



Great-Grand Parents in Brazil? A Socio-Demographic Contextualization

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Received: 2 February 2021 / Accepted: 1 June 2021 / Published online: 22 July 2021
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Abstract

Brazil is often viewed in a stereotyped manner, being considered a rather young country, evoking questions regarding the existence of great-grandparents in Brazilian society. The aim of this review article was to explore the socio-demographic context regarding great-grandparenthood in Brazil. An analysis of population ageing shows that, due to a reduction in mortality rates for all age groups, combined with a drop in fertility rates, the resulting increase in life expectancy in Brazil has created a demographic background which allows for an increasing proportion of older persons to become great-grandparents. This role is not necessarily linked to advanced chronological age, as there is still a large number of women who become mothers before the age of 20. When considering older great-grandparents, who are already in the stratum that is considered "elderly" in Brazil, there is a pronounced heterogeneity in terms of socioeconomic factors, health conditions, family background, and personal life stories. Findings from this review indicate that the socio-demographic, cultural and historical contexts not only enable the emergence of the role of great-grandparenthood in Brazil, but also influence this role, highlighting the urgent need for research on this topic.

Keywords Ageing · Brazil · Great-grandparents · Family

Introduction

Population ageing is occurring worldwide and has been the focus of interest and discussion in a variety of fields. As the average age of populations continues to rise, it is becoming increasingly clear that the roles and functions of elderly people in society must be discussed. When observing population ageing in the context of family

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structures, the roles of grandparents and great-grandparents raise issues of particular interest and possibility.

Brazil is often viewed in a stereotyped manner, being considered a rather young country, raising questions regarding the existence and possible relevance of great-grandparents in Brazilian society; hence the title of this article. Nevertheless, the role of great-grandparents is emerging in Brazilian society. Whereas in the past great-grandparents were generally more passive, whose role was often limited to that of a character spoken of in stories revolving around family tradition and legacy, it is becoming increasingly common for great-grandparents to play a more active role in their families (Schuler & Dias, 2019). Great-grandparents appear to be an important part of the contemporary Brazilian family (Motta, 2010), meaning that this is a new and evolving role which appears to have implications for the family's daily life. (Rabinovich et al., 2014).

Due to the lack of data and demographic literature (Dias & Pinto, 2007; Even-Zohar & Garby, 2016; Rabinovich et al., 2014; Schuler & Dias, 2019), the guiding question for this article was: which socio-demographic context allows for the role of great-grandparenthood in Brazil? The objective was to understand the socio-demographic background which has allowed the role of great-grandparents to develop in Brazil.

In an attempt to better understand the changes and population ageing in this country, this article will present reflections beginning at the macro-level and going to the micro-level. To this end, first an overview of an ageing Brazil is presented. Then, we focus on the heterogeneity of the group of older persons in this country, examining factors such as age, health, economic conditions, and legislative rights. Delving further into the micro-level, the varying roles of older persons in their families are explored. Finally, we go even deeper into the theme of great-grandparenthood, which apparently is indeed becoming increasingly relevant in Brazil.

Brazil – A “Greying” Country

The end of the twentieth century and the beginning of this twenty-first century demonstrate a remarkable demographic dynamic worldwide: population ageing in general, with a marked increase in the number of older persons worldwide. The United Nations (United Nations, 2019) points out that this process of global ageing began in 1950 but has accelerated since the beginning of this century, leading Arantangy and Posternak (2012) to refer to the twenty-first century as the “grandparents’ century.” In his analysis of data published by the UN, Alves (2019) points out that, from 1950 to 2020, the number of people aged 60 years or older increased by a factor of 15.2 worldwide, and that this group currently accounts for 13.5% of the world population, meaning that there are now more than a billion older persons living in the world today.

Brazil is no exception to this global trend of population ageing, showing an increase in the number of older persons in this country in recent years. In fact, Brazil is facing what Alves (2019) has referred to as a “greying tsunami,” since the accelerated ageing process and the percentage of older persons in this country

is higher than the global average. According to UN data, the number of Brazilians aged 60 years or over reached 30 million in 2020 (Fig. 1). It is interesting to note that population ageing in Brazil can be observed not only in the group of persons aged 60 or over, but also in the group of persons aged 65 or over, as well as in the 80 or above group. The projections for the future are for continued accelerated growth of the elderly population, reaching its peak probably in 2085. Alves (2019) expects the rest of the twenty-first century to be "grey," giving rise to a new set of challenges for various sectors of society.

