

Dementia screening protocol for primary care in South America: A Delphi consensus study



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BACKGROUND

In South America (SA), **rapid population aging underscores the urgent need for effective strategies to detect and manage dementia. Primary care is a key component of timely detection**, yet a regionally harmonized, context-sensitive approach to dementia screening is lacking. **This study aimed to develop expert-based recommendations for a brief, feasible, and context-sensitive dementia screening protocol for primary care across SA.**

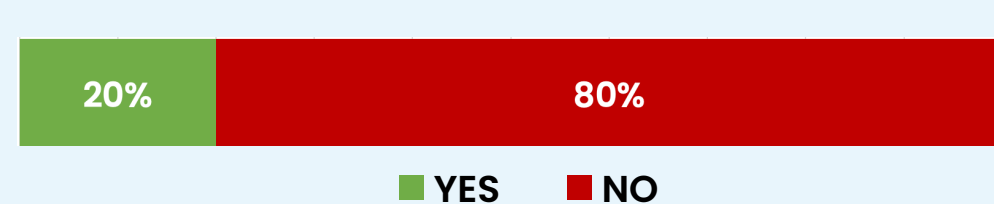
METHODS

- A **two-round modified Delphi process** was conducted with **20 experts from SA**, including neurologists, geriatricians, psychiatrists, and family physicians.
- **Round 1, an exploratory phase, used open-ended, ranking, and yes/no questions to gather opinions** on cognitive and functional screening tools, cut-off points for subgroups, referral criteria, administration time, professional roles and contextual considerations relevant to low-resource settings.
- **Round 2 sought to achieve consensus ($\geq 75\%$) on items derived from Round 1.** Qualitative open-ended responses were analyzed via rapid content analysis to identify themes informing Round 2. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively.

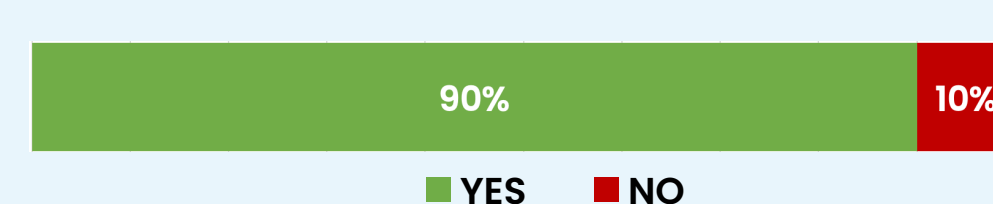
RESULTS

- A **consensus was reached on the timing and target populations** for dementia screening.

Do you think dementia screening should be carried out prior to a medical consultation?



Do you consider that all older adults should be asked about their memory/cognitive status, regardless of the reason for clinical care?

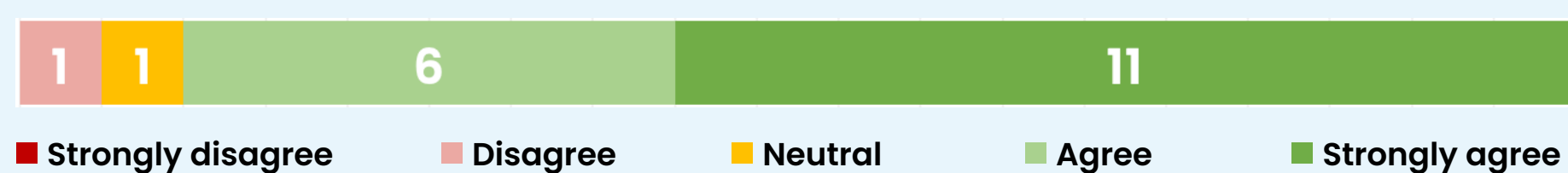


- Experts also agreed on using an **initial screening question** to identify potential cognitive decline, the **duration of a brief screening battery**, and the **roles** of health professionals in primary care.

Acceptable duration for administering a brief screening battery (cognition + functionality) in primary care would be 10–15 minutes

