Amiard V, Libert JP, Descatha A

Is there an accurate relationship between simple self-reported functional limitations and the assessment of physical capacity in early old age?

ABSTRACT

STUDY DESIGN - Observational study. OBJECTIVE - To assess the relationship between individual self-reports and measurements of physical condition in early old age. BACKGROUND - The use of self-reported questions assessing physical limitations remains questionable in large epidemiological studies. We aimed to test whether there is an accurate relationship between objective measures of physical capabilities and answers given to questions asked of general early old age populations. METHODS - 20,335 subjects (45 to 69 years old) performed two gait speed tests at usual and at rapid speeds, and a hand grip strength test. They also completed an interview which included questions about general and specific limitations on their ability to walk one kilometer, climb stairs, and carry 5 kg over a distance of 10 meters. The questions were coded by the patients on a 4-point scale according to the severity of the limitation. Analyses were performed using description of distributions and related tests were carried out. RESULTS - A fair association was found between individual self-reports and measurements of physical state: limitations on walking one kilometer and climbing stairs were more closely related to rapid than to usual gait speed and to carrying a 5 kg load. For general limitations, the strength of these associations was weaker than the other scores. The association between hand grip strength and the reported score for carrying a mass was better than that for gait speed tests. CONCLUSION - Such simple self-assessment questions on physical performance might be useful tools for evaluating functional limitations across a large early old age population in epidemiological research.

KEYWORDS: -

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