Brazil can no longer be considered a "young country," since the number of young persons (aged 15 to 24) and children (aged 0 to 14) has decreased, leading to an increase in the number of older persons, as depicted in the graph below (Fig. 2). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), this country will have the sixth largest elderly population worldwide by 2025. The country is experiencing a rapid demographic transition, with the number of older persons increasing by nearly 700% in less than 50 years. Based on this data, Veras (2009) has described Brazil as a "young country with grey hair."

As seen in Fig. 2, Brazil's age structure has changed significantly since 1950. According to Meneses (2012), Brazilian society today is substantially different from that of the past. In the past, there was a large number of children and young people and a smaller percentage of older people; thus, political attention was focused on education. The demographic situation in Brazil today is very different indeed: the number of older people is increasing while the proportion of young people is falling. The changes in the age structure of Brazil's population are considerable, as can be seen clearly by comparing the age pyramids of 1950 and 2020 (Figs. 3 and 4).

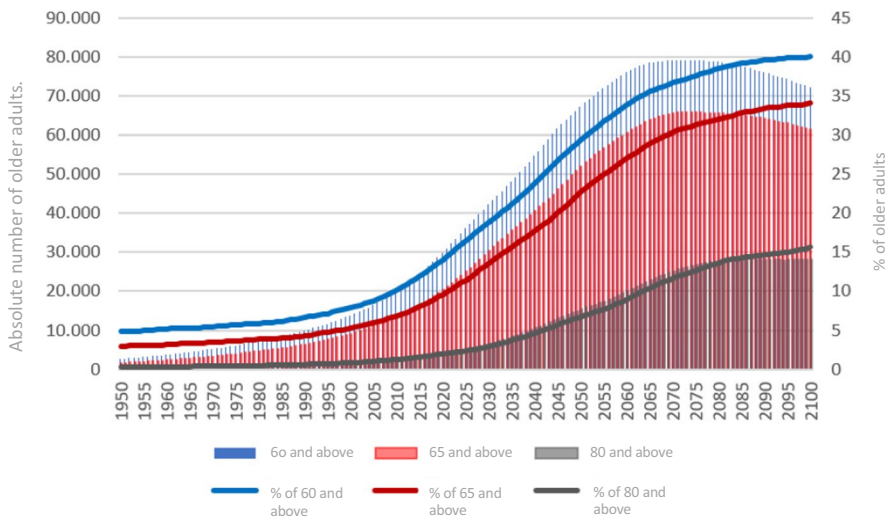


Fig. 1 Older population in Brazil (1950–2100), absolute and relative of older adults aged 60+, 65+ and 80+

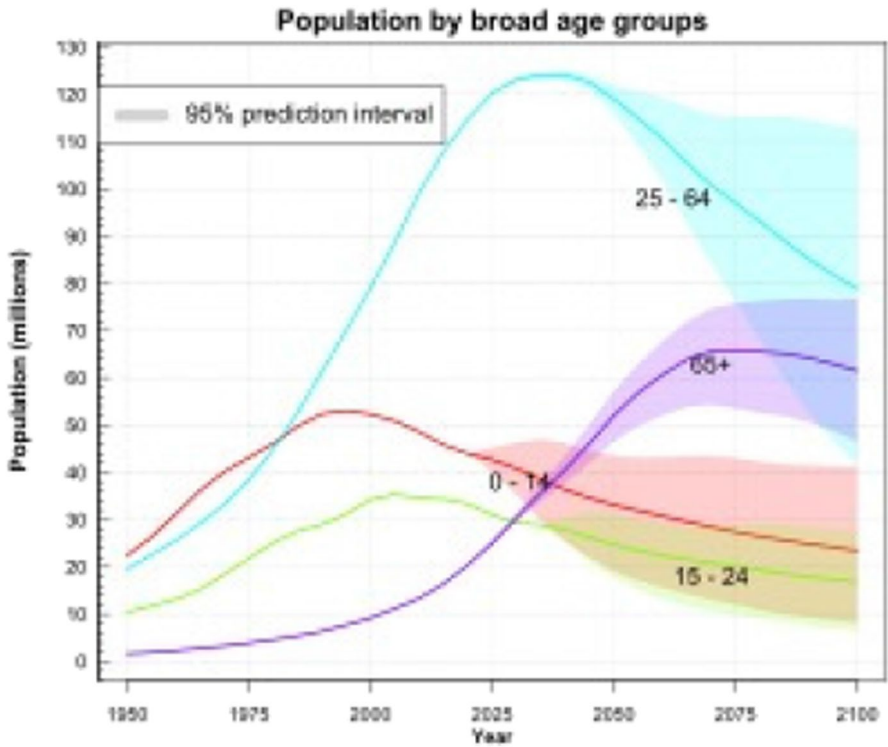
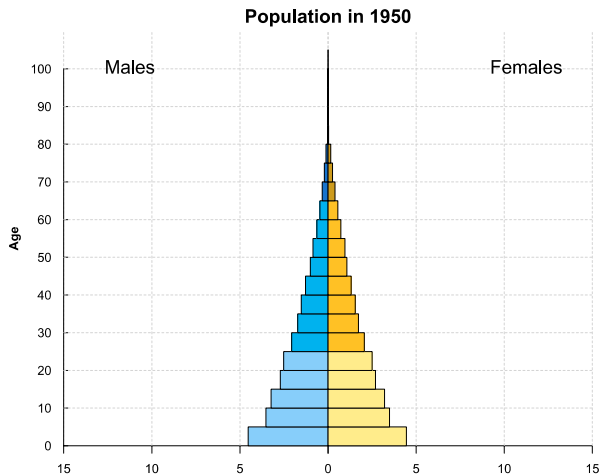