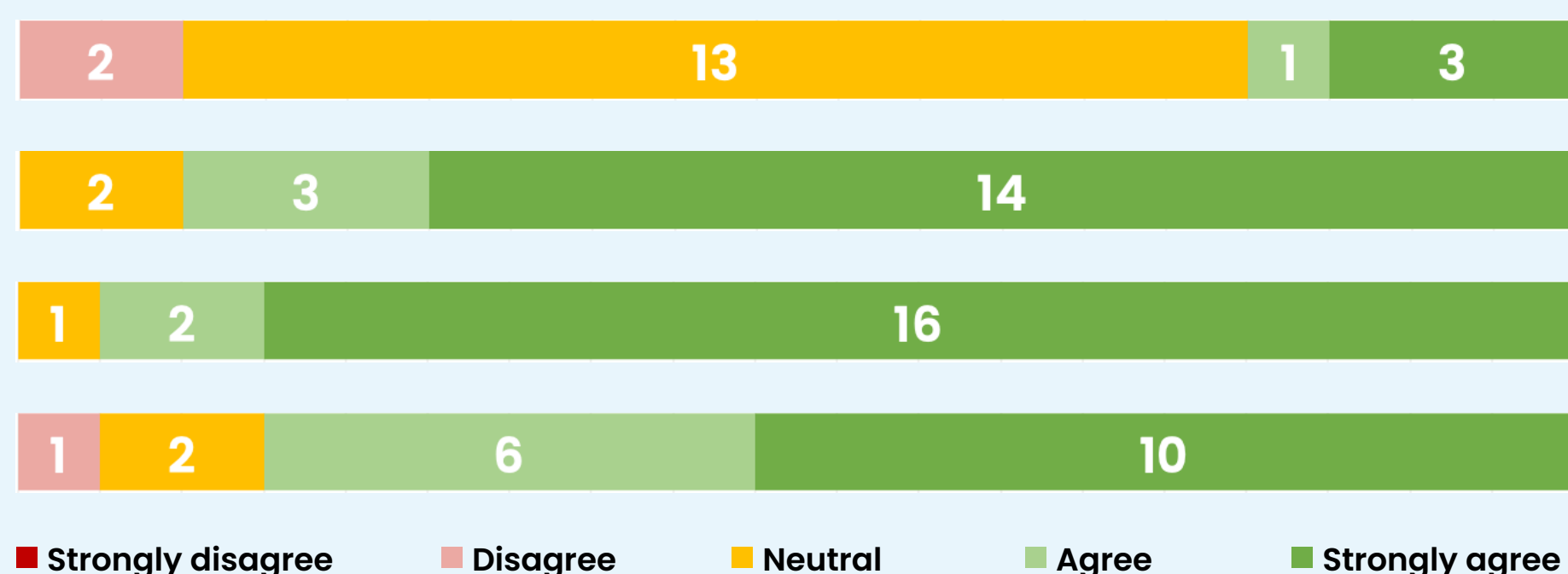


Question to start the screening: 'Have you or anyone around you noticed that you are more forgetful or have difficulty performing tasks or activities that you used to do with ease?'



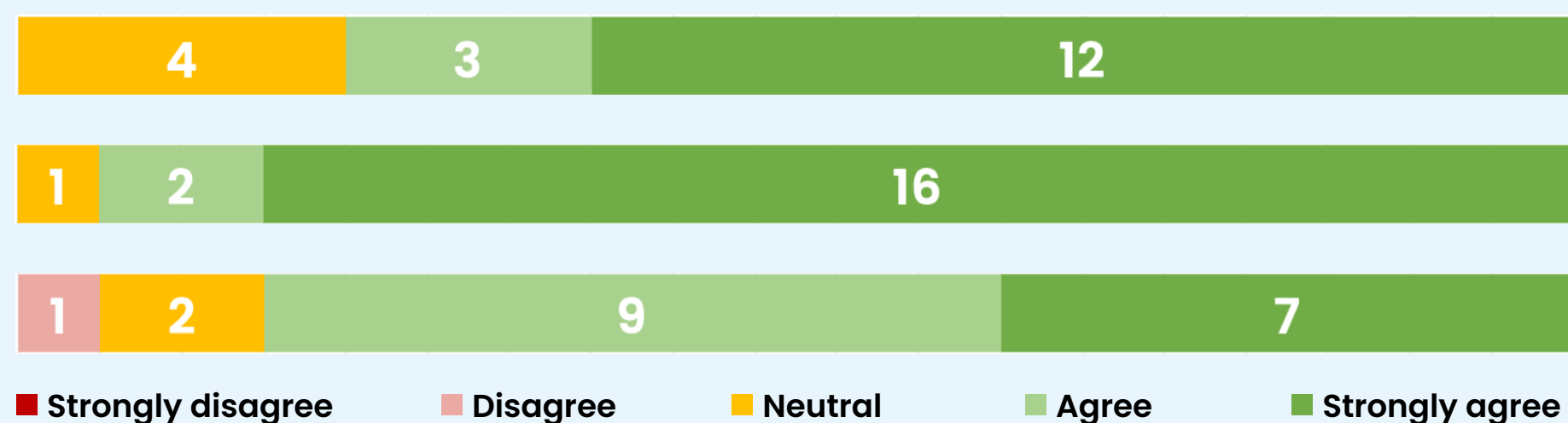
Responsible for applying the screening question

- Community health worker
- Psychologist
- General practitioner
- Nurse



Responsible for administering cognitive and functional tests

- Psychologist
- General practitioner
- Nurse



- The cognitive tests considered **most relevant for primary care** were the **MoCA, MMSE, and Clock Drawing Test**.
- Experts highlighted the **importance of educational, cultural, and sensory adaptations** and also recommended strategies for patients without a reliable informant.
- **No consensus was reached regarding functional assessment tools or specific cut-off points.**

CONCLUSIONS

These guidelines **support timely detection, appropriate referral, and integration of dementia screening** into broader healthy aging and person-centered care approaches, while highlighting areas requiring further research and standardization across SA.

Read the full paper in **Frontiers in Public Health:**



CONTACT INFORMATION



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