

Acknowledgements

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ABSTRACT

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A Century of Living: A Mixed Methods Study of Extreme Longevity in Barbados

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This dissertation provides an account of a descriptive study of a national, census-based cohort of centenarians with officially verified birth dates utilizing mixed methodology design to provide a comprehensive characterization of centenarians in Barbados: females outnumbered males by a ratio of 4.5:1; the ethnic distribution of the centenarians was similar to that of the general population; two thirds of the respondents resided in private residences with relatives; a possible over-representation of higher education and high rates of literacy were identified; high levels of employment and particularly long employment spans were found as were noteworthy gender differences in terms of marital status. The findings indicate that century-long survival is apparently influenced by a combination of factors including historical context, biological influences, and in particular social and behavioural influences, resulting in low prevalence of chronic diseases and their life-threatening complications of heart disease and stroke, exceptionally low levels of clinical depression and relatively good functional capacity among the centenarians in this study. In particular, high levels of religiosity appeared to have a profound influence in the lives of the centenarians and appeared to be positively related to successful adaptation and coping and robust levels of life satisfaction, which may have in turn, contributed to their longevity.

Keywords: Successful Ageing; Centenarians; Religiosity; Oldest Old.