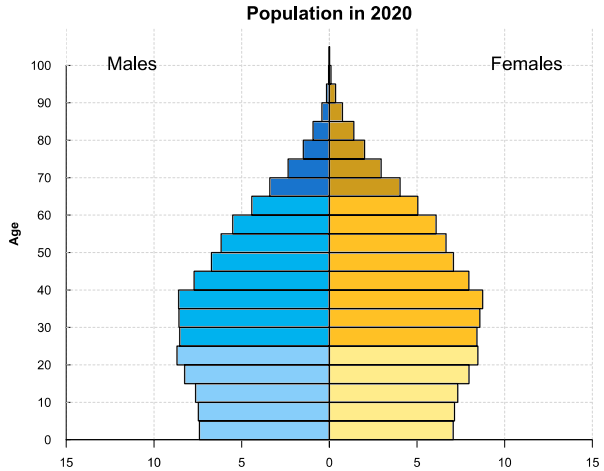
Fig. 2 Brazilian population by age group

Fig. 3 Age pyramid from Brazil 1950



In addition to population growth in general, the shape of the 2020 pyramid (Fig. 4) demonstrates a distribution of age groups which is quite distinct from that of 1950. The increase in the older population, especially around the age of 60, is clear.

Fig. 4 Brazil 2020 age pyramid



Camarano (2004) explains that the proportion of "older elders," that is, those aged 80 or over, is increasing, thereby changing the age composition within the group of elderly persons in Brazil. Therefore, it can be noted that the older population itself is also ageing. It is also noteworthy that, as pointed out by Falcão (2012), the population increase in the group of 80 years or older is mainly female; this is depicted in dark yellow in Fig. 4. Sociologists refer to this phenomenon as the "feminization of old age".

The increase in Brazil's older population is mainly due to increased life expectancy, which is the result of two factors: first, a reduction in mortality in all age groups, followed by a fall in fertility. According to Camarano and Kanso (2009), this led to a drop in the growth rates of the population as a whole, as well as to significant changes in the country's age structure, leading to national population ageing. Data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2015) show that the fertility rate has been falling since the second half of the 1960s.

According to Camarano and Kanso (2009), the country's fertility rate has reached replacement rates in less than 40 years. The authors emphasize that, consequently, the accelerated decrease in population growth is already embedded in the demographic dynamics, regardless of how fertility rates develop. The high fertility rates of the 1950s and 60s, characterized by the "baby boom" generations, as well as the reduction in mortality in all age groups thanks to technological advances in health care and improved access to health care, resulted in an acceleration of the process of population ageing. It can be said that Brazil has experienced population ageing both at the base—that is, due to the fall in fertility, leading to an increase in the proportion of the older population—and at the top, due to the decrease in mortality, especially in the older age groups, resulting in higher levels of longevity (Camarano & Kanso, 2009).

As a result of the drop in mortality in all age groups, Camarano et al. observed an increase in life expectancy both at birth as well as at 60 years of age (Camarano, 2010). According to the IBGE (2020), life expectancy at birth averages

76.7 years. According to Camarano and Kanso (2009), life expectancy at 60 has also increased to an average of 80.9 years for both sexes. The authors summarize that, for the first half of the twenty-first century, their projections indicate a movement of contraction in the Brazilian population, accompanied by super-ageing. Regarding population projections, Camarano (2010) explains that the generation known as "baby boomers" becomes the "elderly boomers." The combination of the reduction in the fertility rate and the decrease in the mortality rate has led to an increase in the number of older persons, especially of "older elders," that is, persons aged 80 or over; this is accompanied by a "feminization of old age," since women make up a larger proportion of the older population group than men (Falcão, 2012).

