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# Fear of falling among Brazilian and Portuguese older adults

Luciano M. Vitorino<sup>1,2</sup>  | Cristina Marques-Vieira<sup>3,4</sup>  | Gail Low<sup>5</sup> | Luís Sousa<sup>6,7</sup>  | Jonas P. Cruz<sup>8</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Medicine of Itajubá, Itajubá, Brazil

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Medicine, Federal University of Juiz de Fora – UFJF, Juiz de Fora, Brazil

<sup>3</sup>School of Nursing of Lisbon, Institute of Health Sciences, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Lisbon, Portugal

<sup>4</sup>CIIS, Lisbon, Portugal

<sup>5</sup>Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

<sup>6</sup>Nurse at Curry Cabral Hospital, Central Lisbon Hospital Center, Lisbon, Portugal

<sup>7</sup>Atlântica Higher School of Health Sciences, Atlântica University, Barcarena, Portugal

<sup>8</sup>Nursing Department, College of Applied Medical Sciences, Shaqra University, Al Dawadmi, Saudi Arabia

## Correspondence

Luciano M. Vitorino, Faculty of Medicine of Itajubá, Itajubá, Brazil and Faculty of Medicine, Federal University of Juiz de Fora – UFJF, Juiz de Fora, Brazil.  
Email: lucianoenf@yahoo.com.br

## Abstract

**Background:** Falling is the leading cause of physical disability, mortality and social exclusion in older adults. In Brazil and Portugal, falls cause thousands of hospitalisations every year. Fear of falling (FOF) causes loss of confidence in accomplishing daily tasks, restriction in social activities and increased dependence.

**Aim:** To compare the prevalence of FOF between Brazilian and Portuguese community-dwelling older adults and the factors associated with FOF.

**Methods:** A secondary analysis of cross-sectional survey data collected from older adults residing in Brazil ( $n = 170$ ;  $M$  age=70.44 years) and Portugal ( $n = 170$ ;  $M$  age=73.56 years).

**Results:** The prevalence of FOF was significantly higher ( $p = 0.015$ ) among Portuguese ( $n = 133$ , 54.1%) versus Brazilian ( $n = 113$ , 45.9%) older adults. FOF among Brazilian older adults was associated with being 76 + years of age and female. Among Portuguese older adults, factors associated with FOF were intake of daily medications, having fallen within the past year, and visual difficulties.

**Conclusions:** Fear of falling is linked with modifiable and non-modifiable factors. Timely assessments of FOF and factors associated with FOF are essential.

**Implications for practice:** Primary care nurses should assess and address FOF in older people with interdisciplinary practitioners.

## KEYWORDS

Brazil, comparative study, fear of falling, geriatric nursing, Portugal

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

By 2050, approximately 80% of people aged  $\geq 60$  years will be living in developing countries (World Health Organization [WHO], 2015). Within Latin America and the Caribbean, Brazil has the highest proportion (11.7%;  $n = 43,000,000$ ) of persons 60 + years of age (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2015). Within the European Union, Portugal has the fourth highest proportion (20.3%;  $n = 2,800,000$ ) of persons 65 years of age and older (UN, 2015). In a Global Burden of Disease report, Brazil ranked the 90th and Portugal ranked 22nd among 188 countries with respect to mortality and morbidity in older age (Lim et al., 2016).

The average life expectancy in both countries is 75 and 81 years, respectively (WHO, 2015). This is a significant achievement because the proportion of persons who are over 60 years in Portugal is nearly twofold higher (WHO, 2015). Many older people live with chronic illnesses and associated functional declines that enhance their fear of and risk for falling (Lavedan et al., 2018; Prince et al., 2015).

## 2 | BACKGROUND

A fall is an unexpected event in which a person unintentionally moves from a higher level to a lower level of the ground (Caldevilla,

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