(S62) FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE QUALITY OF LIFE AMONG INDIVIDUALS WITH MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS
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Background: Research indicates that the effective use of coping strategies and availability of social support resources improves the quality of life (QOL) of individuals dealing with chronic illness. However, little research has examined the relationship among QOL, coping strategies, and social support resources among individuals with multiple sclerosis (MS). This research identified effective strategies for coping with MS. Approach-oriented coping was defined as dealing directly with the problems related to having MS. Avoidance-oriented coping was defined as inappropriately managing the emotions associated with the problem.

Objectives: This study examined variation in the QOL among individuals with MS. Three hypotheses were tested: 1) Variation in coping strategies and social support resources were expected to be related to the overall QOL among individuals with MS. 2) Approach-oriented coping strategies were expected to be positively associated with a better QOL. 3) Avoidance-oriented coping strategies were expected to be negatively related to QOL.

Methods: This quantitative, cross-sectional study compared coping strategies and social support resources relative to physical and mental QOL among individuals with MS. A survey packet was administered to assess demographics, coping strategies, and QOL. Predictors included the course of the disease, severity of symptoms, and satisfaction with social support. Data were collected from three MS chapters in three different states.

Results: We began to identify coping strategies and support systems used to successfully cope with MS. A total of 97 people with MS, aged 28 to 72, completed the survey packets. More of the participants employed avoidance-oriented coping strategies than approach-oriented coping strategies. As hypothesized, approach-oriented coping was positively related to QOL, while avoidance-oriented coping was negatively related to QOL.

Conclusions: Findings from this study can facilitate improvement in coping strategies for individuals living with MS by exploring more effective ways to cope with the disease. Once effective strategies are identified, individuals with MS can be taught how to adopt these strategies to improve their QOL.

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