Another socio-demographic factor which must be considered is migration, both national and international. With regard to national migration, Camarano (2004) points out that, since 1970, a migration of the older population from rural to urban areas can be observed, probably driven by the wish to have better access to health services. Such migration movements in population contribute to the urban hierarchy. The author also points out that this internal migratory flow occurs mainly up to the age of 70 before commencing its decline.

As for international migration, according to Patarra (2003), in the context of an increasingly globalized economy, especially since the 1980s, international emigration of Brazilians can be observed. Immigration of foreigners to Brazilian territory, on the other hand, began during its colonization and later continued, predominantly due to the slave trade. The abolishment of slavery in Brazil in 1888 led to a shortage of laborers in the coffee industry, resulting in the immigration of workers from Europe and Asia, for instance from Germany, Spain, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Syria, and Turkey (IBGE 2000). According to Patarra (2003), two peaks in immigration to Brazil can be observed. The first peak occurred between 1890 and 1930, due in great part to the First World War; the second peak occurred between 1930 and 1950, driven by political changes and the humanitarian crises which took place before, during, and after the Second World War. It is believed that this history of international migration which took place throughout the first half of the twentieth century may have an influence on the cultural identity of older persons living in Brazil today, especially since many of them are either immigrants themselves or the descendants of immigrants.

In view of this background, it is necessary to consider that population ageing changes not only the country's age pyramid, but also its base systems, such as the demand for public policies, family structures, and the lives of individuals. As Ferreira (2019) explains, ageing encompasses far more than just demographic aspects; rather, ageing is a complex phenomenon that crosses multiple disciplines and should be examined from multiple angles, considering both historical-cultural and spatial-temporal aspects. Faleiros (2014) adds that there is a social dynamic of ageing that is situated in a context of social changes, non-linear, and affected by power and production relations. Regarding the various contexts which permeate the experience of ageing, in the next section we will examine various aspects of ageing in Brazil, taking into account its heterogeneity.

Ageing in Brazil – Heterogeneity in Age, Socioeconomic Status, and Health

The data clearly shows that Brazil is an ageing country; nevertheless, a deeper understanding of what it means to age in Brazil is needed. The group of older persons comprises individuals aged 60 to over 100, making this a very heterogeneous age group. The experience of ageing is influenced by a number of variables and is therefore an inherently unique experience for each individual. The experience of ageing is diverse; according to Teixeira (2008), it is a heterogeneous process which takes place in the context of history. Many variables shape how a person ages and how they experience this process. Therefore, it makes sense to speak of "old ages" in the plural, to account for the fact that this is a multifaceted phenomenon which can and should be viewed from different angles. In this sense, according to Faleiros (2014), it is necessary to seek to understand ageing within the context of societal changes, which are non-linear.

As Motta (2019, p. 361) says, "old age is plural," since it is a biosocial condition that differs in several factors, such as sex, gender, social class, ethnic-racial characteristics, and even according to their different age segments. Brazil's situation brings a heterogeneity of socioeconomic factors that further denote a multiplicity of ways of ageing and experiencing old age, especially when considering indicators of poverty and inequality as expressions of national social issues (Teixeira, 2008). Rabinovich et al. (2019) point out that, despite the increase in life expectancy in all age groups and all social classes, there has been no corresponding improvement in the living conditions of the general population. The ageing process can, therefore, reinforce inequalities in terms of quality of life in different strata of the population.

It can thus be stated that there is also economic heterogeneity within the elderly population. The financial situation of this population group has improved since 1990, as Doll and Cavallazzi (2017) point out, mainly due to the improvements in social assistance and changes in retirement policy. The authors point out that the retirement pension is the main source of income (49%) for older persons, followed by a new job for some (39%) and other sources (13%). This makes it clear that the retirement pension is a very important economic factor, not only for the older person themselves, but also for the families who live with them. Camarano (2004) points out that the pension easily becomes an important source of family support, regardless of a dependence situation of the elderly in relation to the family.

The retirement pension is a relatively stable income and has made the elderly visible in a consumer society, according to Rabinovich et al. (2019). Older persons have become a valuable consumer group for the national economy. They spend a significant amount of money in the health sector, for services such as physiotherapy or complementary medicine, but also in the leisure sector, especially tourism, and in the education sector, on courses for senior citizens. Banks also became interested in this population in order to spread the entire credit system, especially the payroll loan (*crédito consignado*). Payroll loans provide easy access to loans at favourable interest rates; however, the risk of over-indebtedness on the part of older persons must not be taken lightly (Doll & Cavallazzi, 2017).

