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35 The Association Between Social Support and Cognition in Older Adults with Multiple Sclerosis

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Objective: Research has shown that social support has protective effects against cognitive decline in older adults. No study to date has examined the relationship between social support and cognition in older adults with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). Advances in treatments for MS have resulted in a growing number of aging individuals with MS, making it imperative to identify modifiable risk factors that affect cognition, such as social support. Therefore, this study was designed to examine the association between social support and cognition in older adults with MS and healthy controls.
Participants and Methods: Participants were older adults with MS (N = 70; M age = 64.71, SD + 3.86 years; 62.9% female) and community-residing older adults (N = 74; M age = 68.42, SD + 5.96 years; 58.1% female). Perceived social support was assessed using the Medical Outcomes Study Modified Social Support Survey (MSSS), which measures emotional/informational support, tangible support, affectionate support, and positive social interaction. Cognition was assessed with the Repeatable Battery for the Assessment of Neuropsychological Status (RBANS), which measures immediate and delayed memory, attention, language, and visuospatial abilities. Linear regressions stratified by group status (MS vs. control) assessed the association between perceived social support and cognition.
Results: Linear regressions controlling for age, gender, education, and medical comorbidities

showed that higher total MSSS scores were related to higher RBANS scores in the MS group (β = 0.243, p = .046) and marginally in the control group (β = 0.239, p = .053). Examination of MSSS domains showed that emotional/informational support (β = 0.246, p = .044) and positive social interaction (β = 0.279, p = .023) were significant predictors of RBANS performance in the MS group. Positive social interaction (β = 0.262, p = .011) was a significant predictor of RBANS performance in the control group. Analyses that further adjusted for depression scores showed that positive social interaction remained a significant predictor of RBANS performance in the control group (β = 0.361, p = .005). In contrast, depression scores attenuated associations between all aspects of social support and RBANS performance in the MS group (p > .05).
Conclusions: Among older adults, the association between social support and cognition varied as a function of MS status. Overall perceived social support, emotional/informational support, and positive social interaction were significantly associated with cognition in the MS group. However, depressive symptoms attenuated these associations. In contrast, positive social interaction was the key driver of the association between social support and cognition among the healthy controls, and notably, this association remained significant even after adjusting for depressive symptoms.

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36 Assessing the Effect of Multiple Sclerosis and Aging Using an Ecological test of Prospective Memory

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