

much to say regarding mechanisms for ensuring access to services and supports among diverse family caregivers, most notably identifying support for “community ambassadors” as key, as well as targeted awareness campaigns.

SESSION 4140 (SYMPOSIUM)

REACHING THE LIMIT: CENTENARIANS IN THE HEALTH AND RETIREMENT STUDY

Chair: Peter Martin Discussant: Jennifer Ailshire

Although life expectancy has increased significantly over the last century, it is still unlikely that individuals reach the century mark of their lives. As a result, it is difficult to study a large enough sample of centenarian survivors; it is even more difficult to follow developmental trajectories of those who survive into very late life. The AHEAD sample of the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) contains longitudinal data of older adults who first participated in 1993. More than 500 HRS participants survived to at least 98 years of age. In this symposium, we present three uses of the data: first, we compare centenarians to older adults who did not survive into their nineties. Second, we compare different cohorts of centenarians with regard to health and psychosocial behavior. Third, we follow participants from their eighties to 100 years of age. The first presentation provides an overview of the HRS subsample. The second presentation highlights the personality profiles of centenarians. The third presentation traces health and psychological well-being among centenarians in the HRS. Finally, we discuss trajectories of cognition and functional limitations for three cohorts of centenarians. The results provide important information for policies and practical implications for families and service providers to older adults, highlighting available resources and health and well-being changes in very late life.

INTRODUCING THE CENTENARIANS IN THE HEALTH AND RETIREMENT STUDY

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The Health and Retirement Study (HRS) is a nationally representative sample of older adults, and data are available for 15 waves. This presentation presents an overview of the oldest cohort of the HRS (the AHEAD sample) as they become centenarians. Basic characteristics of these centenarians and near centenarians (98 years and older, N = 516) indicate that they are primarily female (77 percent), White (82 percent) with on average 10.6 years of education. The average age was 84.2 years at baseline and 98.3 years at wave 14. We analyze data by comparing centenarian survivors to nonsurvivors, by following them longitudinally, and by comparing different cohorts of centenarians over historical time. Results indicate that centenarians continue to enjoy life, and they have special survivorship characteristics. Newer cohorts, however, show a more compromised quality of life. The results are relevant to family members of oldest-old adults and to community service providers.

PERSONALITY PROFILES OF CENTENARIANS AND NEAR-CENTENARIANS IN THE HEALTH AND RETIREMENT STUDY

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Centenarians are typically considered exceptional survivors who maintain their general health. The current study aims to track the change of personality over time and examine the differences between centenarians (defined as 98+ years; n = 516) and a group of non-survivors (died before 98; n = 6,771) using data from the Health and Retirement Study. Findings demonstrated that extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness decreased in 2012 and climbed again in 2014. Conversely, however, neuroticism increased in 2012 and then decreased in 2014. Interestingly, a pattern similar to that of 2012 appeared in 2020. Significant differences between centenarians and non-survivors were found in 2006 and 2010. Centenarians were more extraverted, agreeable, conscientious, and open-minded than non-survivors in 2006. Similarly, centenarians were more extraverted, agreeable, and open-minded than their counterpart in 2010. These findings provide a cornerstone for future research investigating the change of personality and its role in longevity among centenarians.

EXAMINING PHYSICAL HEALTH AMONG COHORTS OF CENTENARIAN SURVIVORS IN THE HEALTH AND RETIREMENT STUDY

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This research highlights cohort differences in physical health among centenarians/near-centenarians in the Health and Retirement Study. Across 14 waves, participants aged 98 or older (n=494) were compared by three cohorts (i.e., 1890-1900, 1901-1910, and 1911-1920). Cohorts were examined at respective waves where participants were 96, 98, and 100 years of age. One-way ANOVA results presented significant differences in functional health at age 96 ($F[2,324]=5.01, p<.01$), subjective health at age 98 ($F[2,212]=7.94, p<.001$), and health conditions at ages 98 ($F[2,213]=12.52, p<.001$) and 100 ($F[2,115]=3.45, p<.05$). The oldest cohort had significantly better functional health than the youngest cohort (age 96), better subjective health than the two younger cohorts (age 98), and fewer health conditions than the youngest cohort (ages 98 and 100). Consistently, the oldest cohort performed better on subjective and objective health markers, providing implications for health care, disease prevention, and policy related to the shrinking “healthspan” among exceptional agers.

THE TRAJECTORIES OF COGNITION AND FUNCTIONAL LIMITATIONS OF CENTENARIAN SURVIVORS

Gina Lee, *Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, United States*

The purpose of this study is to explore cohort differences in the trajectories of cognition and functional limitations among oldest-old adults. Using 1992-2018 data from the Health and Retirement Study, participants included those who survived to at least 98 years (N=494). The study included three cohorts (i.e., 1890-1900, 1901-1910, and 1911-1920) predicting intercept and slope of cognition and functional