According to Teixeira (2008), there are older persons in all income groups, from the poorest to the richest. There is a greater concentration at the centre of the income distribution, which is probably due to the stability of income due to retirement pensions, which in many cases still do not meet all the economic needs of the older population, forcing them to resort to payroll deductible loans, for example.

The group of older persons is also heterogeneous in terms of their health characteristics, which is seen in the varying degrees of functional and cognitive capacity in older Brazilians. According to Souza (2015), older Brazilians' health profile is compromised by health problems, mainly by chronic diseases such as hypertension, spine disease, arthritis, heart disease, and diabetes (PNAD, 2018). Debert (2019) highlights the disparity between the older persons depicted in the media, who are shown as being active and "ready to enjoy one of the happiest periods of their lives" (p.35), and the reality of many older people, who are often fragile, suffering from health impairments and in need of support. In this context, the question arises as to how Brazilian legislation deals with or cares for the country's older population, with their varying needs; this will be the focus of the next section of this paper.

Policies and Legislation Relating to Older Persons in Brazil

As Souza (2015) points out, the first steps to creating federal policies relating to older persons were not taken until 1994. Previously, there were broader policies in place which included older persons but did not relate to their specific needs. A major step was taken with the 1988 Constitution, in which health became a guaranteed right for all. In addition, this document enshrined the duty of the State and the family to ensure the well-being of the older population. Article 229 states that it is the duty of adult children to help and support their parents in old age, need, or illness. The next, article 230, again highlights the duty of the family, society, and the State to support elderly people, ensuring their participation in the community, defending their dignity and well-being, and guaranteeing their right to life. It is interesting to note that the Constitution prioritizes the family as the main source of support for the elderly, placing the State in the background (Camarano, 2010). Yet, it should be noted that the Constitution laid the foundation for the establishment of the Unified Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde*—SUS), which has been in operation since 1990, defending the right to universal healthcare for all and benefiting people of all ages. In addition, the document defines the guidelines for social security, which benefits retirees and, consequently, older persons.

In 1994, the National Policy on the Elderly (*Política Nacional do Idoso*—PNI) was introduced. This is a legal framework defining assistance policies for those over 60 years of age, with the objective of ensuring their social rights, creating conditions to maintain their autonomy, good health, and quality of life (Souza, 2015). Although the focus remains primarily on family assistance, the PNI creates alternatives, such as social and care centres. It was not until 2004 that the operational arm of the PNI was created. The National Council for the Rights of the Elderly (*Conselho Nacional dos Direitos dos Idosos*—CNDI) is a member of the National Secretariat for Human

Rights and is charged with supervising and evaluating the PNI, with the aim of making it effective at the state and municipal levels.

In 1999, the National Elderly Health Policy (*Política Nacional da Saúde do Idoso—PNSI*) was instituted to guarantee the "preservation of people's autonomy in the defence of their physical and moral integrity" (Brasil, 1999, p. 1) through care, preventive actions, assistance, and rehabilitation for the older population. The priority has become to increase life expectancy by investing in the functional capacity of the elderly for a better quality of life (Souza, 2015).

A further legal landmark was the publication of the Statute of the Elderly (*Estatuto do Idoso*) in 2003, which consolidates in a single document many of the previously approved laws and policies, as well as new contributions, aiming to provide for the well-being of the elderly (Camarano & Pasinato, 2004). According to Souza (2015), the Statute divided the responsibility for ensuring the elderly their rights between the family and the government, again prioritizing care within the family. However, Groisman (2014) highlights that, in order for the needs of the elderly to be met satisfactorily, the family cannot be the sole provider of care. In general, it can be said that Brazil has made progress in the establishment of social policies and in the provision of health services for the elderly. However, these legal rules are insufficiently implemented; thus, at present, the family still appears to be the main source of support for older persons, making it necessary to take a closer look at the role of older persons in their families and vice-versa.

Ageing in the Family – Support and Dependency

The most important relationships for older persons generally comprise family members and close friends (Falcão, 2012). However, throughout the ageing process, changes in social and support networks occur, due to situations such as retirement, losses, death of a partner, family events, economic factors, health issues, or migration. Therefore, there are several factors that influence the family life of older persons, and it is important to note that older persons also influence their family.

As previously mentioned, legally, the well-being of the elderly still rests in the hands of their families, being only secondarily the responsibility of the State, in cases where there are no family members available. In this sense, Falcão (2012) highlights that present-day families face important challenges arising from the demands of old age. The author explains that the response that each family will give to this phase of the life cycle will result from relationships, bonds, and family patterns prior to this phase, and how they adapt to new requirements. Rabinovich et al. (2019) observed that older persons consider their families to be very important for two reasons: their families are the ones who care for them, and their families become their reason to live. Nevertheless, it should be noted that effective functioning of families with elderly people goes beyond the immediate familial structure, requiring an informal support network composed of relatives, friends, volunteers, or religious groups, in addition to easy access to health services and community resources (Rabelo & Neri, 2014). However, the family remains the centre of support for the elderly, often managing the entire support network of third parties.

