

ABSTRACT: SILVER STORIES INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Who are the Oldest Old?: Narrative insights from European Nonagenarian Siblings

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Citation: Maeve, R. (2015).
Who are the Oldest Old?:
Narrative insights from
European Nonagenarian
Siblings. *Res Net Health 1*,
ss19.

Received: 26th January 2015

Accepted: 9th March 2015

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Abstract

Ninety year olds are the fastest growing group in Western Europe. 15% of 90 year olds age slowly, combining long ‘lifespan’ and ‘health span’ and often clustering in families. Nonagenarian families are reservoirs of genetic, life-style and behavioural information, which may help us dissect out how to live longer, and better.

This research combined narrative interviews and photographic images as we asked ninety year old siblings about their insights into important factors in their longevity. The subject group was a purposeful sample of nonagenarian sibling pairs or trios, 5 from each of 4 of the European countries associated with the EU Genetics of Healthy Ageing (GeHA) study-Italy, Finland, Poland and Northern Ireland, who answered structured questions about common family background, lifestyles. Overall, 17% of nonagenarian siblings thought genes or long-living family members were important; 19% reported good health all their lives; 30% said that ‘keeping going’ with a positive attitude and good social networks were very important. With respect to life-style, 32% reported that hard work was related to their longevity, while 19% considered good simple food as important.

Across Europe there were differences; Irish siblings ranked genes, health and food as most important. In Italy hard work was the main stay of a long life with health being equally important. In Finland and Poland, a positive joyful attitude was considered intrinsic to longevity, with hard work a close second. All valued good social networks.

The combined narrative and photographic images provided powerful visual and auditory in digital stories used of nonagenarian siblings, a group about whom little is known and provide an important educational tool to improve understanding about ageing well strategies.

Keywords: Nonagenarian siblings, ageing well, narrative, visual images, digital stories, public health messages.



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