

Using Twitter to examine stigma against people with dementia during COVID-19

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Research published in *JMIR Aging* reports that during the pandemic, there has been significant social media attention focused on the increased COVID-19 risks and impacts for people with dementia and

their care partners.

This study used Twitter data to understand [stigma](#) against people with [dementia](#) propagated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the *JMIR Aging* authors' analysis, 4 main themes were identified:

1. Ageism and devaluing the lives of people with dementia
2. Misinformation and false beliefs about dementia and COVID-19
3. Dementia used as an insult for political ridicule, and
4. Challenging stigma against dementia

How people talk about dementia impacts how [policy makers](#), clinicians, and the public value the lives of people with dementia.

Stigma perpetuates misinformation, pejorative language, and patronizing attitudes that can lead to discriminatory actions, such as the limited provision of lifesaving supports and [health services](#) for people with dementia during the pandemic.

Dr. Juanita-Dawne Bacsu from the University of Saskatchewan says that "the COVID-19 pandemic is taking a serious toll on people with dementia and their care partners."

Beyond dissemination of information by traditional news media outlets, Twitter and other forms of [social media](#) have been used extensively by individuals during the pandemic in a many-to-many communication structure to share messages about COVID-19.

Addressing stigma against dementia on social media is important because it can have severe implications, including depression, anxiety, fear, [social isolation](#), feelings of shame, and a decreased quality of life

for people with dementia and their care partners.

Apart from the 1 study by Oscar et al, there is a paucity of research exploring social media discourse related to stigma against dementia, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Examining how stigma manifested on social media during the pandemic may deepen our understanding of the methods and content used to facilitate stigma communication against people with dementia and their care partners.

Using Twitter data, the objective of this study was to examine social media discourse on stigma against people with dementia during the pandemic.

Dr. Bacsu and the [research](#) team concluded that unfortunately, much of this discourse has amplified issues of preexisting ageism and stigma against people with dementia.

This study identified 4 themes for dementia-related stigma and COVID-19, ranging from misinformation and false beliefs to challenging stigma against dementia.

How society talks about dementia impacts how policy makers, clinicians, and the public value the lives of people with dementia.

Thus, COVID-19 policies and public health messages should focus on precautions and preventive measures instead of labeling people with dementia.

Consequently, it is essential that people with dementia not be defined by their disease during the pandemic but be instead recognized as diverse individuals who are able to live meaningful lives with the same human

rights as any other person.

More information: Juanita-Dawne Bacsu et al, Using Twitter to Examine Stigma Against People With Dementia During COVID-19: Infodemiology Study, *JMIR Aging* (2022). [DOI: 10.2196/35677](https://doi.org/10.2196/35677)

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