

Three Voices are Better than One: Family Members' Assessment of Cognitive Deficits in Late Life

Karen A. Roberto, Ph.D.
Rosemary Blieszner, Ph.D.
Jyoti Savla, Ph.D.

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Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI)

- Age-related decline in memory and executive functioning
- Criteria for assessing MCI include:
 - self-reported complaint of memory loss that interferes minimally with activities of daily living and personal relationships
 - uncharacteristic memory loss for the person's age
 - normal functioning in other cognitive domains
 - no evidence of dementia
- Possibly a transitional phase between normal cognitive aging and early dementia

(Petersen et al., 1999)



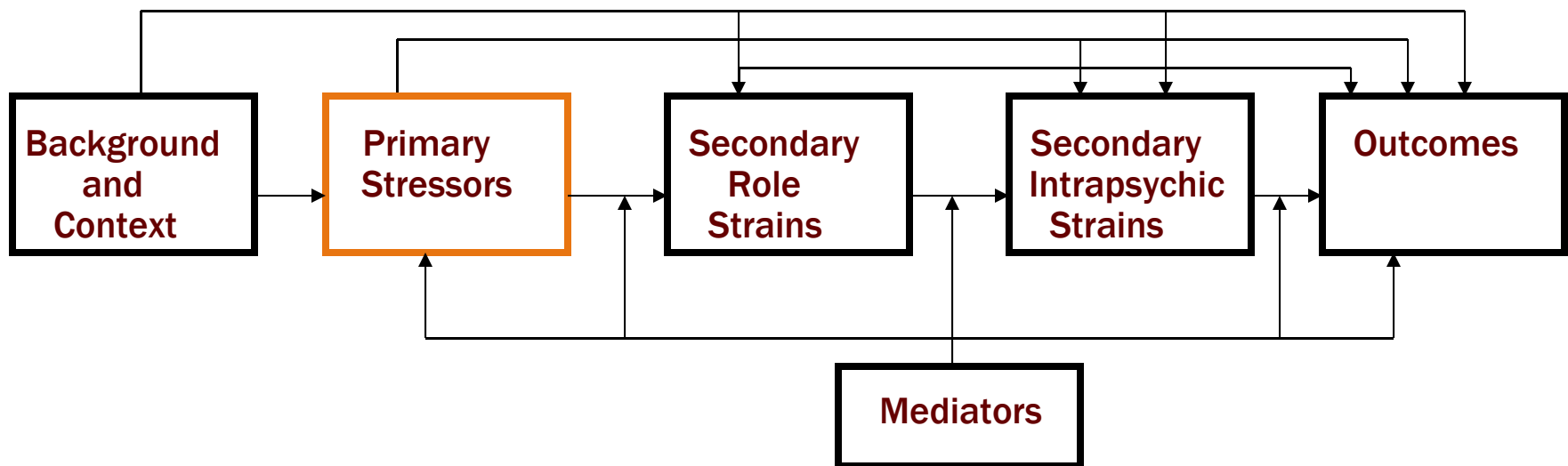
Purpose

To compare subjective perceptions of memory loss among older adults diagnosed with MCI and two family members.



Conceptual Framework

Pearlin's Caregiving Stress Process Framework



Methods

- Memory Clinics, Church, Existing Study Pool
- 127 Families -- 77 Triads
- Family - level Data
 - Elder with MCI (E), age 60+
 - Primary care partner (PCP)
 - Secondary care partner (SCP)
- Three Contacts (face-to-face/telephone)
- Scales and Open-ended Questions

Triad Members

Characteristic	Elder n=77	Primary Care Partner n=77	Secondary Care Partner n=77
Mean Age (SD)	75.6 (7.1)	66.8 (12.5)	50.7 (12.5)
% Female	35	84	73
% White	74	78	78
% Married/Partnered	70	84	69
% > HS Education	58	66	77
% Monthly income ≤ \$1,999 \$2,000-3,999 ≥ \$4,000	39.0 26.0 29.9	32.5 22.1 35.1	
Relationship to Elder			
% Spouse	-	66	-
% Adult Child	-	21	74
% Sibling	-	7	12
% Other Relative	-	7	8
% Friend	-	4	7

Qualitative Analyses: Acknowledgement of Memory Changes

- Open-ended interview questions
- Open coding process – multiple coders
- Final coding scheme – 45 categories
- Used ATLAS.ti (Muhr, 2004) to organize and manage the data, coding scheme, and emergent findings

Family Acknowledgement of MCI

Four degrees:

