

# 60% of those with dementia feel they are treated as less able: SMU study

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Some 60 per cent of people with dementia say they are treated as less competent than others, according to a new nationwide study conducted by the Singapore Management University (SMU). This is a slight increase from 56 per cent in the previous study in 2019.

Meanwhile, one in two of them say they also feel less competent than they did before getting dementia.

More than half of those with dementia still rate their level of inclusion in everyday life at three out of 10 or lower, similar to the findings of the first SMU survey on dementia in 2019.

Compared with 2019, however, the percentage of people with dementia who say they face rejection, loneliness and shame has dropped by more than half, from 72 per cent to 31 per cent.

This follow-up survey studied the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the lives of people with dementia, which almost 80 per cent of respondents rated as negative.

It also assessed Singapore's dementia-friendliness – more than 75 per cent of respondents rated it as significantly less-than-friendly.

Some 3,226 participants were interviewed, including 32 people with dementia, 619 caregivers, and members of the public.

The study was conducted between January and March by SMU principal lecturer of statistics Rosie Ching and the more than 70 undergraduates she taught. It was done together with Dementia Singapore and supported by the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC).

The number of people with dementia here is expected to rise to 152,000 by 2030, according to the Ministry of Health. In 2018, there were around 82,000 people with dementia.

Recent efforts to strengthen dementia care include the addition of more than 200 FairPrice and Sheng Siong outlets as Dementia Go-To-Points, bringing the total number of these safe return points for people with dementia to over 550.

There are also Go-To-Points at MRT stations and bus interchanges.

The public can also get information and resources on dementia at the Go-To-Points.

More than 1,000 supermarket managers and supervisors have also received training in dementia awareness from Dementia Singapore and AIC.

The latest SMU study found that more Singaporeans want to improve the lives of people living with dementia, but they say more needs to be done to raise awareness of the condition.

Forty-seven per cent of respondents noted their frustration at their lack of knowledge on how to support people with dementia, demonstrating the need for more education on the condition and its challenges, said the study.

Although the average knowledge level about dementia among respondents remains below 50 per cent, there have been some improvements.

While more than 50 per cent of caregivers rated their knowledge of dementia as average in 2019, 43 per cent placed themselves in the high knowledge category today.

And 56 per cent of the public now rate their level of knowledge about dementia as average, when a similar proportion indicated low knowledge in 2019.

The top two reasons chosen for low knowledge of dementia were no family history and no outreach or education.

More than eight in 10 respondents in the survey feel confident that people with dementia can enjoy fulfilling lives.

Eighty-three per cent are confident more can be done to improve their quality of life – this is almost 30 per cent higher than the 2019 survey.

Respondents also said more can be done to address the stigma attached to the condition.

According to the SMU survey, stigma levels around dementia remain prevalent, with those with no connection to dementia having the highest average stigma level towards the condition.

Men remain significantly less open towards dementia than women, and baby boomers (aged 70 and above) are the least open. Generation X (age 40 to 69), which comprises primary caregivers, are the most open towards the condition.

For living arrangements, a family home is still the preferred choice for respondents, but only 57 per cent of people with dementia chose this, down from 85 per cent in 2019.

On the other hand, there is a fourfold rise in persons with dementia wanting to live independently and a twofold rise in the preference for homes with specialised dementia care among respondents.

AIC chief executive Tan Kwang Cheak said: "The group of persons living with dementia will continue to grow in Singapore, and we will need to meet their needs and aspirations... We want them and their caregivers to know that there is support from the community and Government to enable them to live their lives to the fullest."

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