

SLEEP IN OLDER ADULTS: ASSOCIATION BETWEEN CHRONIC INSOMNIA AND COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING

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Introduction: Chronic insomnia and cognitive impairment are both common complaints among older adults. Even so, only a few studies have examined the effects of chronic insomnia on cognitive functioning among the elderly, and the results of these studies are contradictory. We therefore examined whether insomnia is associated with changes in cognitive functioning among elderly people.

Methods: The study population comprised two groups: 64 older adult subjects without sleep disorders, and 35 elderly insomniacs. All subjects were living independently in the community and were in good clinical condition. The cognitive capacity of each subject was tested at the subject's home using the computerized "MindFit" test (CogniFit, Inc.).

Results: Analysis revealed significant differences between the insomniac and the non-insomniac subjects in memory span [$t(97)=2.77$, $P<0.007$], integration of two dimensions tasks [$t(45)=2.03$, $P<0.049$], time estimation [$t(97)=2.42$, $P<0.017$], and in executive functioning tasks [$t(96)=2.03$, $P<0.045$].

This preliminary analysis demonstrates that in four categories of cognitive functioning, elderly people with insomnia display significant impaired performance compared to non-insomniacs.

Conclusion: The present findings suggest that late-life insomnia may be one of the factors contributing to the decline in cognitive functioning seen among older people. The findings of this study offer hope that treatment of insomnia in older adults can have beneficial effects in improving cognitive functioning in these patients. Therefore, attention to and effective treatment of chronic insomnia in older persons may not only improve the quality of their nighttime sleep, but conceivably may also maintain cognitive function, thus improving their overall quality of life.