

Researchers identify personality traits

April 3 2009

Researchers from Boston University School of Medicine's (BUSM) New England Centenarian Study have noted specific personality traits associated with healthy aging and longevity amongst the children of centenarians. The work was conducted in collaboration with scientists from the National Institute on Aging. These findings currently appear online in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.

Previous research on siblings and [offspring](#) of centenarians have documented that exceptional longevity runs strongly in families. Studies of the offspring of centenarians showed that their mortality is 120 percent lower than other members of their birth cohort and that they also have markedly lower prevalence rates and delayed onsets of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and [diabetes mellitus](#). Because [personality traits](#) have been shown to have substantial heritable components, the researchers hypothesized that certain personality features may be important to the healthy aging observed in the offspring of centenarians.

Using the NEO-Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) questionnaire, measures of the personality traits for neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness were obtained from 246 (125 women and 121 men) unrelated offspring of centenarians with an average age of 75.

Both the male and female offspring of centenarians scored in the low range of published norms for neuroticism and in the high range for extraversion. The women also scored comparatively high in

agreeableness. Otherwise, both sexes scored within normal range for conscientiousness and openness, and the men scored within normal range for agreeableness.

According to the researchers, personality traits in the offspring of centenarians appear to have distinctive characteristics that may have important implications for their longevity. "Interestingly, whereas men and women generally differ substantially in their personality characteristics, the male and female offspring tended to be similar, which speaks to the importance of these traits, irrespective of gender, for health aging and longevity.

It's likely that the low neuroticism and higher extraversion will confer health benefits for these subjects," said senior author Thomas Perls, MD, MPH, director of the New England Centenarian Study. "For example, people who are lower in neuroticism are able to manage or regulate stressful situations more effectively than those with higher neuroticism levels. Similarly, high extraversion levels have been associated with establishing friendships and looking after yourself," he said.

Perl's added, "These findings suggest that personality is an important characteristic to include in studies that assess genetic and environmental determinants of longevity. Such studies are currently underway."

Source: Boston University

Citation: Researchers identify personality traits (2009, April 3) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-04-personality-traits.html>

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