

# Small lapses, big impact:

Exploring emotional responses and self-perceptions in  
narratives of daily cognitive-functional challenges in  
subjective cognitive decline

Ifah Arbel (PhD), Shlomit Rotenberg (PhD), Adina Maeir (PhD)

*Functional Cognition Lab, Hebrew University of Jerusalem*



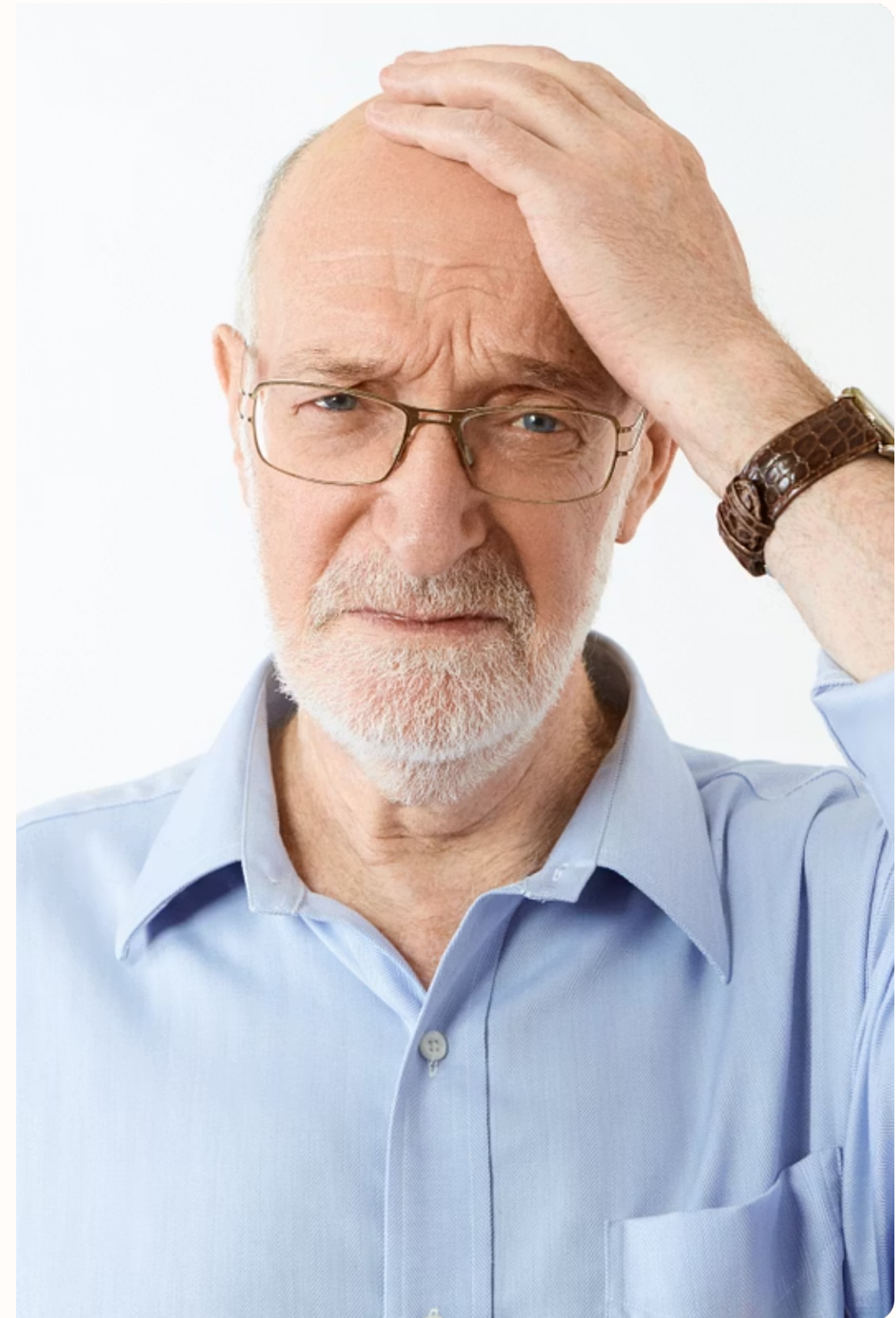
# Subjective cognitive decline (SCD)

## What is SCD?

- Self-reported, persistent cognitive difficulties not detected by neuropsychological tests.

## Prevalence

- ~25% of older population (60+) without cognitive impairment.





