

# Report highlights scale of dementia epidemic in Africa

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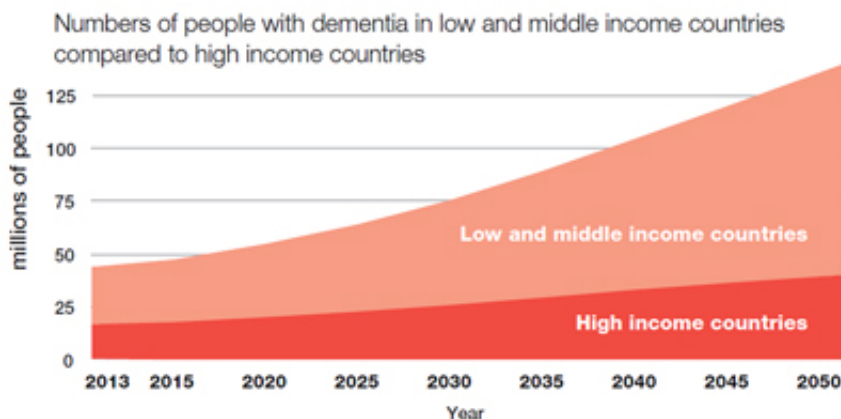
Credit: King's College London

Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) has published its first report on the impact of dementia in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), at its 4th Sub-Saharan African Regional Conference. The report, co-authored by researchers from the Global Observatory for Ageing and Dementia Care at King's College London, calls for a transformation in the response to dementia, citing a 63 per cent increase in the number of people expected to be living with dementia in the region by 2030 – and an increase of 257 per cent by 2050.

Launched during World Alzheimer's Month, the report highlights new data on the impact of dementia in SSA, the experiences of those living with dementia in the region and the urgent need for governments to act to encourage improved understanding, access to health services and social protection.

The total costs of dementia in SSA are estimated to be over US\$ 6.2 billion – more than the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 19 of the 49 countries in the region. Almost three-quarters of this is made up of the cost of informal care, predominantly provided by family members. Healthcare systems must be strengthened to provide support for people with dementia and their care partners, including public campaigns that challenge discrimination and by increasing access to social protection, including pension schemes.

There was no equivalent term for dementia identified in any local language in the countries researched. Symptoms of dementia are incorrectly attributed to normal ageing or even to witchcraft leading to people being excluded from their community.



Credit: King's College London

Paola Barbarino, CEO of Alzheimer's Disease International, says: "This report provides important evidence of the huge scale of the challenge we face on multiple fronts in sub-Saharan Africa. Not only is dementia hidden socially, but governments must do more to enhance the infrastructure needed to support those affected. We are calling on governments in the region to take the issue up urgently and to follow the recommendations of the World Health Organization's Global Plan of Action."

The global plan on dementia, unanimously adopted by World Health Organization (WHO) member states in May 2017, includes targets for every government to prioritise dementia awareness, diagnosis, care and research. ADI urges governments to work with people with dementia and Alzheimer associations to achieve the best possible response to the plan.

More research is needed. Dr Maëlen Guerchet, lead author of the report at King's College London's Global Observatory for Ageing and Dementia Care, says, "This [report](#) is timely considering the growing importance of dementia in the region. Our review of the evidence highlights the need to develop research that will help promote and inform consideration of dementia in health agendas. Dementia awareness, access to healthcare services and the rights of people with [dementia](#) and their families are key aspects to focus on in sub-Saharan Africa where older populations are not given adequate attention."

Provided by King's College London

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