

PHOTOESSAY

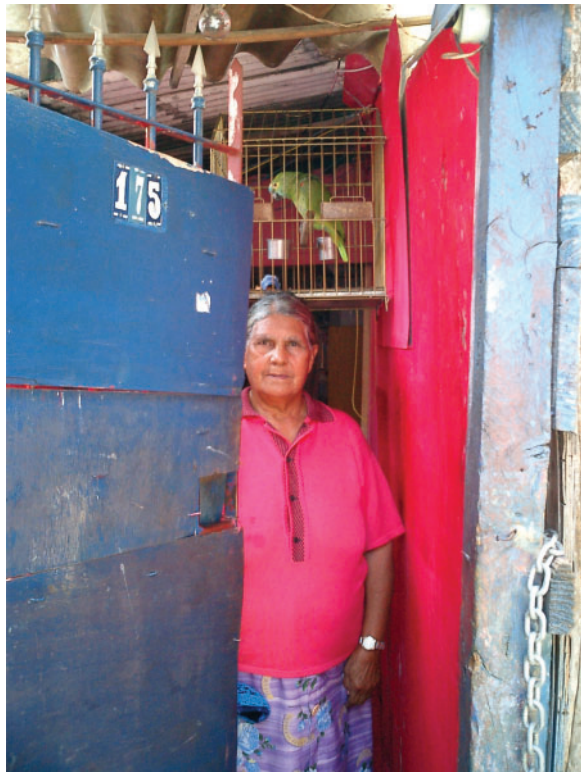
# São Paulo portraits: ageing in a large metropolis

Marcia Scazufca<sup>1\*</sup> Cintia A. F. Seabra<sup>2</sup>

Brazil is a country undergoing marked socio-demographic transition, with one of the fastest ageing populations in the world. Currently, those aged 60 years or over make up 9% of the Brazilian population, but this older group is expected to represent 15% of the entire population in 20 years time. A massive exodus from rural areas to urban centres took place in

the second half of the 20th century, and 81% of the elderly population is now living in urban centres. The elderly were actors in this process of dramatic change that rapidly transformed the country from a predominantly young rural agrarian society to a diversified urban one.<sup>1,2</sup>

This photoessay shows images taken during the fieldwork of an ongoing cohort study that was designed to examine the determinants of health of older Brazilians (65 years and over) from poor socio-economic backgrounds living in the city of São Paulo.<sup>3</sup> This cohort was born before 1940, when life expectancy in Brazil was 41 years; it was even shorter in the rural areas where most of them came from. They represent those who survived very high infant mortality, endured much socio-economic adversity throughout their lives, have rarely



Female, 71 years old



Male, 102 years old

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil, and Academic Unity of Psychiatry, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK.

<sup>2</sup> Section of Epidemiology, University Hospital, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil.

\* Corresponding author. E-mail: scazufca@usp.br



Female, 79 years old. 'It is to think over and over again about many things. An elderly person is someone who is unable to do anything. We can't do anything by ourselves'



Female, 96 years old. 'It is sad, because one can no longer do the same things one used to. One wants to, but is not able. I was a hard working woman, but not anymore'



Female, 76 years old. 'One gets more and more tired, gets older, and can no longer do the things one used to do'



Male, 72 years old



Male, 69 years old



Female, 99 years old. 'To be old is to be unable to work, is having to eat what others give you... It is to become blind! It is to be a burden to others. Those who take care of us get fed up. I don't want to become like that'

seen their own generation or their parents getting older, and now live in the largest conurbation of South America. The images were taken in their houses, at the end of long interviews, when they were asked to say what ageing meant to them. The individuals gave their permission for their photographs to be used. We believe these portraits are suggestive of their resilience in a way that the research protocol could not capture.

Text by Marcia Scazufca and Photographs by Cintia A. F. Seabra

## Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the Wellcome Trust, UK (grant code GR066133MA) and by FAPESP (grant n. 2004/12694-8), Brazil. M.S. was supported by the Wellcome Trust and CNPQ-Brazil during the development of this work.

**Conflict of Interest:** None declared.



Female, 71 years old. 'As far as I am concerned ageing does not exist. I still feel young, thank's God! One has got to have the will to do things. For me, old age is just like being a 20-year-old person. I still have the same determination, the same courage'

## References

- <sup>1</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *World Population Ageing 1950-2050*. New York: United Nations, 2002.
- <sup>2</sup> Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística - IBGE. *Perfil dos Idosos Responsáveis pelos Domicílios no Brasil 2000*. Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística - IBGE, 2002.
- <sup>3</sup> Scazufca M, Menezes PR, Vallada HP *et al*. High prevalence of dementia among older adults from poor socio-economic backgrounds in São Paulo, Brazil. *Int Psychogeriatr*, doi: 10.1017/S1041610207005625, published online 11 June 2007.