

# Dementia-related stigma in Italian rural communities

(POS2-33)



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Daniela Berardinelli (1), Silvia Gonella (1,2), Roberta Sturaro (3), Roberto Quarisa (4), Diego Taghetta Dur (4), Lucia Pavignano (4), Massimo Savio (5), Valerio Dimonte (1), Paola Di Giulio (1), Sara Campagna (1)

(1) Department of Public Health and Pediatrics, University of Turin, Turin, Italy. [daniela.berardinelli@unito.it](mailto:daniela.berardinelli@unito.it)

(2) Direction of Health Professions, Azienda Ospedaliero Universitaria Città della Salute e della Scienza of Turin, Turin, Italy;

(3) MSN Humanitas Student, Humanitas University, Milan, Italy.

(4) Department of Public Health and Pediatrics Nursing Degree Course, University of Turin, Ivrea, Italy.

(5) Massimo Savio, Azienda Sanitaria Locale TO4, Turin, Italy.

**Introduction.** Stigmatising attitudes can lead people to respond negatively to, be prejudiced towards, avoid, or even be frightened of people with dementia (PwD) (1). **Stigma affects PwD and their caregivers**, who experience exclusion, shame, isolation, and loneliness. Few studies have investigated the presence of stigma perceived by PwD and their families in rural communities and none the level of social stigma in this area (2). Assessing dementia-related stigma represents the first step to planning tailored educational interventions to reduce stigmatizing attitudes and behaviours.

**Methods.** A **cross sectional study** was performed. Fifty-five people who live in Italian rural communities filled in the Dementia Public Stigma Scale (DePSS) by an online questionnaire. The **DePSS explores five dimensions including fear and discomfort, negative perceptions, positive perceptions, healthcare and family burden, and social exclusion.** The DePSS is a 16-item scale scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1=Strongly disagree; 7=Strongly agree). Higher score indicates a higher level of stigma. Mean (SD) values for each item and the overall scale were computed.

**Results.** Thirty-nine (71%) participants were female and 22 (40%) had a degree. Only three participants lived with people with dementia, but 29 (53%) had previous or current personal experience with PwD. Twenty-three (42%) were engaged in volunteering activities in the social or healthcare setting. Thirty-three (60%) lived in communities with less than 5000 inhabitants and 22 in areas between 5000 to 30000 residents. The overall dementia-related stigma was 3.1 ( $\pm 1.4$ ). The items with the highest score were: **people with dementia can enjoy their lives** (3.7 ( $\pm 1.3$ )), **in the presence of people with dementia, I feel comfortable** (3.6 ( $\pm 1.3$ )), and in the presence of people with dementia, **I am relaxed** (3.4 ( $\pm 1.4$ )).

**Conclusion.** Stigma levels in the rural community studied were, on average, low, except for a few items where the DePSS can be a valuable tool to identify the areas of intervention to reduce dementia-related stigma.

1. Towards a dementia-inclusive society: WHO toolkit for dementia-friendly initiatives (DFIs). Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

2. Burgener SC, Buckwalter K, Perkhounkova Y, Liu MF, Riley R, Einhorn CJ, et al. Perceived stigma in persons with early-stage dementia: Longitudinal findings: Part 1. *Dementia* (London). 2015;14(5):589-608. doi: 10.1177/1471301213508399.



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