

LIVES Impact



SWISS100/Jos Schmid

Living Beyond 100: Insights from the SWISS100 Study

DANIELA S. JOPP, Associate Professor, Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Lausanne.

ADAR HOFFMAN, FNS Junior Scientist, Institute of Social Sciences, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Lausanne.

The SWISS100 Team – Contact: swiss100@unil.ch

Centenarians – people aged 100 and older – are part of the very old, today's fastest-growing demographic group in most industrialized countries. In

Switzerland, their numbers have increased from just 12 individuals in 1950 to 2,198 in 2024 (Figure 1). The Swiss Federal Statistical Office estimates that 26% of girls and 15% of boys born in 2017 may celebrate their 100th birthday. Yet we know surprisingly little about their living conditions, needs, and daily challenges¹. The SWISS100 study, Switzerland's first nationwide centenarian research project, fills this gap by providing empirical insights into life at age 100 across the country's three main language regions.

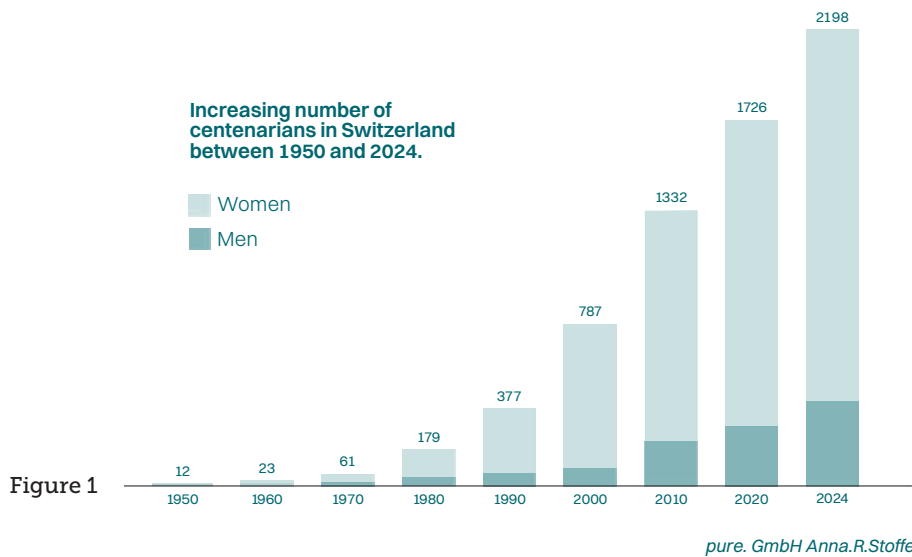


Figure 1

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The SWISS100 study pursues three main objectives: (1) documenting the characteristics and living situations of Swiss centenarians, a largely understudied population; (2) identifying specific vulnerabilities and resilience mechanisms associated with extreme longevity; and (3) developing a more balanced perspective on very old age based on empirical evidence to counter negative stereotypes about aging.

INNOVATIVE METHODOLOGY

This interdisciplinary research, conducted by experts in medicine, biology, psychiatry, psychology, and sociology, adopted a biopsychosocial approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods. The study included telephone and face-to-face interviews, and a photo project culminating in the travelling exhibition "Welcome to your future: centenarians of Switzerland", showcasing Swiss centenarians and the study's findings. A total of 446 centenarians (aged 100 to 110 years old), and their families were included in the various study parts. SWISS100 was primarily financed by the National Science Foundation; with additional funding provided by the Minerva and the Age Foundations.

KEY FINDINGS

Physical health: universal yet subjective

Swiss centenarians have an average of six health issues. A total of 96% experience vision or hearing difficulties, and many suffer from chronic diseases. These conditions compromise their autonomy and ability to live independently. Despite these objective limitations, the study participants rate their health as 'good' on average, reflecting their ability to adapt their comparison standards. This approach could be summarised as: 'Why complain? Most others from my birth cohort are already gone!' (Figure 2).

Biology: important, but not yet fully understood

Blood tests in Swiss centenarians reveal a protein signature in which centenarians more closely resemble younger individuals (20–60 years) than octogenarians. Many of these signature proteins are involved in inflammation, metabolism, and cellular repair and degradation pathways, suggesting potential mechanisms underlying healthy longevity and offering targets for promoting healthier aging².

Cognition: surprising diversity

Despite the fact that dementia prevalence doubles every decade after the age of 65, 57% of centenarians show no or only mild cognitive limitations. The study reveals considerable heterogeneity: some participants demonstrate performance exceeding the average of younger individuals, while others face significant difficulties (Figure 3).

Mental health: an invisible challenge

Mental health is often overlooked in very old age. Study findings show that conditions such as disinhibition and anxiety are present in a subgroup of centenarians for whom more detailed diagnosis and targeted treatment should be considered³. Furthermore, nearly one in four centenarians exhibits possible depressive symptoms, particularly in institutional settings. Analyses show that poorer mental health is not due to nursing home living per se, but the loss of independence due to poorer health⁴.