BACKGROUND

## Subjective cognitive decline (SCD)

### Reported difficulties include

Memory, executive functions, processing speed, language, attention, visuospatial perception

### Risks

Increased risk of mild cognitive impairment and dementia



## BACKGROUND

# Subjective cognitive decline (SCD)

Most interventions focus on cognition - cognitive training, physical exercise, and psychoeducational instruction on memory strategies.

BACKGROUND

# Psychosocial consequences

**Reduced self-efficacy**

**Loneliness**

**Depression and anxiety**

**Reduced QoL**





## BACKGROUND

# Functional consequences

### **Difficulties with complex ADLs**

Less efficient performance of complex tasks.

### **Compromised occupational experience**

Low satisfaction with performance.

### **Withdrawal from activities**

Avoidance of participation in meaningful activities.

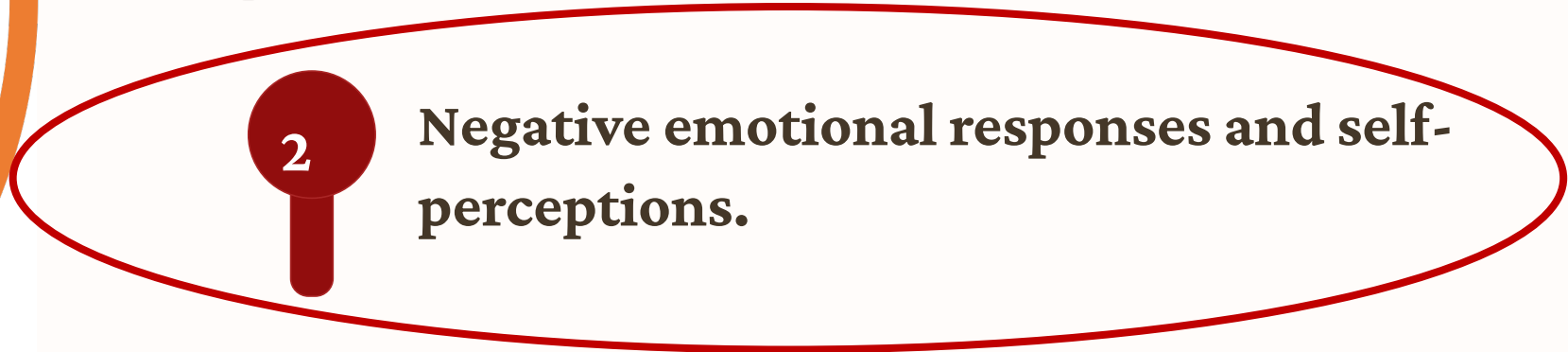


BACKGROUND

1

**Cognitive difficulties affect daily functioning.**

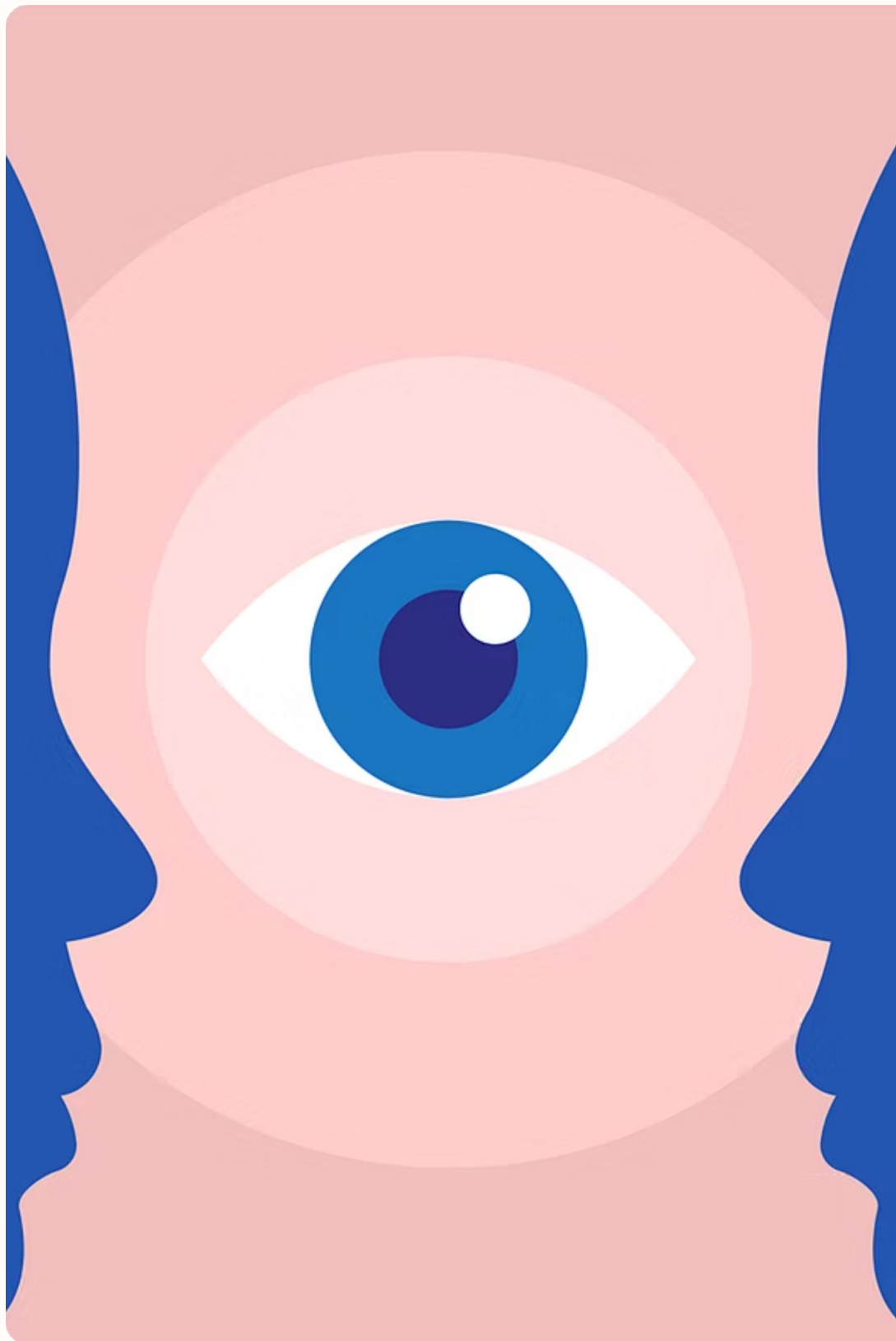
2



**Negative emotional responses and self-perceptions.**

3

**Activity avoidance.**



#### OBJECTIVE

**To explore negative emotional responses and self-perceptions shaped by cognitive-functional challenges in daily life among older adults with SCD.**

#### METHODS

Secondary analysis of video recordings from an intervention feasibility study: Cog-Fun Aging/WISE (Well-being, InSight, and Engagement)

## Cog-Fun Aging/WISE intervention



Group-based intervention program to cope with cognitive-functional changes.

12-session program.



