

Longevity and Happiness

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Objective

The objective of the present investigation is to analyze the elements that could explain the longevity in Costa Rica

Backgrounds

Central America is considered "Third World," a place of poverty, tropical disease, and, during the 1990's, terrible wars. Because of that, it is surprising the fact that people live here longer than the people of Europe and North America.

In 2005, Luis Rosero, a University of Costa Rica demographer claimed that 60 year-old Costa Ricans have the longest life expectancy of anyone in the world, and most of them live in Nicoya, which is a significant poor place of Costa Rica.

Nicoya is interesting because it scores lowest in CR mortality and it does on morbidity ranks. For the 75,000 or so people who live here, life proceeds much the way as it has for hundreds of years. Nicoyans make their living as small farmers, laborers who work the area's cattle ranches, and it's important to point out that most of them are poor.

Figure 1. Costa Rica: Nicoya Area



Results From other researches

- Baltes(1990) points out that healthy coming of age has to include handy-cap less status, and Reig et al.(1996) stress how risky behaviour (smoking, limited network support, lack of physical work) conflict that goal
- 52% of the interview people were female
- 85% were from 60 to 79 years old
- Half of them did not finish elementary school
- 60% lived with his or her couple (very high for Latin American standards, SABE)
- 32% lived by themselves
- 50% describe their health status as not good
- 12% risk depression and 6% were depressed, mostly female

- Obesity was highly prevalent, specially among female
- 10% reported to be smokers, mostly male
- Poor oral health (at least less of half of the teeth) is prevalent and that is more so with low weight elders (Fernández et al.2007)
- Those who are socially active show better health indicators
- Yet, activity diminish with age

From ENSA 2006 Household Health Survey:

- More than 80% of elders feel happy (at different degrees)
- That is about 4% less than the general population's
- Interestingly enough those that are very satisfied are about half of those who are just satisfied (to other question the ratio is even 1:10)
- 86% feel satisfied (at different degrees) with their life, and 22% are very satisfied
- That ratio is not statistically different from the general population
- 77% are satisfied about their health and that is only 5% less than the general population's ratio, which is a surprise

- 87% are satisfied at different degrees with their health care.
- Oddly enough, it is much larger than that of the general population, but it may be so because service usage
- One important feature is social networks as seen above
- 78% of elders are satisfied with their couples which a bit lower than the general population's
- level
- They are pleased to a higher level (88%), both with their children and their friends and neighbors
- They are satisfied with the place they live in, the activities they do and they public services in their neighborhood at high level

Conclusion

- The Water—Nicoya's water has Costa Rica's highest calcium content
- Emphasizing Family -- Centenarians tend to live as a couple, with children or grandchildren from whom they get support.
- Having Faith -- All but one centenarian interviewed had a strong belief in God. They relinquished the pressures of the day to a higher power.
- Eating Fruit -- People eat many wildly exotic fruits ultra rich in antioxidants but only once a year while in season. They ate papaya and citrus fruits all year long.
- Nixtamal – Nicoya's core diet here, corn soaked in lye with beans, dates back 3,500 years. It's a complete food high in niacin, calcium and amino acids.
- Passion for Work – Centenarians seem to have enjoyed physical work all of their lives. It was their main form of exercise and they did it almost every day.
- Having a "Plan de Vida" – Successful centenarians have a clear life plan. They feel needed and want to contribute to a greater good beyond just themselves.
- Finding Happiness – Costa Rica scores near the top of international well-being surveys. Happy people have higher levels of endorphins and stronger immune systems.



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* Significativo al 95%