

## 1 in 10 people with dementia experience suicidal thoughts, finds study

## September 9 2024

Study & Year	Cases/Total (n/N)	Pr	oportion, 95% Cl	Weight (%)	Proportion (95% CI)
Suicidal Ideation					
Alipour-Haris et al., 2022	11149 / 1056046		•	5.18	0.0106 (0.0104 to 0.0103
Armstrong et al., 2021	18 / 95		I	- 4.93	0.1895 (0.1228 to 0.280 0.2789 (0.2124 to 0.358
Ashby et al., 1991	41 / 147		- 1	5.08	0.2789 (0.2124 to 0.3568
Borges et al., 2015	14 / 172		_ <b>•</b> !	4.90	0.0814 (0.0488 to 0.132)
Carey et al., 2023	7/94		<b>+</b>	4.65	0.0745 (0.0359 to 0.148
Chan et al., 2008	13 / 520			4.90	0.0250 (0.0148 to 0.042
Chappell et al., 2016	286 / 7364		+	5.17	0.0388 (0.0347 to 0.043
Draper et al., 1998	21 / 221		- <b>-</b> -	4.99	0.0950 (0.0628 to 0.141
Forsell and Winblad 1997 Forsell et al., 1997	24 / 114			4.99	0.2105 (0.1453 to 0.294 0.3681 (0.3012 to 0.440
Junack et al., 2021	67 / 182			5.09	0.0427 (0.0411 to 0.044
Harwood et al., 1998	2699 / 63255			5.18	0.0511 (0.0246 to 0.103
Jonson et al., 2023	7 / 137 65 / 465			4.66	0.1398 (0.1111 to 0.174
(oyama et al., 2015	64 / 634		-	5.12	0.1009 (0.0798 to 0.128
laismith et al., 2022	2758 / 18252		•	5.18	0.1510 (0.1459 to 0.158
Ortner et al., 2021	44 / 157			5.06	0.2803 (0.2156 to 0.355
Rosness et al., 2010	29 / 221		֥	5.03	0.1312 (0.0927 to 0.182
Shah et al., 1998	12/41		· -	4.77	0.2927 (0.1743 to 0.447
Temkin-Greener et al., 2020	5952 / 447792		•	5.18	0.0133 (0.0130 to 0.013
Teri et al., 1991	14 / 61		i —	4.85	0.2295 (0.1409 to 0.351
Total: Suicidal Ideation	23282 / 1595970		<b>•</b>	100.0%	0.0997 (0.0619 to 0.156
Test for heterogeneity: $\chi^2$ =20200.99, df=19, p	=0.00; I <sup>2</sup> =100%				
Attempted Suicide			1		
Alipour-Haris et al., 2022	1307 / 1056046	•		11.39	0.0012 (0.0012 to 0.001
Barak & Aizenberg 2002 Chappell et al., 2016	16 / 215			10.93	0.0744 (0.0461 to 0.118 0.0058 (0.0043 to 0.007
Draper et al., 1998	43 / 7384	-	•	11.23	0.0023 (0.0001 to 0.034
Lyness et al., 1992	0 / 221				0.0333 (0.0021 to 0.366
Mormont et al., 2014	0 / 100			5.01	0.0050 (0.0003 to 0.074)
Ortner et al., 2021	2 / 157		<b>•</b>	8.63	0.0127 (0.0032 to 0.049
Sabodash et al., 2013	6 / 138		· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	10.28	0.0441 (0.0200 to 0.094)
Schmutte et al., 2021	19382 / 2667987		♦	11.40	0.0073 (0.0072 to 0.007
Takacs et al., 2015	8/79		· · · · ·	10.48	0.1013 (0.0515 to 0.189
Takahashi et al., 1995	11 / 100			10.71	0.1100 (0.0620 to 0.187)
Total: Attempted Suicide	20775 / 3732419		-	100.0%	0.0170 (0.0075 to 0.038)
Test for heterogeneity: $\chi^2$ =4116.21, df=10, p=	0.00; I <sup>2</sup> =100%				
Death by Suicide		1			
An et al., 2019 Annoret al., 2019	27 / 5909			8.66	0.0046 (0.0031 to 0.008 0.0008 (0.0005 to 0.0003
	91 / 141592	-		8.86	0.0000 (0.0005 to 0.000
Armstrong et al., 2019 Chappell et al., 2016	4 / 524 3 / 7384			7.34 6.94	0.0076 (0.0029 to 0.020 0.0004 (0.0001 to 0.001
Erlangsen et al., 2020	569 / 243022	•		0.94 8.93	0.0023 (0.0022 to 0.002
McCarthy et al. 2013	24 / 85990	- <b>-</b>   <b>-</b>		8.63	0.0003 (0.0002 to 0.002
McCarthy et al., 2013 Mo et al., 2023	141 / 235085	+		8.89	0.0008 (0.0005 to 0.000
Moon et al., 2021	119 / 62282	+		8.87	0.0019 (0.0016 to 0.002
Novilla-Surette et al., 2022	68 / 131234	<b>-</b>		8.83	0.0005 (0.0004 to 0.000
Sabodash et al., 2013	2 / 138			6.22	0.0147 (0.0037 to 0.058
Schmutte et al., 2021	705 / 2667987	+		8.93	0.0003 (0.0002 to 0.000
Seyfried et al., 2011	241 / 294952	•1		8.91	0.0008 (0.0007 to 0.000
Total: Death by Suicide	1994 / 3876077	•		100.0%	0.0011 (0.0006 to 0.002
Test for heterogeneity: χ <sup>2</sup> =1781.68, df=11, p=	0.00; 1~=99%				
	1	1 1	1 1	1	
	0.0000	0.0003 0.0025	0.0180 0.1192	0.5000	

