

China Facing the Brunt of Dementia

29 July 2013 | News | By BioSpectrum Bureau

China Facing the Brunt of Dementia



An international team of researchers has established that more than 90 percent of dementia cases in China go undiagnosed with a high level attributing to rural areas. The team of public health experts led by Dr Ruoling Chen at King's College London strongly argues that "more mental health education targeting high-risk populations is the need of the hour to improve diagnosis rates, and extend support to sufferers and their families."

The team discovered that, in China, undetected dementia among older population is strongly associated with low socio-economic status. They also identified that Chinese cultural factors may play a vital role in poor detection rates of dementia. Dr Chen added "Dementia is increasingly a global health threat as the world population is ageing. China has the most dementia sufferers compared to all other countries across the world, but at the same time it is poorly recognized condition." Further he added "Mental health services need to be prioritized as economic development extends throughout China. Our hope is that by looking at the rate of undetected dementia in China we can offer globally applicable insights into the common risk factors, aid earlier diagnosis."

Dr Chen and his team interviewed a random sample of 7,072 older adults in six provinces across China, with one rural and one urban community in each province. They identified 359 older adults with dementia and 328 with depression. There were only 26 participants who had doctor-diagnosed dementia reported and 26 who had doctor-diagnosed depression. Overall, 93 percent of dementia cases and 93 percent of depression was not detected.

The research team also identified that Chinese cultural factors may play a part in poor detection rates of dementia. Unlike in high-income countries, most of older Chinese people live with their families. A surprising, important finding was that

undetected dementia is related to strong social support. Such 'help available when needed' may mask the disease and hinder detection. In addition, Chinese may interpret dementia symptoms in older people as being an acceptable part of the ageing process rather than as an illness.

Dr Simon Ridley, Head of Research at Alzheimer's Research UK, said, "We must ensure long term investment for dementia research if we want to contribute to the lives of millions living with this condition".

The study is published in the British Journal and is the first to examine factors influencing the poor diagnosis of dementia in older people in low-income countries, where there are more dementia sufferers than in high-income countries.