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Poor Memory and Depression in Older Adults: Results from the Study on global AGEing and adult health

TYRA JUDGE¹, ALICIA M. DELOUIZE¹, PAUL KOWAL^{1,2,3}, NIRMALA NAIDOO², SOMNATH CHATTERJI², and J. JOSH SNODGRASS^{1,4}

¹Department of Anthropology, University of Oregon; ²World Health Organization (Switzerland); ³University of Newcastle Research Centre for Generational Health and Ageing (Australia); ⁴ University of Oregon Center for Global Health



World Health Organization

SAGE

WHO's SAGE: Study on global AGEing and Adult Health

- Longitudinal study on patterns and determinants of aging in 6 middle-income countries.
- Nationally representative self-report, anthropometric, and performance, and health data on older adults

Introduction

- Worldwide, over 20% of older adults suffer from a mental health disorder.
- The most common mental health disorders are dementia and depression, affecting 5% and 7% of the world's older adult population, respectively.
- Early-stage dementia is often misdiagnosed as depression
- While depression is now a well accepted early symptom of cognitive decline, some studies have shown no association

Study Objective/Hypotheses

Objective: To better understand the relationship between depression and cognition in older adults in SAGE Wave 1 data (2007-2010).

Hypothesis: Self-rated memory, backward digit span, and verbal recall will be negatively associated with depression in all study countries.

Participants & Methods

N = 35,344

Age: ≥ 50 , $M = 63.54$, $SD = 9.79$

Gender: 66% Female

Education: $M = 5.49$ yrs, $SD = 5.07$

Depression: Previously validated diagnostic algorithm or self-report diagnosis

Backward digit span: Score out of 9

Verbal recall: Score out of 10

Self-rated memory: 1 *Poor* to 5 *Great*

Results

Controlling for sex, education, and age:

- Poor memory was associated with the presence of depression in every country except India
- Poor self-rated memory was associated with depression in China, Mexico, and Russia
 - Great self-rated memory was associated with depression in Ghana
- Backward digit span or verbal recall was associated with depression in China, Ghana, and South Africa

Discussion

- Our results demonstrate an association between poor memory and depression in these middle-income countries.
- There was still much variation between groups, and cultural effects on the relationship between depression and cognition should be explored
- Care should be made when diagnosing depression in older adults globally, as mood changes could be an early sign of dementia



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Fig 1. Difference in Memory in Older Adults with Depression

