

Dementia knowledge in three countries in sub-Saharan Africa

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

Dr Rosalind Willis
Associate Professor in Gerontology
Centre for Research on Ageing
University of Southampton
United Kingdom SO17 1BJ

r.m.willis@soton.ac.uk
www.soton.ac.uk/ageing

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 symptoms¹.

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 causes²⁻³.

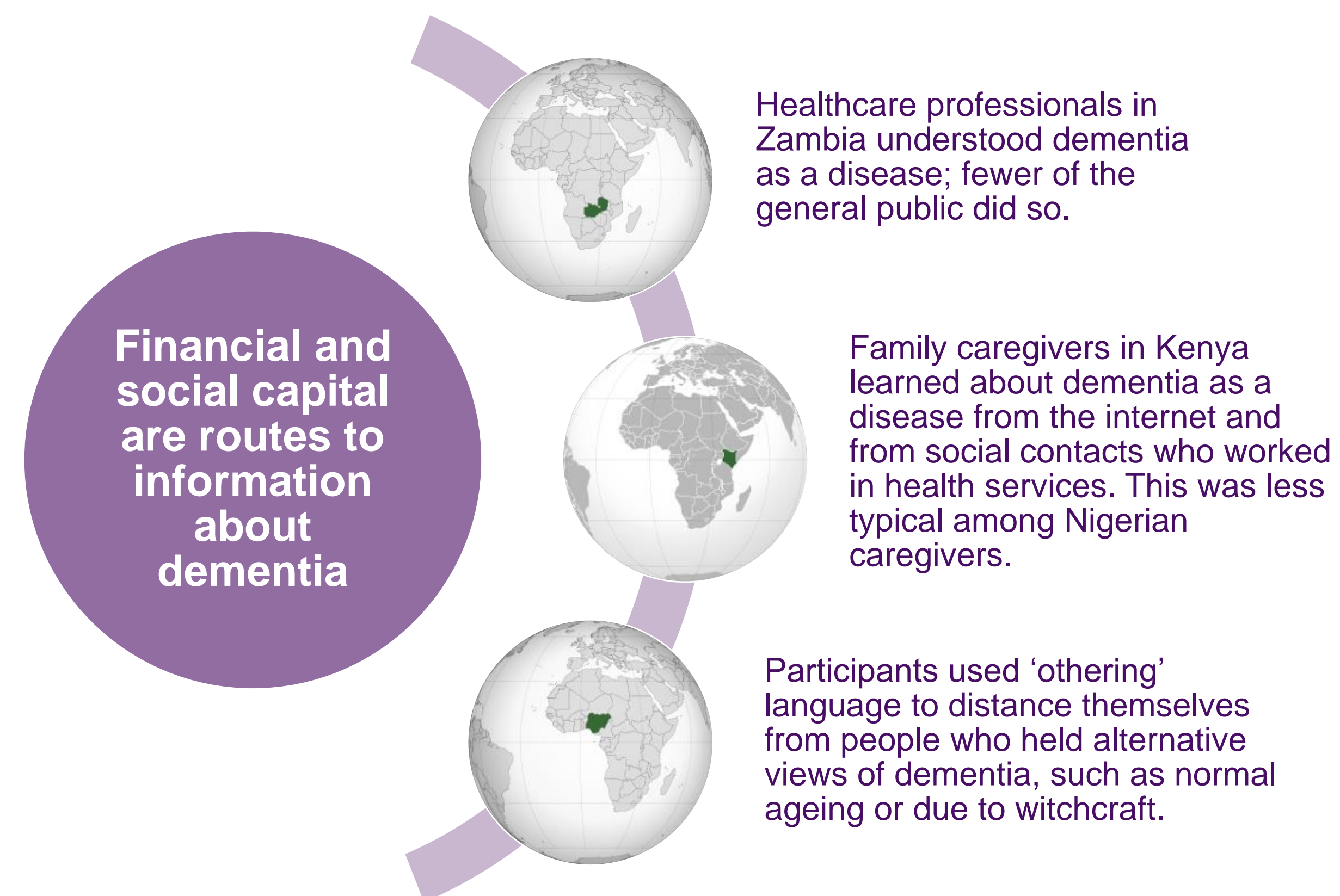
As the existing research is scarce, we present new findings on dementia knowledge from three countries in Africa.

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.

Alzheimer's disease was known as 'a disease of the West' ... many people did not think it could be Alzheimer's. But as for us, we went and read about it and ... we knew it was Alzheimer's disease.
(caregiver, Kenya)

RESULTS



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.

Acknowledgements

The research emanates from three MSc research projects conducted at the University of Southampton under the supervision of Dr Willis. All authors contributed to the synthesis of the research. All projects received ethical approval. We gratefully acknowledge the funding of the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission.

References:

1. ADI (2019) World Alzheimer Report 2019: Attitudes to Dementia. London: Alzheimer's Disease International.
2. Agyeman, N. *et al.* (2019) "When someone becomes old then every part of the body too becomes old": Experiences of living with dementia in Kintampo, rural Ghana. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 56, 5, 895-917.
3. Mushi, D. *et al.* (2014) Social representation and practices related to dementia in Hai District of Tanzania. *BMC Public Health*, 14, 260, 1-7.