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Headline: Nearly 3 in 4 people with dementia in S'pore feel ashamed, rejected: Study

Nearly 3 in 4 people with dementia in S'pore feel ashamed, rejected: Study

BY DARYL CHOO



TODAY file photoA patient resting in a ward at a hospice.

SINGAPORE — Nearly three in four people with dementia here experience rejection and loneliness.

And while more than half of the general public feel uncomfortable interacting with them, nearly eight in 10 want to do more to improve the lives of people with dementia.

These were among findings of the first national survey on dementia by the Singapore Management University (SMU) and the Alzheimer's Disease Association (ADA).

Of the 5,679 respondents polled in January and February this year, 32 were people with dementia while 1,156 were primary or secondary caregivers. The others were the general public with no connection to dementia.

Dementia is a condition where brain cells die at a faster rate than normal, causing a decline in mental abilities and leading to failing memory, intellectual function and personality changes. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia.

THE SURVEY ALSO FOUND:

- More than half of the people with dementia surveyed (56 per cent) said that others treat them as less competent, and half feel that they cannot be open with others about their condition.
- About 56 per cent of the general public think their knowledge of dementia is low. More than two in five (44 per cent) feel frustrated not knowing how to help people with dementia.
- Half of those with dementia feel ashamed of their condition, with stigma as the main reason.
- About 70 per cent of all respondents said people with dementia should live with family and agree that Singapore needs to provide more dementia-friendly amenities.

WHY IT MATTERS:

- One in 10 people in Singapore aged 60 and above — or an estimated 82,000 individuals in 2018 — have dementia. The number is expected to grow beyond 100,000 by 2030.

“Stigma affects more than just the quality of life for persons with dementia and their families,” said ADA chief executive Jason Foo. Using the right language, showing empathy and building dementia-friendly communities is key to tackling this stigma, he said.

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“All of us should not focus on the deficits (of people with dementia), but on what they can still do with their remaining abilities. It’s important to recognise that they can still lead purposeful and meaningful lives,” added Mr Foo.

Said SMU vice-provost Lim Kian Guan: “We hope our statistical findings will spur Singaporeans to learn more about what can be done to improve the lives of those living with dementia, as well as that of caregivers.”

A nationwide dementia awareness campaign will be launched in June by ADA. The association will publish a set of guidelines on language to use when talking about dementia and people with the condition. It will also organise roadshows, events and talks, culminating in a public event on World Alzheimer’s Day on Sept 21.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The survey was led by Ms Rosie Ching, a senior lecturer of statistics at SMU’s School of Economics, as part of a module in which students also tackle real-world challenges.

Ms Ching and her 99 students worked closely with the ADA to develop a tailored survey consisting of more than 133 questions.

The students gathered 5,679 responses in five weeks and analysed the data after that.