

# Social Problems of Alzheimer Patients and Their Family Members

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## Abstract

Alzheimer disease is the most frequently seen and widespread form of dementia. In Georgia, there is no state program that deals with Alzheimer, which means that families of the patients stand alone when dealing with the disease. The study goal was to find out the problems and needs of the Alzheimer patients and their family members. The qualitative approach model was used for the research, which in turn was a biographical-narrative interview. The study has revealed a decreased role of a public sector in the life of people with disease. The families alone have a responsibility to take care of their patients, without any help from the others, which often worsens their already difficult economic situation.

## Keywords

Alzheimer disease, dementia, socialization, family caregivers, Alzheimer patients, social issues

## Introduction

Alzheimer disease (AD) is most common form of dementia, a general term for a memory loss and other cognitive skills that are serious enough to restrict individual's everyday activities. It is a progressive neurological disease caused by irreversible damage of a neurons. AD is marked by decreased function of the gray matter in brain. Disease causes various problems with some major brain functions: memory, cognitive functions, orientation, learning, speaking, and reasoning abilities.<sup>1</sup>

AD is named after the German doctor Alois Alzheimer who first defined this disease in 1906. AD affects older adults around the age of 65 years. But Alzheimer is not just a disease of old age.<sup>2</sup> AD is one of the global challenges of a modern health care. In 2010, 35.6 million people suffered from confirmed cases of Alzheimer.<sup>3</sup> The number is only going to increase along with the aging process of the population and is projected to reach 66 million by the 2030 and 115 million by the year 2050. The majority of a new cases of AD are most likely to be observed in middle and low-income countries, also 70% of existing cases are from those countries too.<sup>4</sup>

The total number of new cases of dementia each year is nearly 7.7 million worldwide, which means that about 600 million people will suffer from this terrible disease over the next 40 years.<sup>5</sup> Health care systems all over the world will struggle to provide sufficient care for such number of people from social and economic standpoint. The worldwide costs of dementia were estimated to be US\$818 billion in 2015.<sup>6</sup>

The studies have proved that AD has a major impact on patient's social isolation which is often stigmatized.<sup>7</sup> Person

suffering from the disease can have serious problems in a society. They can lose their jobs and lose contact with their friends; they also have problems moving around, which in turn limits their ability to socialize. All of these contribute to social isolation of these people. Socialization is the process of learning social norms, rules, laws, and values by an individual, and this process determines how an individual can adapt to a society.<sup>8</sup> One of main problems of patient suffering from AD is disruption in their social behavior, which can have serious implications on how they are perceived by public.<sup>9</sup>

In Georgia, just like in all other low-income countries, the role of the state in dealing with Alzheimer is enormous. Despite this, there are no state programs that deal with Alzheimer, which means that families of patients are alone in dealing with the disease. Also, social awareness about this issue is very low. Probably, only a few people in Georgia know about the symptoms and pathogenesis of the disease. Unlike Georgia, many countries have a special care programs for patients with Alzheimer. There are no studies about this issue; even the data about number of people suffering from Alzheimer do not exist.

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