- Complete 34%
- Passive 36%
- Partial 27%
- None 4%

Acknowledgement and Everyday Functioning

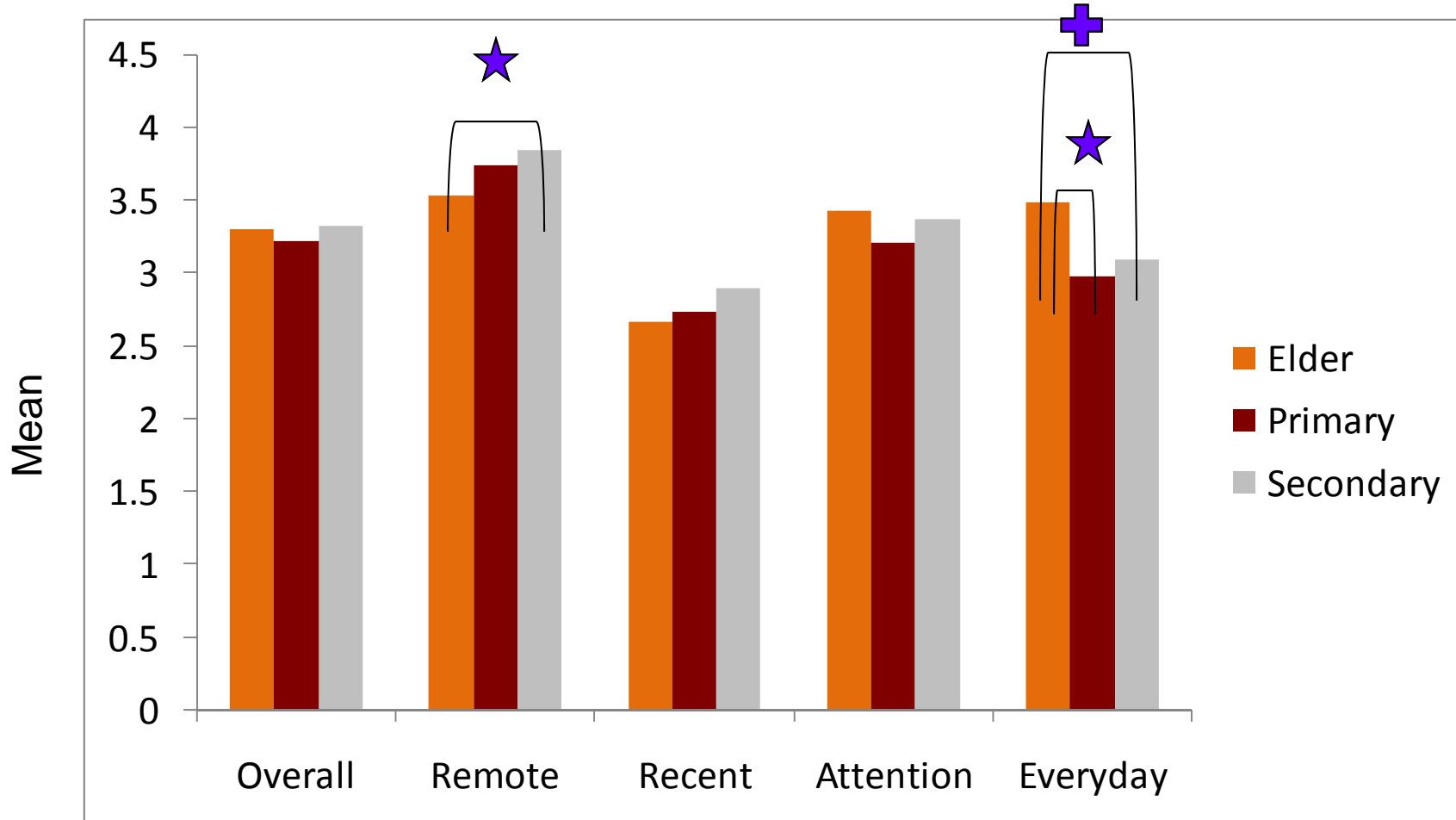
- Developing Coping Strategies
- Maintaining Social Identity
- Accepting Social Support

Quantitative Analyses: Perceptions of Memory Changes

Dementia Deficits Scale (Green et al., 1993)

- Awareness of cognitive, emotional, and functional deficits
- 14 items; 4 areas of ability:
 - remote memory
 - recent memory
 - attention
 - performance of everyday activities
- 5-point scale: Very poor . . . Very good

