

GERIATRIC MEDICINE
RESEARCH

Is the same workplace behaviour viewed differently in the presence of a dementia diagnosis? A randomized vignette study.

Judith Godin, Jasmine Mah, Nicolas Roulin, Katie Aubrecht, Melissa K Andrew

Introduction

People living with early-stage dementia are often capable of continuing in meaningful employment, but stigma may limit their opportunities. Interpreting counter-productive workplace behaviours through dementia diagnosis and gendered lenses may shape responses in ways that exacerbate stigma towards dementia in the workplace.

Objective

We aimed to assess whether the presence of a dementia diagnosis and gender of an employee influenced observers' perceptions and reactions to counter-productive workplace behaviours.

Participants

- 360 employed Nova Scotians
- ages ranged from 19 to 84, M = 45
- 64% identified as women
- 84% employed full-time
- 57% have held a supervisory role
- 34% know or care for someone living with dementia





- recruited from the Leger participant pool
- \$5 equivalent for participation
- online survey
- randomized to one of nine versions of a vignette

Diagnosis:	No Diagnosis	At Risk	Dementia
Gender			
No pronouns	n=40	n=40	n=40
He / his	n=40	n=40	n=40
She / her	n=40	n=40	n=40

Vignette Sample

Risk of Dementia/Female Pronouns

Imagine you are Alex's supervisor at a marketing firm. Alex is a 59-year-old project manager who you've supervised for 5 years. You have found her to be a reliable and professional employee who has a pleasant demeanor. She enjoys baking with her friends and family and brings baked goods for you and your colleagues to share. At a recent performance review, Alex reported that a doctor indicated good physical health, but a risk for developing dementia. Your organization has recently upgraded many technological systems and now requires employees to complete training on the systems. You, Alex, and the rest of the team are taking the course together. Throughout the course presentation, Alex continuously asks the instructor to repeat themselves and clarify basic points previously discussed. After a few interruptions, the instructor tells her to save all questions for the end of the presentation. Alex becomes angry at the course instructor and accuses them of being unreasonable before storming out of the presentation. For the rest of the workday, Alex is irritable, which you notice is a new pattern of behaviour that has begun recently.

Side Note: Participants were more likely to give women employees formal notices compared to male employees. $F=3.5, p<.05, \text{partial } \eta^2=.02$

Key Findings

Worry

Participants were more worried about an employee's ability to complete tasks when the employee had a dementia diagnosis.

Frustration

Participants were less frustrated with an employee's counter-productive behaviour when the employee had a dementia diagnosis or was at risk of dementia.

Accommodation

Participants more strongly agreed to provide accommodations when the employee had a dementia diagnosis or was at risk of dementia.

Strategy

Participants were more likely to plan an exit strategy for the employee who had a dementia diagnosis or was at-risk of dementia.

Conclusion

Although co-workers may worry about competency of people with early-stage dementia, the lower levels of frustration may demonstrate an empathy and an openness to finding appropriate solutions that benefit both the employee living with dementia and the workplace. Agreement to plan an exit strategy with workers at risk or living with dementia may push people out of the workplace; however, the finding that participants were willing to accommodate co-workers with dementia is encouraging.

