Dementia knowledge in three countries in sub-Saharan Africa

Rosalind Willis PhD, Adwoa Manful MSc, Lilian Igbafe MSc, Patricia Mukayagi MSc
University of Southampton

People in developing countries have been reported to misinterpret dementia symptoms, but we show that knowledge of dementia as a disease process is common among those with high social capital.

INTRODUCTION

Dementia prevalence is expected to increase rapidly in low-and-middle income countries in the coming decades. Such countries have fewer resources to devote to health and social care infrastructure. Diagnosis and care provision for dementia rely on recognition of dementia symptoms.

The limited research on dementia knowledge in sub-Saharan Africa reports low awareness of dementia, typically linking it to a normal part of ageing or supernatural causes.

As the existing research is scarce, we present new findings on dementia knowledge from three countries in Africa.

METHODS

Three African researchers collected qualitative data in Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia, as part of MSc research. Interviews were conducted with family caregivers, healthcare professionals, and members of the public. They were analysed thematically, followed by qualitative synthesis to draw out shared findings.

RESULTS

Healthcare professionals in Zambia understood dementia as a disease; fewer of the general public did so.

Family caregivers in Kenya learned about dementia as a disease from the internet and from social contacts who worked in health services. This was less typical among Nigerian caregivers.

Participants used ‘othering’ language to distance themselves from people who held alternative views of dementia, such as normal ageing or due to witchcraft.

CONCLUSIONS

• Knowledge of dementia is growing in Africa, but access to this knowledge is dependent on social capital.
• Campaigns to raise awareness should be accompanied by an increase in services to support people with dementia and their families.

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