

The evaluation of the Activities of Daily Life for the diagnosis of Mild Cognitive Impairment in the elderly: a qualitative exploration of the lived experience of older people with MCI

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Introduction

The concept of Mild Cognitive Impairment is gaining more and more importance because of the possible conversion to Alzheimer Disease. In particular amnesic MCI is seen as the preclinical phase of AD and is defined as 'a cognitive deterioration, which is bigger than expected for age, but without limitations in daily functioning'. However, recent research shows subtle problems in the complex activities of daily living (ADL). Currently there are no sensitive measurement tools available to capture those subtle deficits. The aim of the study is to explore the experiences of older persons concerning the changes in their daily life due to MCI and how they adapt to the situation. This could help to develop an assessment tool to detect MCI and AD in an early stage of the disease and could guide practice.

Methods

A qualitative design (in depth interviews) was used. By purposive sampling, 29 independent living older adults with MCI (meeting the criteria of the Working group on MCI), were included. Systematic analysis was conducted by mean of open coding, categorisation, interpretation and recontextualisation of the narrative data.

Results

The participants reported an active participation. They had meaningful activities and performed on a high level. Nevertheless, they all reported subtle change - without causing dangerous situations - in complex activities due to the mild cognitive problems. They seem to have in particular problems with process skills: organising, dual tasks, everyday planning, problem solving. Some of them showed concern and anxiety about these changes. Their adaptation strategies were using external aids, avoiding activities causing difficulties, or performing differently. A few did not adapt and lived their life unstructured. Facilitators were the partner, the children. A new life situation was hard to overcome.

Conclusion and implication for practice

Reported changes were personal and difficult to capture with the regularly used assessment tools because they do not distinguish between motor-and process skills. In particular the last causes the troubles with MCI. Adaptation strategies varies among the participants.

These findings could 1) help to development a more suitable instrument 2) serve as a guideline for a client centered occupational therapy program.