Falcão (2012) examines the complexity of the relationships between older persons and their families; specifically, to what extent the support offered by the family—invoking in the older individual the feeling of being loved, cared for, valued, and an important part of the family network—may come from a sense of obligation, as the responsibility to care for the elderly is anchored in Brazilian legislation. The author highlights the importance of reflecting on what conditions provide the ideal framework for a family to exercise its care function, concluding that each case must be evaluated with its particularities and distinct relationships, considering relations prior to the current situation.

The issue of dependence of the elderly should also be briefly explored. In the Brazilian context, dependence is understood as the lack of autonomy to carry out activities of daily living. According to Miranda (2014), there are two situations of dependence in the elderly: dependence due to cognitive disorders, such as Alzheimer's Disease; or dependence due to incapacitating health problems—that is, the elderly person remains lucid, but needs help from others to carry out activities of daily living. It is interesting to note that dependency appears to be the focus of Brazilian social concern, since national policies for the elderly focus either on elderly persons with full autonomy, or on their recovery (Debert, 2019). Still, it is necessary to question to what extent the focus on independence or autonomy may prevent the possibility of solidarity between generations.

While dependency, seen from a functional angle, occurs from the elderly towards their families, the Brazilian scenario also presents the possible financial dependence of families towards their elderly. According to Camarano (2020), the income of the elderly through their retirement pensions is an important source of sustenance for Brazilian families. Elders have contributed with 70.6% of the household income, corresponding to approximately 62.5% of their retirement pensions. Doll and Cavallazi (2017) highlight that retirement pensions are viewed as safe and reliable income, which has become especially important in the current economy. They also point out that there are financial transfers between generations, usually by mutual agreement, which are seen as advantageous for those involved. The expected “empty nest” creates space for a possible multigenerational home in which the elderly person plays the role of provider. This turns the expected concept of dependency around since, in this case, it is the family who depends on the older person, from a financial perspective. The constellation where several generations co-reside in the same household, whether for financial reasons, or for reasons of conservation of the family institution, is becoming increasingly common in Brazil (Wozniak & Falcão, 2016). It is possible that other family structures will evolve around the care of the older adult. Thus, families appear in a multitude of different configurations and structures, highlighting the necessity to take a closer look at these families. Motta (2019) explains that the family landscape has evolved with the emergence of new roles, which can overlap; furthermore, these roles are experienced for a longer period of time.

The Roles of Older Persons in the Family: A Prospect of Great-Grandparenthood

Based on this socio-demographic background, it becomes apparent that there is an increased possibility of a longer duration of certain family roles, of experiencing new roles within the family, and of greater intergenerational interaction.

Motta (2010) describes the multigenerational family by distinguishing various generational segments: the very old, who can reach the status of centenarians, that is, great-grandparents, followed by the generation of their elderly children, sometimes referred to as the “sandwich generation,” often caregivers, who also support their parents, children, and grandchildren. As a consequence, there are several levels of relationships and interrelationships between these various family roles that characterize the multigenerational system. Harper (2006) points out that individuals grow older with more vertical than horizontal connections in the family, and spend more time playing intergenerational roles than ever before.

The family roles of grandparents and, possibly, great-grandparents, are the prospects for Brazilian elders (Falcão, 2012). Due to socio-demographic changes, there is a trend towards a greater number of grandparents and grandchildren in the country (IBGE, 2010). Due to the increase in life expectancy in the country, it can be inferred that older people will have the opportunity to experience the role of grandparents over a longer period of time, even seeing their grandchildren become adults, thus opening up the possibility of experiencing the role of great-grandparents as well.

However, it should be noted that, with the fall in the fertility rate, the experience of great-grandparenthood may be embedded in some specific factors. In their analysis of the average ages at which Brazilian women give birth to their first child, Ribeiro et al. (2019) point out the low fertility rate and postponement of the first child in Brazil. The authors explain that in the 1980s, the average age at which Brazilian women gave birth to their first child was 23.5 years old; in the 1990s, it was 23.1 years; in the 2000s, 22.9; reaching 24 years in 2010. Furthermore, in the last census, there was a drop in the proportion of mothers who had children in their 20s, and an increase in the number of first-time mothers aged 30 or older (IBGE, 2017). Despite the increase in the age at which Brazilian women have children, due to the greater longevity of older people, it is entirely realistic for many of them to become great-grandparents. By making a brief projection of the average ages at which women have children, let us take as an example a woman X born in the 1960s. We can assume that she would have had her first daughter in 1983 at age 23. This daughter in turn would have had her first daughter in 2006, also at age 23, making woman X a grandmother at 46 years of age. Even if her granddaughter postpones having children until she is 30, she might have her first child in 2036, adding another generation to the family and making woman X a great-grandmother at the age of 76. Due to the increase in life expectancy in Brazil, this is an entirely realistic scenario.

