00$ ). Participants with secondary education increase the perception of role equality when they transition into retirement. Conversely, participants with higher education show a decrease in this perception when they retire.

### 3. DISCUSSION

In most dimensions of the ENRICH scale, couples position themselves slightly above the middle scores of the subscales, indicating dissatisfaction with the marital relationship in the different aspects. Marital satisfaction is an important subjective aspect not only individually but also for the family well-being, with relevant effects on the different aspects of their functioning (Nunes et al., 2022). According to Abreu-Afonso et al. (2022), there is a continuous decline in marital quality after the initial stages of the family life cycle, and this decline is continuous and constant after the couple is formed. However, this decrease in marital quality does not occur after retirement and there is even an increase in quality after retirement.

The analysis of the ENRICH dimensions applied to the present sample, seems to indicate that conjugality is positively influenced by the variable retirement. According to Li et al. (2021), the retirement phase is often accompanied by another phase: the honeymoon. This phase appears in association with the phase already described above, in which the individual tries to put into practice all the projects that he/she has idealized during his/her professional activity. It seems, therefore, that spouses believe that the marital relationship will benefit from retirement, since the greater availability of time will allow them to achieve dreams and plans which were not realized due to job restrictions. However, the couple may revert to pre-existing patterns of interaction after this initial phase (Kowal et al., 2021), so further research in this area may help to understand if this is what is happening to this population.

There is a greater satisfaction with conjugality when communication is effective, well managed and pleases both members of the couple (Choi, 2021). The participants in this study demonstrate this connection between marital satisfaction and effective

communication. Associated with communication is the ability to solve conflicts. Only with an effective communication can conflicts arising within the couple be solved (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2022). This satisfaction with the relationship also seems to be related to the couple's management and compatibility in occupying their free time, as well as the agreement and consensus regarding how to express affections and feelings and the management of sexuality between spouses (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2022).

At this stage of the relationship, sexuality focuses not only on the sexual act itself, but also on acts of intimacy. Sexual activity tends to decrease with age, but this does not imply that couples are not sexually active (Fraser et al., 2021).

Thus, the more effective and less dubious the communication between the couple, the better their relationship will be. We can consider that communication is strongly linked to marital functioning. When the couple's communication is inhibited, there will be problems in the relationship, which translate into not talking about the relationship, intimacy and conjugality (Lourenço, 2006). These failures in conversation may negatively influence not only the couple but also the mental health of individuals and families. According to Fraser et al. (2021), a communication can be considered pathological when it does not fulfil its function of a positive bond between individuals, but contributes, on the contrary, to originate a climate of incomprehension and resentment between them. Lourenço (2006) considers that idealization at this stage of life coincides with the children leaving home. This phase of the 'empty nest' occurs simultaneously with the entry into retirement and may lead to a re-focusing on the couple and their experience of conjugality. While the children are at home, the couple is concerned with their education, with providing conditions for them to have access to the best opportunities, to be autonomous and to start their own family. During this phase, the education of the children takes center stage and conjugality is not the center of couples' lives (Kowal et al., 2021). With the empty nest, although many couples feel lost, individuals have the opportunity to return to conjugality and to each other. Thus, marital satisfaction may increase with the departure of children and not necessarily with the transition to retirement.

This new phase that couples are going through is characterized by many movements, since the departure of children is associated with the entry of new people, such as daughters and sons-in-law and grandchildren (Kowal et al. 2021). Marital satisfaction may also be compromised if the couple finds itself between two generations (ascendants and descendants) that need their support. This entrapment between two generations may compromise not only the marital satisfaction but also the couple's health.

This stage of couples' lives presents challenges. According to Lourenço (2006), these challenges can be summarized as: facilitating the children's departure from home, adapting the couple relationship and learning how to deal with ageing. Retirement appears as another challenge, which has implications in the readjustment of the couple and also in the way each individual deals with his/her own ageing process. At this stage, couples tend to look more at their core, assessing the quality of their marriage and looking to the future (Kowal et al., 2021).

With regard to gender, the results seem to point to the existence of gender differences in the dimensions of the scale. This is the case of Communication, in which men show less satisfaction with this aspect of the relationship than women are. However, the levels of satisfaction with this dimension are closer between genders, after retirement.

There is an area of relationships that seems to indicate some conflict: Family and Friends dimension. While women assume satisfaction with this area before retirement, men show discomfort with these interferences in the marital relationship. After retirement, men and women show an approximation regarding this dimension. This fact seems to be in line with previous studies (Sheppard & Stanford, 2019). According to Silva et al. (2022), this phase reflects an increase in perceived marital quality and satisfaction, as well as a greater importance assigned to the family and conjugality.

We can consider that there are four areas in which the genders differ: education, economy and power, sexuality and consensus on birth and parenthood. Traditionally, men are educated to be the leaders of the family, the ones who earn a higher salary and therefore have a higher status than women in the family. Also related to this role of financial leader of the family, men are taught not to sacrifice their job and remuneration to help the family while women tend to devote themselves more to the family and forego career advancement (Choi et al., 2020).

Similarly to what is reported in other studies, in the dimensions Idealization, Marital Satisfaction, Leisure Activities, Financial Management and Sexual Relations, both genders perceived an improvement from the pre-retirement to the post-retirement phase (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2022; Lourenço, 2006). Thus, retirement may mean, for the couples in the sample and in their current phase, the idealization and satisfaction with conjugality that goes against the initial honeymoon phase (Choi, 2021).

## CONCLUSION

As the ageing process is an evolutionary process, the individual experiences this process throughout his/her life cycle and is accompanied in this process by his/her family. Therefore, we may conclude that, in terms of health maintenance, it will be beneficial to continuously monitor the family and the couple (Kasalova et al., 2018). The couple will be mostly in the empty nest phase, and the interventions should particularly focus on the couple, so as to preserve their health capital. The conjugal relationship seems to be a protective factor in this transition. When necessary, it is essential to mediate situations that require intervention at different levels of prevention.

As concluded by other studies (Lourenço, 2006; Pedreiro et al., 2021; Scharn et al., 2018), the results presented reiterate the importance that recently retired people give to the family, particularly the spouse. The family is not only a source of support and

support in the transition to retirement, but it is also important as a way to occupy time and to give meaning to life. Based on this principle, the transition to retirement raises several issues within the family, thus highlighting the need to promote family health in a systemic way at this stage of the life cycle.

This study showed evidence that this transition is also unique in marital re adaptation. Each couple's expectations towards the future depend on the quality perceived by each of the spouses about their marriage, what they have already experienced and their satisfaction at the current moment (Lourenço, 2006).

The sample size was small and that was one of the limitations of this study. The fact that the number of retirees and non-retirees was very different in size is another limitation.

The future research in this area should focus on increasing sample size and on a longitudinal study that allows accompanying people through the transition process.

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