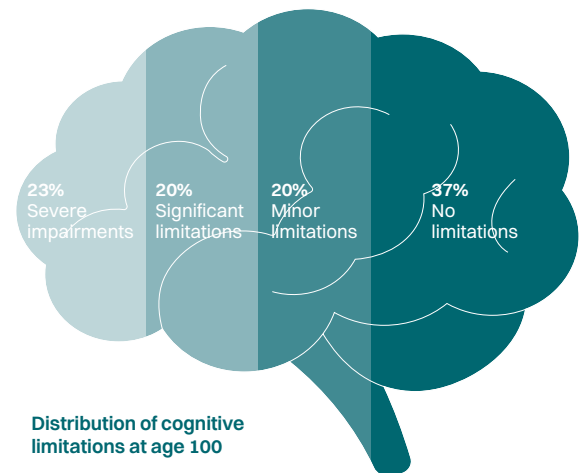
Social networks: a key component of care organization

In Switzerland, 51% of centenarians live in private homes and 49% in care institutions. Home care often relies on hybrid arrangements, combining professional services and support from family members, friends, and neighbors. The loss of →



pure. GmbH Anna.R.Stoffel

Figure 2



pure. GmbH Anna.R.Stoffel

Figure 3

social contacts accumulates in very old age: while 76% of centenarians have lost their partner, one-third have no remaining friends. However, two-thirds maintain regular contact with at least three family members. Centenarians with limited social contact are at higher risk of receiving no help, which can increase their vulnerability⁵.

Psychological well-being: the role of internal factors

Over 90% of centenarians report being satisfied with their lives. Psychological factors – optimism, sense of purpose, will to live, and feelings of self-efficacy – play a decisive role in this satisfaction. While objective factors such as the number of health problems seem to have no impact, loneliness negatively affects life satisfaction^{6,7}.

The importance of proxies in research

Centenarians are among the most difficult populations to include in research. The study demonstrates that involving proxies – people who know the centenarian well – is a key strategy for producing inclusive and realistic data. Without this approach, research would only represent the healthiest centenarians and overlook the most vulnerable⁸.

PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

This research offers concrete directions in five key areas:

Physical health: Maintaining health until very old age is essential. Investing in prevention, risk reduction and early identification of illness has lasting effects on health trajectories and increases chances of aging well over the life course.

Mental health: Centenarians and their family members often carry a non-neglectable burden caused by mental health issues. Increasing sensitivity to mental health symptoms among very old individuals, and improving both diagnosis and treatment, are important steps in reducing this burden.

Care: Coordinated home care solutions that combine professional services and informal family support contribute to the well-being of centenarians. Regular social contact is an important protective factor against vulnerability and loneliness. Opportunities for intergenerational exchanges and meaningful social interactions are important at all ages and should be promoted actively.

Psychological strengths: Optimism, meaning in life, will to live and feelings of self-efficacy are central to life satisfaction in very old age. Supporting the life-long development of these strengths – through suitable programs, contexts and opportunities for engagement – are of high importance as they play a protective role across the life course.

Society and research: To enable more people to age well, a more balanced, and empirically grounded view of aging that moves beyond stereotypes is urgently needed. Research on the diverse living realities at very old age, which systematically includes the most fragile individuals – for example through proxies – can help us build knowledge bases and the development of solutions adapted to this population. ■

References

¹ Gomes da Rocha, C., Jopp, D. S., Cavalli, S., Herrmann, F., von Gunten, A. (2024). Les centenaires : pourquoi s'y intéresser ? Aperçu de l'étude SWISS100. *Gazette Médicale*, 13 (4), 14-16. <https://doi.org/10.23785/Gazette.2024.04.001>

² Delhaes, F., Falciola, J., Hoffman, A., Carnesecchi, S., Cavalli, S., von Gunten, A., Jopp D. S., Herrmann, F.R., & Krause, K. H. (2026). Plasma proteome profiling of centenarians across Switzerland reveals key youth-associated proteins. *Aging Cell*, 25(2), e70409. <https://doi.org/10.1111/accel.70409>

³ Uittenhove, K., Rohner, S., Falciola, J., Gomes da Rocha, C., Röcke C., Cavalli, S., Herrmann, F., Jopp, D. S., & von Gunten, A. (2024). Mental health among centenarians living in Switzerland. *Psychogeriatrics*, 24, 887-896. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psyg.13137>

⁴ Gomes da Rocha, C., Jopp, D. S., Hoffman, A., Falciola, J., Cavalli, S., Herrmann, F., Ribeiro, O., Verloo, H., & von Gunten, A. (2025). The role of functional dependence in depressive symptoms among centenarians: Findings from the SWISS100 study. *International Psychogeriatrics*, 37(5), 100071. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.inpsyc.2025.100071>

⁵ Masotti, B., Zaccaria, D., von Gunten, A., Herrmann, F., Jopp, D. S., & Cavalli, S. (2025). Centenarians' care arrangements: insights from the Swiss Centenarian Study. *International Journal of Care and Caring*, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1332/23978821Y2025D000000158>

⁶ Jopp, D. S., (2023). Über 100. Publik-Forum EXTRA Alt und Glücklich? Noch immer mit dem Leben flirten (pp. 10-12).

⁷ Jopp, D. S., Hoffman, A., Falciola, J., et al. (2026). SWISS100 – Findings of the first nation-wide centenarian study in Switzerland. University of Lausanne.

⁸ Zaccaria, D., Falciola, J., Masotti, B., von Gunten, A., Herrmann, F., Jopp, D. S., & Cavalli, S. (2025). Data quality in centenarian research: The proxy-centenarian relationship and item nonresponse in the SWISS100 study. *PLoS ONE* 20(1): e0311847. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0311847>



<https://wp.unil.ch/swiss100/>