## Prevalence of suicide outcomes in people living with dementia

Forest plots of prevalence of suicide outcomes in PwD. Credit: *Ageing Research Reviews* (2024). DOI: 10.1016/j.arr.2024.102445



People with dementia are more likely to have suicidal thoughts but are not necessarily more likely to attempt or die by suicide than the general population, finds a new study led by UCL researchers.

The study, <u>published</u> in *Ageing Research Reviews*, analyzed 54 studies that investigated various aspects of mental <u>health</u>—including the prevalence and risk of suicide—in people with dementia, between 1991 and 2023.

Dementia is an escalating global health challenge, affecting an estimated 55 million people worldwide. Alongside impacting <u>cognitive abilities</u>, people with dementia often experience debilitating neurological and psychological symptoms such as depression, apathy, aggression and anxiety.

These symptoms can sometimes lead to heightened <u>emotional distress</u> and, in some cases, suicidal ideation.

The researchers pooled data from 20 studies that reported on suicidal thoughts in people with dementia, that involved more than 1.5million people. They found that 10% of people with dementia had experienced suicidal thoughts compared to the World Health Organization's estimate of 2% for the general population.

Those with moderate dementia were more at risk of suicidal ideation than those with mild dementia.

However, after reviewing data from more than 3.7million people with dementia, the researchers found that the prevalence of attempted suicide or death by suicide was approximately the same as the prevalence found in the general population- with 0.8% of people with dementia attempting suicide within a two-year period.



The team found that 0.1% of people with dementia died by suicide, and younger people with dementia were about three times more likely to be affected than those who were older.

Even though men were less likely to report suicidal thoughts, they were significantly more likely to attempt suicide and almost three times more likely to die by suicide than women.

Lead author, Dr. Roopal Desai (UCL Psychology & Language Sciences), said, "Dementia is a growing global health issue as more people live long enough to develop it.

"People with dementia may be at higher risk of having suicidal thoughts and, in particular, certain groups such as men and <u>younger people</u> with dementia may be more at risk of dying by suicide, but this field has not been well studied. The current NICE guidelines for the assessment, management and support of people living with dementia do not mention suicidality in this population or address how to assess or manage this risk. This means that clinicians do not routinely assess or actively manage this risk.

"This review highlights the importance of providing mental health support and <u>suicide prevention</u> in dementia care, with a focus on age, the severity of symptoms, and sex."

In light of the study's findings, the researchers are now calling on clinicians and caregivers to be vigilant in assessing the emotional wellbeing of people with dementia, in order to ensure timely support and the safety of patients.

Senior author, Dr. Amber John said, "It is often assumed that suicide is not an issue in people living with dementia. This study shows that people with dementia are no less likely to attempt or die by suicide than the



general population—and indeed are more likely to experience <u>suicidal</u> <u>ideation</u>.

"This means that suicide risk needs to be taken just as seriously in people living with dementia as in the general population. "

Mental Health Medical Director of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB), Prof Alberto Salmoiraghi, who co-authored the paper, said, "These findings are truly important for clinicians and paramount to inform future service developments, particularly in regard to risk assessments and pathways of care."

## **Study limitations**

The study examined various ways people expressed <u>suicidal thoughts</u> and involved both clinical and community samples, which can influence incidence rates.

The researchers were also unable to analyze all the <u>risk factors</u> for suicide due to a lack of information from the existing studies.

In addition, the findings do not consider different subtypes of dementia (i.e. frontotemporal <u>dementia</u> may pose a higher suicide risk due to behavioral changes and aggression).

**More information:** Roopal Desai et al, Suicide and dementia: A systematic review and meta-analysis of prevalence and risk factors, *Ageing Research Reviews* (2024). DOI: 10.1016/j.arr.2024.102445

Provided by University College London



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