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Six-month longitudinal associations between cognitive functioning and distress among the community-based elderly in Hong Kong: A cross-lagged panel analysis

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Although previous studies have extensively documented the cross-sectional relationship between cognitive impairment and psychological distress, findings relating to their longitudinal associations remains mixed. The present study examines the longitudinal associations and mutual influence between cognitive functioning and psychological distress across six months among community-dwelling elderly in Hong Kong. A total of 162 older adults (40 males; Mage=69.8 years, SD=6.4) were administered objective and subjective measures of cognitive functioning, as well as self-reported ratings of distress, at two time points, six months apart. Using structural equation modeling, we tested the cross-lagged relationships between cognitive functioning and distress. Our cross-lagged model indicated that cognitive functioning at baseline significantly predicted subsequent psychological distress. However, distress was not significantly associated with subsequent cognitive functioning. Additionally, the objective and subjective measures of cognitive functioning were not significantly correlated. These findings suggested that distress may occur as a consequence of poorer cognitive functioning in elderly, but not vice versa. The lack of correlation between objective and subjective cognitive measures suggested that the participants may not have adequate insight into their cognitive abilities. The implications of these findings are discussed.

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