Although many Brazilian women are delaying their first pregnancy, leading to an increase in the average age at which they have children, there is still a large number of women who become mothers before the age of 20. In 2018, the IBGE recorded 414,866 cases of women who became mothers between the ages of 15 and 19 in the country, and 18,231 cases under the age of 15. If we consider the family of a young woman who becomes a mother while still in her teens, it can be assumed that her grandparents may well be “young great-grandparents,” taking on this new intergenerational role at a fairly young age. In this context, it is interesting to note that the role of great-grandparents is not necessarily linked to

advanced chronological age and can be experienced by adults who may not yet be considered older persons.

As we can see, the role of great-grandparents in Brazil is very heterogeneous: it can be experienced by persons of a wide variety of ages, in various socio-cultural contexts and different family structures, resulting in unique psychological experiences for the individuals who live the role. Hence, we can answer our title question as follows: yes, great-grandparents exist in Brazil and they play a relevant role in society; however, there are many variables which must be taken into account. As Papalia et al. (2006) observe, the role of great-grandparenthood is a relatively new one, leading to many questions regarding its significance for the individuals themselves, but also for their family and Brazilian society. In the next section, significant Brazilian research on the topic of great-grandparenthood is briefly presented in order to better understand this role.

Great-grandparents in Brazil – What Do We Know?

There is limited scientific literature on the role of great-grandparents in Brazil, with the first article on the topic published in 2007; therefore, we still know little about the role. However, interest in the topic has been growing, linked to the country's ageing population. The first research on the role of great-grandparents was carried out in Recife by Dias and Pinto (2007). They conducted a qualitative study on the role of great-grandparents and their relationship with their great-grandchildren, in which 21 great-grandparents with an average age of 77 took part. The authors found that the role of great-grandparents stands out as a having a high value, highlighting positive feelings related to longevity, pride, and satisfaction. They also pointed to a special status of the role of great-grandparents, in an emotional and symbolic perspective. It is important to highlight that, due to age, great-grandparents possibly provide more expressive and emotional care, since they have physical limitations that make contact with great-grandchildren difficult (Dias & Pinto, 2007).

Subsequently, in 2014 Rabinovich et al. carried out descriptive research in Bahia with 50 great-grandchildren, who were interviewed about their perception of their great-grandparents. The results showed that great-grandparents contribute greatly to the family's daily life. The authors discuss how great-grandparents bring children closer to the notion of time and even death, since they appear even older than their grandparents. In this sense, the death of a great-grandparent may be a child's first experience of loss of a family member and the consequent grief. Children can also experience a change in position from grandchildren to great-grandchildren. In addition, it was emphasized that great-grandparents transmit a generational legacy that is part of the family memory and contributes to the family's daily life. Furthermore, great-grandparents are viewed from a longevity perspective, as the founders of the family, providing a greater sense of temporality: "[...] the most evident characteristic of the existence of great-grandparents is the extent of children's understanding of temporality" (Rabinovich et al., 2014, p.196). Their research also distinguished two types of great-grandparents: "*more than grandparents*" and "*in the place of grandparents*": the "*more than grandparents*" were

generally older and needed more help but told more stories; the “in the place of grandparents” were younger and still able to provide care for their great-grandchildren.

Schuler and Dias (2018) aim to understand the role of great-grandparents and the impact of the various relationships established with members of different generations in their family. Their research was a multiple case study with three multi-generational families, totalling twelve participants. The authors reached results that denote an active participation of great-grandparents in their families in an emotional and affective way. Great-grandparents give support to younger generations, mainly through conversations with their children and grandchildren. Great-grandparents play with their great-grandchildren, often old-fashioned games from their own childhood, such as playing in the street, or even making a wooden playhouse for a great-grandchild. They still tell many stories, go for walks, take pictures, and cook their grandchildren’s and great-grandchildren’s favourite meals. It is interesting to note that there was also financial support, given by great-grandparents to their respective families. The authors also highlight the intergenerational relationship that is provided mainly by visits made by children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren to great-grandparents. Finally, as for the meaning of being a great-grandparent, all participants attributed feelings of transcendence, memories, blessing, gratitude, gift, opportunity for a new beginning, and revival to being a great-grandparent.

