

Experiences of Social Participation among Community Elderly with Mild Cognitive Impairment: A Qualitative Research

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Abstract : Mild cognitive impairment (MCI) is a clinical stage that occurs between normal aging and dementia. Although MCI increases the risk of developing dementia, individuals with MCI may maintain stable cognitive function and even recover to a typical cognitive state. An intervention to prevent or delay the progression to dementia in individuals with MCI may involve promoting social engagement. Social participation is the engagement in socially relevant social exchanges and meaningful activities. Older adults with MCI may encounter restricted cognitive abilities, mood changes, and behavioral difficulties during social participation, influencing their willingness to engage. Therefore, this study aims to employ qualitative research methods to gain an in-depth comprehension of the authentic social participation experiences of older adults with mild cognitive impairment, which will establish a foundation for designing appropriate intervention programs. A phenomenological research was conducted. The study participants were selected using the purposive sampling method in combination with the maximum differentiation sampling strategy. Face-to-face semistructured interviews were conducted among 12 elderly individuals suffering from mild cognitive impairment in a community in Zhengzhou City from May to July 2023. Colaizzi 7-step method was used to analyze the data and extract the theme. The real experience of social participation in older adults with mild cognitive impairment can be summarized into 3 themes: (1) a single social relationship but a strong desire to participate, (2) a dual experience of social participation with both positive and negative aspects, (3) multiple barriers to social participation, including impaired memory capacity, heavy family responsibilities and lack of infrastructure. The study found that elderly individuals with mild cognitive impairment and one social interaction display an increased desire to engage in society. To improve social participation levels and reduce cognitive function decline, healthcare providers should work with relevant government agencies and the community to create a comprehensive social participation system. It is important for healthcare providers to note the social participation status of the elderly with mild cognitive impairment.

Keywords : mild cognitive impairment, the elderly, social participation, qualitative research

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