

## The Experience of Living with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) among the Elderly in Northern Sri Lanka

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**Background:** The concept of Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) is a condition between normal and dementia-type pathological ageing. The concept of MCI applies to people who suffer from cognitive impairment at the same time with the normal activities of daily living. The people with MCI may progress to dementia or remain in MCI or revert to normal cognition. Living with this disease condition may increase their uncertainty, leading to an additional psychological burden. This study was to describe the subjective experience of living with MCI among the elderly in Northern Sri Lanka. **Methods:** In-depth interviews were conducted among a sample of elders who had been identified as having MCI within 6 months in a study of MCI prevalence among 1028 elderly aged 65 years and above. **Results:** The study unit for this qualitative study was 16 elders (8 males and 8 females) with a mean age of 74.3 years, whom have been identified as having MCI during the above-mentioned study. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in verbatim. The interviewer checked the transcription for accuracy. Grounded theory was used to explore the themes of the objectives. There were four common themes that emerged from these qualitative studies. Changes, attributions, consequences and coping were the four themes explored during analysis. Changing pattern in cognitive abilities after getting MCI was 'forgetfulness', 'poor concentration', and 'problems in geographical orientation'. Attributions after getting MCI were 'normal ageing phenomena', 'personality trait', and 'somatic conditions. The reported consequences were categorized into two categories as experienced by the patient and by the family members. Three categories of coping mechanisms were adopted by the patients following the diagnosis of MCI. Those were emotion-oriented, problem-focused and avoidance-oriented coping mechanisms. **Conclusions:** Living with a new disease can significantly influence a patient's emotional response, symptom perception, attributions and coping skills.

**Keywords:** MCI, Elderly, Patient perception, Sri Lanka