### Intervention goals

- To strengthen coping with cognitive challenges.
- To reduce negative emotions and negative self-perceptions arising from these challenges.
- To improve the subjective experience of participation in everyday life



## Feasibility study

2

### Groups

2 community centers

11

### Participants

9 women, 2 men

65-86

### Age range

M = 78

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## Secondary qualitative study

1

### Transcription

Transcription of narratives about everyday cognitive-functional errors (in context).

2

### Thematic Analysis

Reflexive, theory-driven (MOHO), thematic analysis, Braun & Clarke (2006)

- Personal causation
- Occupational identity
- Occupational competence
- Occupational adaptation

3

### Identify Mechanisms:

*How* negative emotional responses and self-perceptions are formed.

# Themes and subthemes

## Theme 1:

"I'm so stupid": Translating cognitive slips into harsh self-judgment

## Theme 2:

"Is this normal aging or a sign of decline?": Living with uncertainty and worry

## Theme 3:

"Becoming passé": Threats to social value and autonomy

### Subtheme 1.A:

"Why is this so hard"? Escalating self-critique when 'easy' tasks prove challenging

### Subtheme 1.B:

"Again I forgot": Cumulative lapses and the consolidation of self-judgment

### Subtheme 3.A:

"They don't see me the same": Losing valued identities and perceived competence

### Subtheme 3.B:

"This technology makes me stupid": Feeling outpaced by rapid technological change and patronized by younger people

