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Commentary

Impact of Decline and Depressive Symptoms over Novel Cognitive Stimulating Activities

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ABOUT THE STUDY

Dementia is one of the most important public health challenges in the world due to an ageing population. However, aside from one recent approval, no new pharmacological therapies have been discovered in the past ten years despite increased efforts and numerous attempts in pharmaceutical trials. Additionally, the effectiveness of the dementia treatments currently available is poor and only lasts a little time. Early prevention is therefore more and more important. A lot of emphasis has been paid recently, especially at the pre-clinical stage, to validating the potential of preventative Non-pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs) to reduce cognitive decline. Notably, there will be almost 9.2 million fewer occurrences of dementia in 2050 if the start and course of dementia could be delayed by only one year through any types of therapies.

There have been numerous NPI experiments to enhance cognition. These include the FINGER, PreDIVA, LipidiDiet, and MAPT studies. All of these exhibited massively favourable cognitive benefits, with the exception of the FINGER trial, which was distinguished by its intensive character and high adherence rate. These trials generally concentrated on a wide range of conventional dementia protective variables, namely diet, the control of vascular risk factors, and physical activity. The main idea wasn't to use Cognitive Stimulating Activities (CSAs), a collection of exercises meant to improve cognitive performance. For people with mild to moderate dementia, The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guideline from 2006 advised routine use of CSAs. In 2017, a whitepaper commissioned by the Lancet also highlighted CSA as one of the preventive interventions with a high potential for delaying cognitive impairment.

A combined CSA intervention aimed at community-dwelling senior citizens without dementia reduced cognitive decline and enhanced several cognitive functions, including global cognition. Particularly noteworthy were the gains in quick memory, one of the first cognitive functions linked to early cognitive decline. Exploratory subgroup analyses revealed that the intervention's positive effects were more pronounced in Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) across all cognitive domains, with a mean effect size of 0.42 in the visuospatial construction and global cognition domains. Additionally, participation in more CSAs was linked to greater gains in global cognition and other cognitive areas. On the other hand, regardless of baseline cognitive status and dose-response impact, participation in the CSAs did not result in improvements in depression symptoms.

There are now two main lines of research supporting the beneficial long-term effects of CSAs. First, it has been demonstrated in multiple epidemiological studies that taking part in CSAs was linked to better cognitive results at about a 5-year follow-up; however, these investigations were methodologically constrained by the lack of control groups. Second, RCTs on CSA interventions continue to show generally mixed results, in contrast to the overwhelmingly positive evidence from epidemiological research on enhancing cognitive outcomes. They have limited sample sizes and short follow-up times, which raises questions about how long the interventions will last.

The NPIs targeting conventional risk variables demonstrated overwhelmingly positive evidence of benefits in global and several cognition domains in the FINGER study. The MAPT, preDIVA, LipiDiDiet, and ACTIVE studies, on the other hand, did not produce improvements in cognition and had small effect sizes despite similarly containing NPIs and being carried out over lengthy follow-up periods.

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