

POSTER ABSTRACTS

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Effectiveness of Self-Reported Memory Status in Measuring Cognition in the Elderly

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Background: Subjective memory complaints have been used as an indicator of global cognitive function. Population research on the usefulness of subjective memory complaints as a predictor of cognitive impairment and dementia has been conflicting. This study examined the association of memory complaints with cognitive impairment and dementia in two different elderly populations.

Methods: The study includes 221 elderly men and women from West Los Angeles Kaiser who completed a mailed self-report health survey and a second sample of 131 women from another NIA study who completed the same survey. All reported having "severe memory problems." To determine how effective these self-reports were in determining cognitive status, both samples were given the Telephone Interview for Cognitive Status-modified (TICS_m). Risk for dementia was determined by identifying subjects scoring less than 28 points on the TICS_m, then administering a Telephone Dementia Questionnaire (TDQ) to a proxy. If a TDQ was not possible, chart reviews were conducted. Descriptive statistics (chi-squares), t-tests and odds ratios were conducted to determine the cognitive status of those reporting severe memory problems.

Results: The first sample had 121 responders and 90% (N=109) scored in the cognitively impaired range with a mean TICS_m score of 19.5. 76% of those reporting severe memory problems had either cognitive impairment (17%) or dementia (59%). The second sample of 131 women had a 23.4 mean TICS_m score versus 29.6 for negative reporters and 70% versus 34% scored below 28 on the TICS_m. After adjusting for age and education, those reporting severe memory problems were 28 times more likely to have dementia than negative reporters (OR = 28.29; CI 15.11-52.98; p<.0001).

Conclusions: While there are varying degrees of strength of association of the single memory question to actual performance on the TICS_m and the risk of dementia, the results indicate moderate effectiveness. The single memory question appears to be an efficient and economical method of initial screening of large elderly populations for cognitive impairment and dementia.