RESULTS

## What is "Harsh Self-Judgment"

Dumb

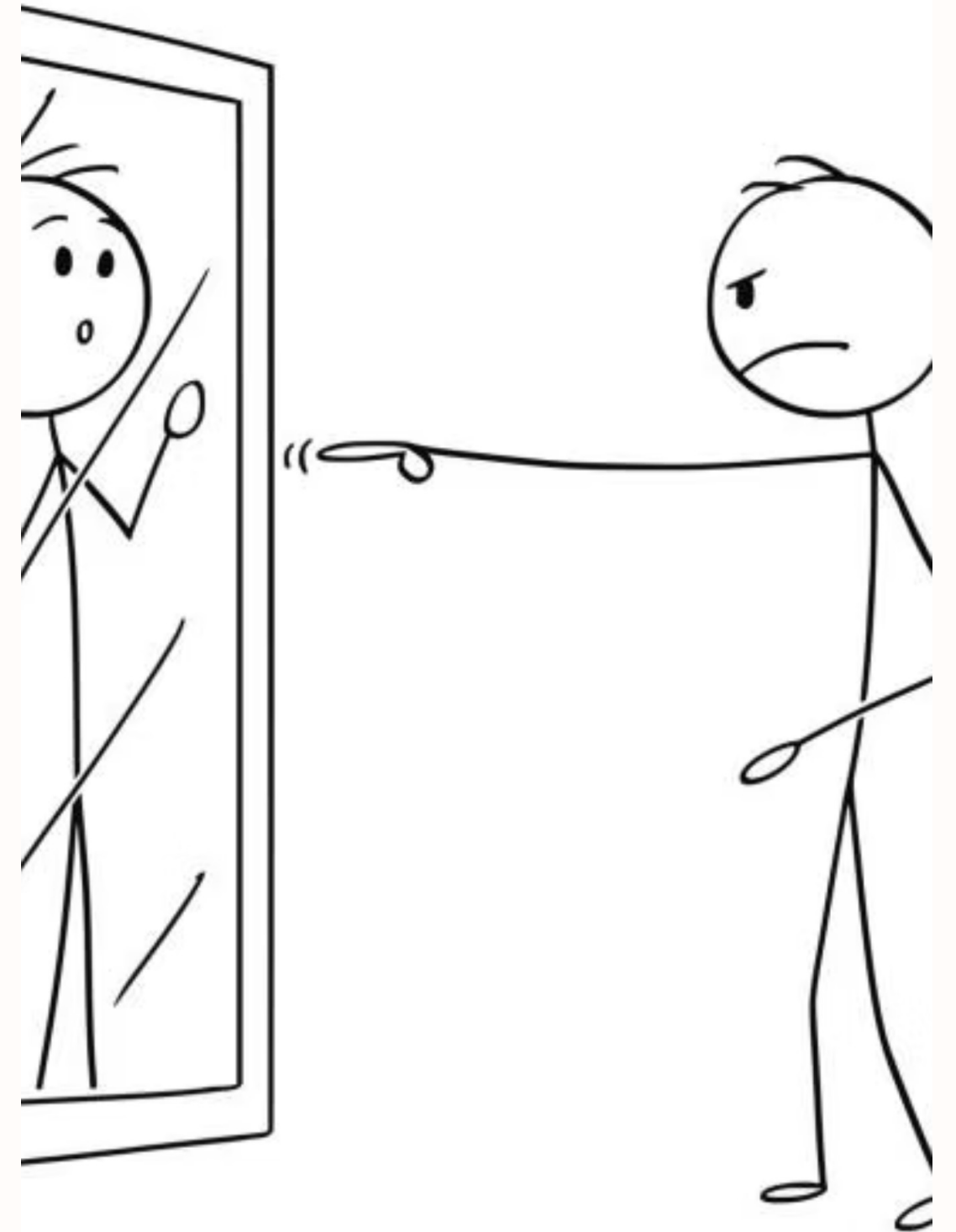
Stupid

Idiotic

Humiliated

Messed up

Foolish



# Themes and subthemes

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## Participant quotes

*It was really frustrating. I felt so **dumb**. I said, 'what **an idiot I am**.' I really went into **self-criticism**. I said, 'What was so hard about taking a cup from the lab?' My frustration was that I couldn't remember something so simple.*

**Subtheme 1.A: “Why is this so hard”? Escalating self-critique when ‘easy’ tasks prove challenging**



## Participant quotes

“

Yesterday I couldn't find my phone book **again**...It was the **second time** this happened...I felt like I was losing it, **because it had already happened a month** ago. It's so embarrassing. And that's just one 'screw-up.' I **had ten 'screw-ups' lately**.

