Family Perceptions of Mild Cognitive Impairment

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Focus and Purpose

Focus: MCI and Family Relationships

Conceptual Framework: Boss’ theory of ambiguous loss and Pearlin’s caregiving stress framework

Purpose:
- Examine family members’ perceptions of their elder relative’s memory loss
- Explore under what circumstances changes in the elders’ memory influence family relationship dynamics
45 Family Triads

- **Elder:** aged 60+
  - 32 males; 13 females

- **PCP:** family member most involved in the elder’s life; familiar with clinic evaluation
  - 9 males; 36 females
  - 34 spouses; 6 adult children

- **SCP:** relatives aware of the elder’s memory problems; monthly face-to-face contact with the elder & PCP
  - 11 males; 34 females
  - 39 adult children
Coding Categories

- Awareness of MCI changes
- Family/friend dynamics
- Social support
- Care partner role
- Negative emotions
- Positive emotions
- Negative interactions
- Positive interactions
Acknowledgement of MCI

- **Family Cluster A** (n=16)
  - Elder +
  - SCP +
  - MCI

- **Family Cluster B** (n=13)
  - Elder +/-
  - SCP +
  - MCI

- **Family Cluster C** (n=5)
  - Elder +
  - SCP +
  - MCI
  - PCP +/-
Relational Shifts

Distancing Families
(n = 14)

Engaging Families
(n = 4)

Sustaining Families
(n = 3)
Secondary Care Providers

SCP → MCI

Elder (n = 7) → PCP

SCP → MCI

Elder (n = 4) → PCP

SCP → MCI

Elder (n = 5) → PCP

SCP → MCI

Elder → PCP

SCP → MCI

Elder → PCP
Summary

Pronounced shifts in perceived closeness and quality of relationships in families in which an older member has MCI

- Acknowledgement of MCI
- Characterization of MCI
- PCPs expressed the most emotional stress
- SCPs response often associated with past relationship history
  - Intensify emotional support for the elder and PCP
  - With PCPs, collectively provide emotional support for the elder
  - Distance him/herself from family
Conclusions

- When family members avoid acknowledging the changes and losses associated with MCI, relationships suffered.

- MCI-related distress often led to communication problems, conflict, and aggravation of pre-existing relationship issues that affected family members’ support and emotional involvement with one another.

- Need for more family-level investigations to further understanding of relational complexities facing families in this pre-caregiving stage of memory loss.
For more information

- kroberto@vt.edu
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- Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI): What do we do now?

http://www.gerontology.vt.edu/docs/Gerontology_MCI_final.pdf