

Background

WHAT IS FRAILITY?

Clinical definition:

- A state of decreased reserve and increased vulnerability¹
- Results from declines in multiple systems¹

For older adults, frailty is linked to:

- Negative stereotypes of aging^{2,3,4}
- Physical limitations²
- Disability²
- Disengagement²
- Poor cognitive functioning³
- Pity, shame or disgust⁴

Older adults relate to frailty in 3 ways:

1. Do not self-identify as frail (even if fulfilling clinical criteria)^{5,6,7}
2. *Feel* frail but do not *identify* as frail²
View frailty is a transient event or isolated to a specific body part².
3. Self-identify as frail²

Impact of self-identity and stigma:

- Positive perceptions of aging and self-esteem associated with better functional health⁸
- Negative stereotypes worsens memory, gait speed and handwriting⁹

- Positive psychological health important to perception of "successful aging"⁹

References

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Methods

DESIGN

- This qualitative study is using individual interviews of both frail and non-frail individuals, as measured by the Edmonton Frail Scale, to describe participants' perceptions of frailty and develop an explanatory theory.

POPULATION

- Ages 65 or older
- Various stages of frailty separated into groups as defined by the EFS
- English speaking
- Recruited from community groups, family medicine and specialist clinics, and inpatient units in acute and rehabilitation hospitals

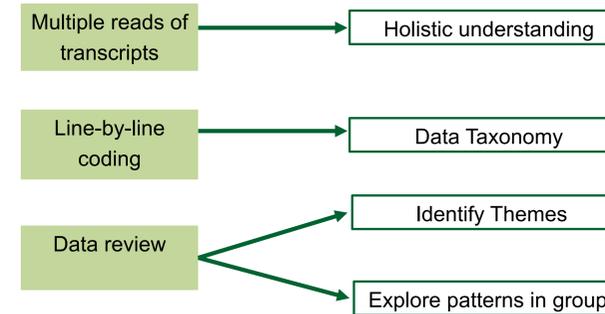
DATA COLLECTION

- Individual interviews exploring the meaning of frailty, components of frailty, usefulness of the term frailty and each component of frailty when thinking about health.
- Demographics
- Questions surrounding Edmonton Frail Scale (EFS)

Analysis

ANALYSIS

- Interpretive description: to explore clinical phenomena and experiences of illness and health⁹
- In progress



Reducing Bias

- Bracketing researcher bias
- Two reviewers early in review process
- Final themes and patterns will be reviewed with research team

First Impressions

Summary of first impressions from interviewing process:

- Note only transcripts from older adults living without frailty available so far

What is frailty?

- Many older adults relate frailty to declines in mobility and functional status

"It conjures up a sense of limited mobility." [75 year old male, non-frail]

"Somebody who is timid, perhaps not physically able to do the tasks that they need to for daily living." [66 year old female, non-frail]

- Most do not identify as frail even if classified as such by EFS

First Impressions

What are the most important aspects of aging well?

- General tendency to place more importance on aspects of health with personal experience or experience through family or friends

"Education to understand nutrition, to understand the causes and prevention of mental deterioration" [82 years old male non-frail, post-secondary educated]

How would you feel if you were told you are frail by a health care professional?

- Most older adults would feel negative emotions

"...suddenly being told I'm frail would be very offensive to me." [82 years old male non-frail]

- Those who view being told of frailty status as unhelpful interpret frailty as a hopeless state or a precursor to death

- Those who view being told of frailty status as helpful, even if associated with initial negative emotion interpret frailty as remediable and would be motivated to find means of improving their frailty status

"I guess initially that there be some denial but then I have to engage my brain to make sure that I understand what's going on around me and recognize that my body is changing. That my abilities are changing, that I have to be flexible and I have to be adapting." [71 year old male, non-frail]

"Well having made me anxious, I would expect them to allay my anxiety by telling me what I can do." [75 year old male, non-frail]

Objectives

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

To describe older adults' perceptions of frailty and the utility of the concept when discussing health.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

- Describe older adults' perception of the meaning and usefulness of each component of frailty
- Describe older adults' perceptions of the usefulness of the term frailty after providing information about current definitions of frailty used by health professionals
- Describe the relationship between perception of frailty and frailty status

Next steps

- Analysis of interview transcripts
- Comparison of perceived usefulness of term frailty vs concept of frailty
- Exploration of meaning and usefulness of each component of frailty
- Comparison of perceptions between participants with frailty and without frailty as classified by EFS