”

**Subtheme 1.B: “Again I forgot”: Cumulative lapses and the consolidation of self-judgment**



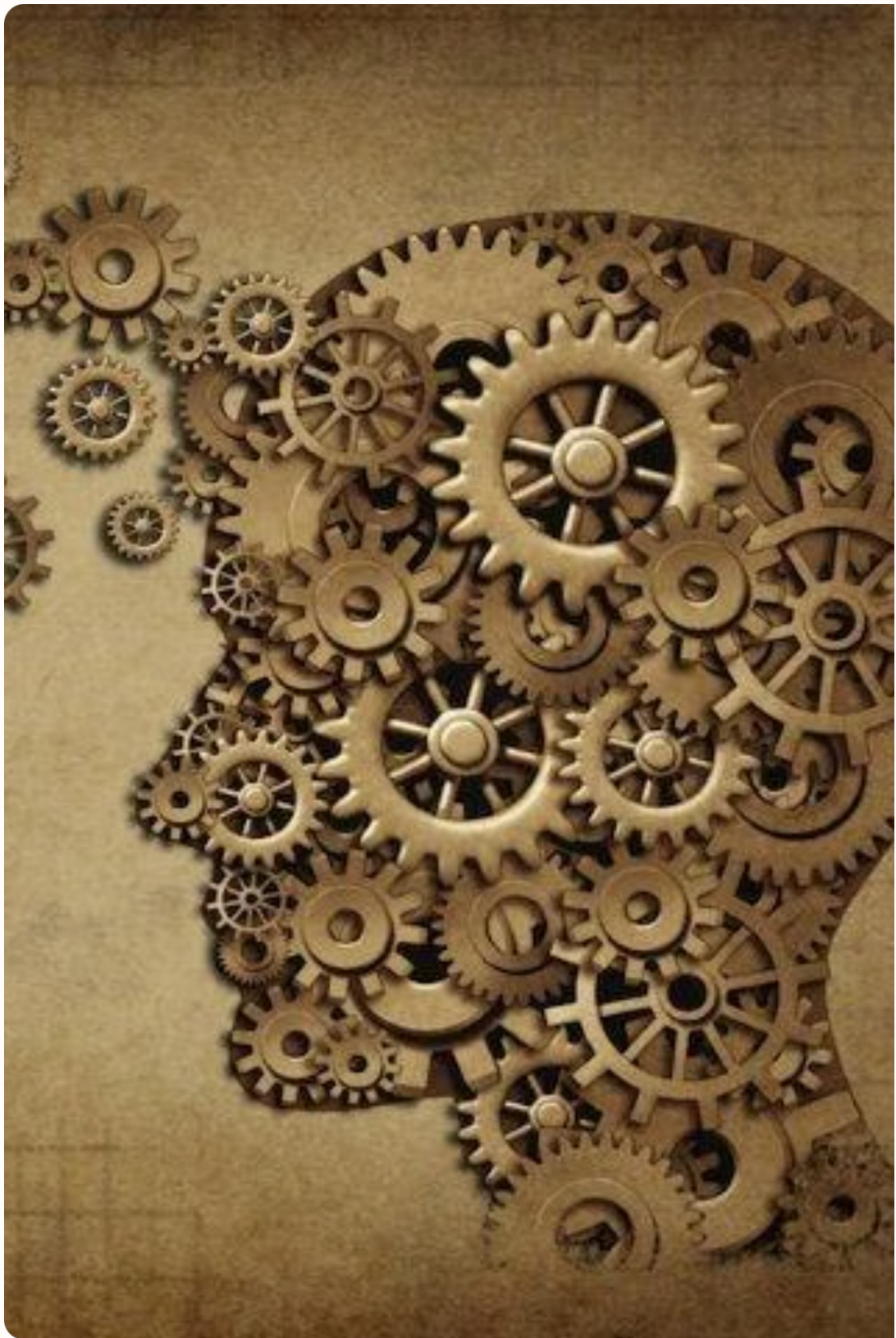


## RESULTS

# Participant quotes

*I also feel a change in my son's attitude over the years because I often can't remember words and it comes out jumbled. In the past, he used to pay attention to everything I said, and today... **I'm slowly becoming irrelevant to him.***

**Subtheme 3.A: “They don’t see me the same”:** Losing valued identities and perceived competence



## DISCUSSION

### **Selected mechanisms**

- 1. Mismatch** between prior self-knowledge and current functional ability
- 2. Limited understanding of task complexity**
- 3. Repeated errors instead of strategy development:**
  - Impaired metacognitive abilities?
  - Fear of dementia?
  - Diagnosis uncertainty?
- 4. Internalized ageism and self-stigma, stereotype confirmation**



## CONCLUSIONS



### **Main Insight**

The gap between 'small slips' and strong reactions suggests that SCD is not solely a cognitive phenomenon; it is also emotional and social, with implications for participation.

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### **Recommendations for health promotion programs**

1

**Preventing the accumulation of negative experiences and preserving meaningful functioning.**

2

**Narrative and emotion-focused work to support identity continuity alongside cognitive decline.**

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**Thank you for listening! Questions?**

**Contact details: [iarbel@univ.haifa.ac.il](mailto:iarbel@univ.haifa.ac.il)**