European Geriatric Medicine 8 (2017) 164–167

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Research paper

Health-related quality of life in a multidomain intervention trial to prevent cognitive decline (FINGER)

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 19 October 2016
Accepted 27 December 2016
Available online 24 January 2017

Keywords:
Cognition
Prevention
Multidomain
Health-related quality of life
RAND-36
SF-36

ABSTRACT

Introduction: The Finnish Geriatric Intervention Study to Prevent Cognitive Impairment and Disability (FINGER) successfully demonstrated that multidomain lifestyle intervention can improve or maintain cognitive functioning in at-risk individuals. Health-related quality of life (HRQoL) was a secondary endpoint.

Methods: The intervention (n = 631) aimed at healthy diet, increased physical activity, cognitive training, and vascular risk management. The control group (n = 629) was given general health advice. HRQoL was assessed at baseline, 12, and 24 months using validated RAND-36 (SF-36) instrument with 8 scales.

Results: During the 2-year intervention period, mean scores in all scales decreased in the control group, but increased in the intervention group for vitality (12 months), social function (12 months), and especially general health at both 12 and 24 months. There was a statistically significant beneficial effect of intervention on the change in general health and physical function at 12 and 24 months.

Conclusion: Multidomain lifestyle intervention improved also important dimensions of HRQoL.

1. Introduction

The Finnish Geriatric Intervention Study to Prevent Cognitive Impairment and Disability (FINGER) is a "proof-of-concept" double-blind, randomized controlled trial, which successfully demonstrated that a 2-year multidomain lifestyle intervention — consisting of exercise, dietary counselling, cognitive training, and cardiovascular risk factor control — can improve or maintain cognitive functioning in older persons at risk of cognitive decline [1]. A further beneficial dimension of the intervention would be its potential effect on health-related quality of life (HRQoL), a clinically important endpoint in outcome research in older people [2]. An improvement in HRQoL could provide added value, and analysis of HRQoL might also help to discern efficient parts of the multidomain intervention. We report here the in-trial changes of HRQoL in the intervention and control groups.

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.eurger.2016.12.005

2. Methods

The FINGER study is registered at Clinicaltrials.gov (NCT01041989). FINGER participants were recruited from earlier population-based surveys in Finland, and inclusion criteria were Cardiovascular Risk Factors, Aging and Dementia (CAIDE) Dementia Risk Score at least 6 points and their cognition average or slightly lower than expected for age. Between Sept 7, 2009, and Nov 24, 2011, 2654 individuals were screened and 1260 community-dwelling individuals aged 60 to 77 years were randomly assigned to intervention ($n = 631$) and control ($n = 629$) groups [1]. The two-year intervention aimed at healthy diet, increased physical activity, cognitive training, and evidence-based vascular risk management and monitoring. The control group was given general health advice.

Study participants were not actively told of their group allocation, and the assessors of study outcomes were blinded to group allocation. Analysis was by modified intention to treat (all participants with at least one post-baseline observation). The primary outcome was cognitive performance, change in cognition measured with comprehensive neuropsychological test battery (NTB) Z score, and the results showed a statistically significant between-group difference in the change of NTB total score per year (0.022, 95% CI: 0.002–0.042, $P = 0.030$ [1]). NTB was selected because a sensitive cognitive test was required in this population with MMSE $\geq$ 26 points at baseline.

HRQoL was a pre-specified secondary outcome, and it was measured using the RAND-36 (Medical Outcomes Study 36-Item Short-Form Health Survey; practically identical to Short Form [SF]-36) with its 8 scales: Physical Function (PF), Role Physical (RP), Role mental (RM), Vitality (VT), Mental Health (MH), Social Function (SF), Bodily Pain (BP), and General Health (GH) [3]. HRQoL assessments were performed at baseline, 12, and 24 months. The results of RAND-36 have been validated in the Finnish population, and population standards for the 8 scales are available [4].

3. Statistical analysis

Mplus (Version 5) was used for fitting Growth mixture models (GMM) with robust maximum likelihood estimation method. Logit link was used to analyze the relationships between categorized scales (RP, RM, SF) and latent growth factors. GMMs are more complex than mixed models used in the cognition report of FINGER [1], since they are based on mixtures of distributions to handle large discrepancies from normal distribution. Estimation of separate mixture distributions is based on latent class analysis in which, as a first step, models with different number of latent classes are estimated (here models with 1–5 latent classes) and the best fitting model was chosen. In-depth information on statistical details can be found in Mplus references [5,6].

Effect size was calculated using Cohen's d formula, i.e. difference score of intervention and control group changes compared to baseline score divided by baseline standard deviation. These values were given separately for 12-month and 24-month effects because non-linear model for change was adopted.

A 2-sided P-value of < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

4. Results

At baseline, the scores in all RAND-36 scales were considerably higher in FINGER participants compared with the Finnish population of similar age (Table 1). During the 2-year intervention period, mean scores in all scales decreased in the control group, but increased in the intervention group for VT (12 months), SF (12 months), and especially GH at both 12 and 24 months. There was a statistically significant beneficial effect of intervention on the change in GH and PF at 12 and 24 months (Table 2). Effect sizes for most RAND-36 scales were small (0.02–0.08), however higher for GH (0.18–0.20; Table 2).

5. Discussion

In an older population at-risk of dementia, a multidomain intervention to improve or maintain cognitive functioning also had a beneficial effect on several scales of a validated HRQoL instrument, RAND-36 [3], although the effect sizes were not large. However, the net differences in GH scores were greater, between groups they were > 3 points. This is considered clinically meaningful in RAND-36 [3] — and this difference persisted for 2 years. The effect size of GH difference was 0.18–0.20, which is greater than that of cognitive difference (0.13), primary endpoint in FINGER [1]. It is worth noting that the positive effect on GH could

Table 1
Baseline Characteristics of FINGER Participants.

Demographic characteristics	Intervention group ($n = 631$)	Control group ($n = 629$)
Age at baseline visit, mean (SD)	69.5 (4.6)	69.2 (4.7)
Proportion of women, %	45	47
Education, years, mean (SD)	10.0 (3.4)	10.0 (3.4)
MMSE, points, mean (SD)	26.7 (2.0)	26.8 (2.0)

RAND-36 scales[a], age and sex-adjusted	No. of participants with measurement	Intervention group	Control group	Age and sex-adjusted population mean among people aged 65 and over[b]
Physical function	1253	79.0 (0.8)[c]	80.1 (0.8)	60.6
Role physical	1238	73.1 (1.4)	75.7 (1.4)	47.0
Role mental	1232	80.5 (1.3)	80.8 (1.3)	58.8
Vitality	1242	71.0 (0.8)	71.6 (0.8)	60.7
Mental health	1244	81.8 (0.6)	81.1 (0.6)	74.8
Social function	1248	87.8 (0.7)	88.9 (0.7)	77.3
Bodily pain	1249	74.4 (0.9)	74.1 (0.9)	64.2
General health	1251	58.4 (0.7)[d]	61.9 (0.7)	49.0

SD: standard deviation.
[a] The scores of the RAND-36 scales can range from 0 (worst) to 100 (best).
[b] From reference [4].
[c] Mean (SE).
[d] Significantly different from control.