At the time of writing this article, the three papers described above are the only ones to be found on the topic of great-grandparenthood in Brazil. It is interesting to note that they were all carried out in northeastern Brazil and used qualitative methodologies. Another important fact is that all of these deal primarily with great-grandparents in old age, possibly due to the inclusion criteria for the respective surveys.

There is still a great need for research on the topic of great-grandparenthood, especially taking into account the heterogeneous nature of ageing and the variety of family structures in the country.

According to the predictions of Dias et al. (2018), more Brazilians than ever will take on the role of great-grandparents as life expectancy increases in the population. Interesting areas which require further research are, for instance: the relationship between great-grandparents and their great-grandchildren, great-grandparents who raise their great-grandchildren, and the role of younger great-grandparents.

Final Thoughts

This review paper sought to explore the phenomenon of population ageing in Brazil in order to understand the socio-demographic background which permits the role of great-grandparents to develop and flourish in this country. The data point to a very accelerated ageing process, which has attracted attention in the last 50 years. This phenomenon is mainly due to the reduction in the mortality rate for all age groups, combined with a drop in the fertility rate. This fall in the fertility rate may lead to questions about the relevance of the topic of the article, since it elicits the question as to how it is possible to experience the role of great-grandparents if Brazilian women are waiting longer to have children, as well as having fewer children. Despite

the fall in the fertility rate, the presence of great-grandparents in Brazil is a reality, due to the increase in life expectancy of older persons. In addition, it must be taken into account that the role of great-grandparents is not necessarily linked to a specific chronological age. Indeed, due to the fact that the percentage of Brazilian women who have children before the age of 20 is still considerable, some great-grandparents may be so-called "young great-grandparents".

When examining older great-grandparents, who are already in the stratum that is considered "elderly" in Brazil, there is a pronounced heterogeneity in terms of socio-economic factors, health conditions, family backgrounds, and personal life stories. Thanks to some financial stability gained with their retirement pensions, it is not uncommon for older Brazilians to contribute financially to their families, sometimes even supporting them and making them financially dependent on the older family member(s). On the other hand, health issues can lead to older persons being dependent on their families' help to carry out daily life activities. This raises the question of whether the older person is dependent on their family, or vice versa? In any case, the family plays an essential role in the life of older persons, especially since, legally, the family is considered the primary source of support for the elderly. The exact character of this support depends on a number of variables, characterized by each family, as well as the life story of the older person.

It is concluded that there is a whole socio-demographic, cultural, and historical context that not only enables the experience of the role of great-grandparents, but also influences it. The fall in the mortality rate, followed by an increase in life expectancy, combined with advances in health services and public policies, have led to greater longevity in Brazil. This ageing population, combined with the verticalization of family structures, have led to the emergence of the role of great-grandparents in Brazil.

These socio-demographic developments which are now taking place in Brazil have already been seen in other countries, such as the USA. It is interesting to note that these socio-demographic changes in the USA led to an interest in the role of great-grandparents, marked by the publication of several research papers between the 1980s and the 2000s (Barer, 2001; Doka & Mertz, 1988; Drew & Silverstein, 2004; Reese & Murray, 1996; Wentowsky, 1985). In Brazil, this incipient interest, observed in the research on the role of great-grandparents beginning in 2007, has so far been concentrated in the northeast of the country (Dias & Pinto, 2007; Rabinovich et al., 2014; Schuler & Dias, 2018). It can therefore be inferred that this is a specific moment in which this role can be experienced due to socio-demographic factors.

In this sense, there is a certain urgency for research in this field, since living in this socio-demographic scenario facilitates the possibility of experiencing the role of great-grandparents in Brazil. The role of great-grandparents may increase or hide again, depending on future socio-demographic developments. While increased longevity may prolong the possibility of experiencing this role, the fertility rate may decline further, leading to a decreased likelihood of the multigenerational experience between four generations. It is worth mentioning that the present research only aimed to explore the socio-demographic background of great-grandparenthood;

however, there are still specific elements of each experience of great-grandparents that should be taken into account and require further investigation.

This review paper also presents limitations due to the lack of literature and further socio-demographic data about older people in Brazil. Nevertheless, we believe that the current intergenerational context motivates the development of further research on the role of great-grandparents and their nuances in the family and beyond, mainly due to the scarcity of present literature. In addition, the need for a closer look at society is emphasized. This older population requires the creation and implementation of new public policies, as well as psychological support for them and their families.

Acknowledgements The author would like to thank Dr. George Leeson from the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing for the fundamental support in the process of writing this paper. The author would also like to thank the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Capes)* for funding this research.

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