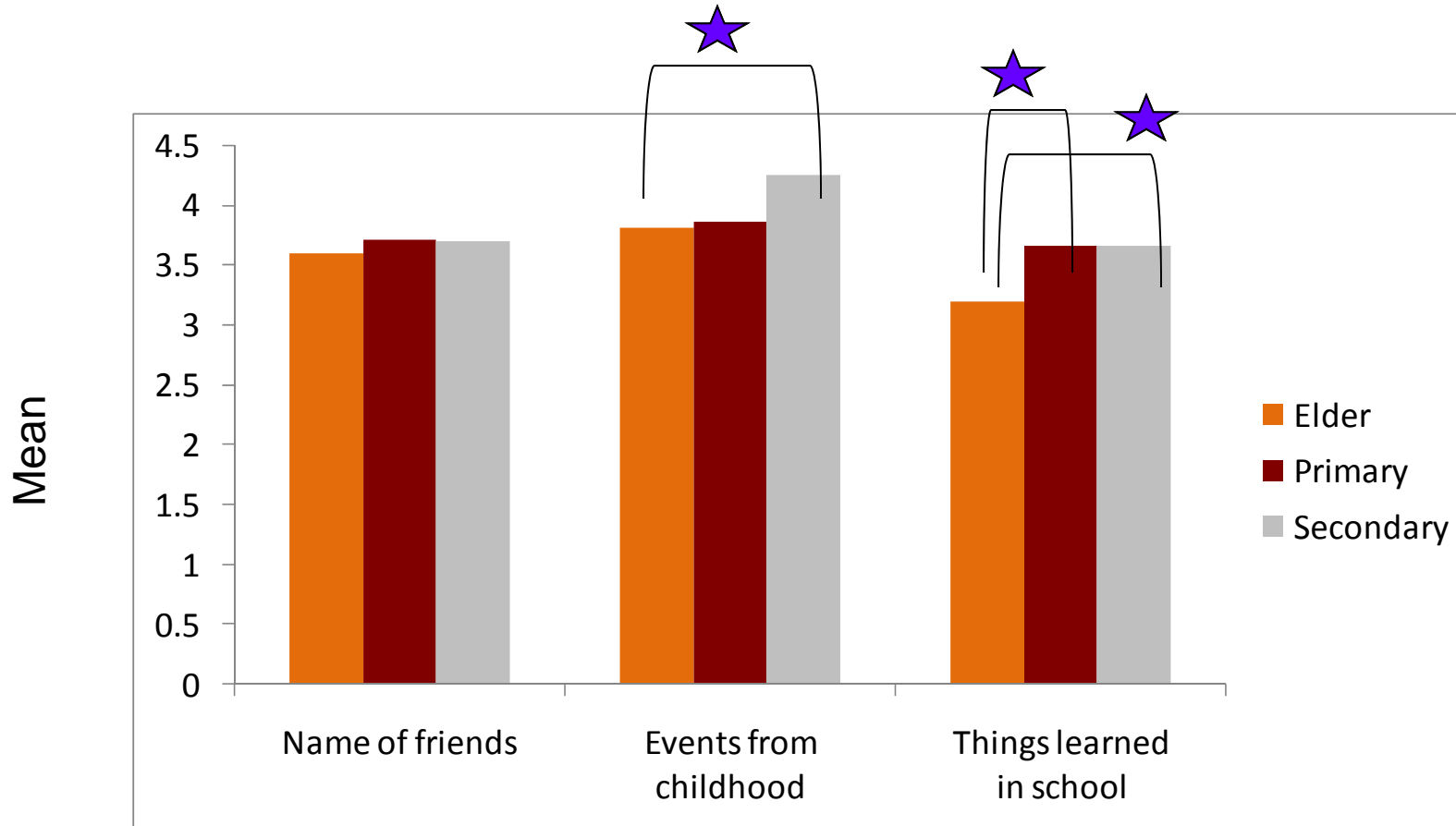
Awareness of Memory Deficits



★ $p < .05$ + $p = .06$



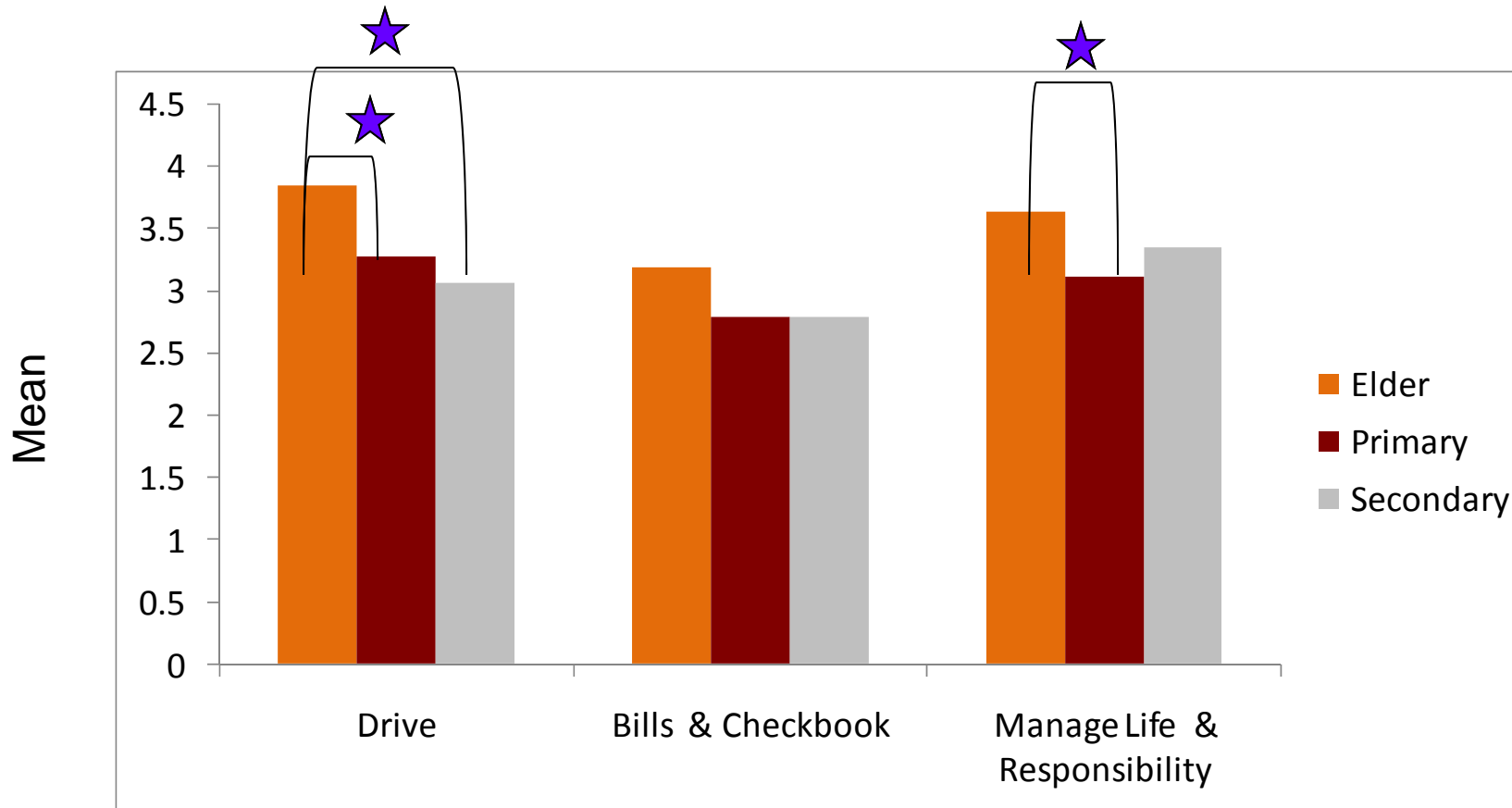
Item Comparison for Remote Memory



★ $p < .05$



Item Comparison for Everyday Performance



★ $p < .05$



Conclusions

- Within-family variation in acknowledgement and awareness of memory deficits occurs
- Family members have a significant influence on each other as they adapt to memory-related challenges
- Shared perspective enhanced family members' understanding of the elder's memory and behavior changes and enabled them to cope with minimum distress
- Family dynamics influence, and are influenced by, the extent of family agreement about the elders' memory loss.

Benefits of Multiple Informants

- Family-level analyses more accurately reflect lived experiences of elders and relatives
- Multiple views contribute depth and breadth of information
- Possibility of filling in “missing data” and confirming statements, perspectives, findings
- Opportunity to explore reasons for differing perceptions, beliefs, interpretations

Challenges with Multiple Informants

- Missing data/cases:
inability to recruit and retain all intended informants
- Issues of interpretation:
whose perspective is privileged, when?
- Need large data sets & multiple occasions of measurement for advanced statistical analyses
- Coding and analyzing family-level qualitative data

Acknowledgements

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- Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Salem
- University of Chicago's Center for Comprehensive Care and Research on Memory Disorders (UC-CCCRMD)
- Indiana University Center for Aging Research's Regenstrief Institute in Indianapolis (IUPUI)
- Emory University Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Memory Clinic in Atlanta (Emory)
- Loudon Church, Roanoke
- The Baltimore Study on Black Aging

Staff:

Martha Anderson, Carlene Arthur, Nancy Brossoie, Lauren Ermann, Gail Evans, Eva Hughes Kye Kim, Brandy McCann, Marya McPherson, Angie Otero, Kristen Pujari, Tammy Stevers, & Karen Wilcox

Translating the Research

Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI): What do we do now?

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