

Cultural Perceptions and Awareness of Dementia Amongst the People of Ibiaku Issiet Community: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions and interpretations of dementia within the Ibiaku Issiet community, focusing on individuals' understanding of dementia, its symptoms, and its impact on affected individuals and their families. A qualitative approach was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Fifteen participants, comprising men and women aged 34 to 76, were selected from the community, with inclusion criteria limited to those who have a family member with dementia. Analysis of the data revealed various themes, including spiritual influences, punishment beliefs, limited awareness, stigmatization, spiritual beliefs, lack of accessibility to support services, frustration, helplessness, and a call for educational awareness and support initiatives. These findings highlight the importance of cultural interpretations in understanding dementia and underscore the need for increased awareness and support, particularly in communities lacking support. Recommendations include government intervention to provide educational programs and allocate resources for tailored support programs for caregivers within diverse cultural contexts.

Keywords: Dementia, cultural perceptions, caregivers, qualitative study, community-based research

1. Introduction

Dementia is a debilitating syndrome characterized by chronic and progressive brain pathology, resulting in a gradual decline in memory, thinking skills, and daily functioning. A neurological condition poses a significant global health challenge, impacting over 50 million individuals worldwide in 2020 (Nakanishi et al., 2022a). Furthermore, as the worldwide population ages, the prevalence of Dementia is expected to escalate dramatically, reaching an estimated 152 million individuals by the year 2050 (Nakanishi et al., 2022b). Additionally, Dementia is an ongoing neurodegenerative condition categorized by cognitive decline, memory loss, and impaired daily functioning. The prevalence of Dementia is increasing worldwide, posing significant challenges for individuals, families, and communities. The perception and awareness of Dementia vary across different cultural contexts, influencing the recognition of symptoms, help-seeking behaviors, and the overall well-being of those affected (World Health Organization, 2019).

Dementia, as a global health concern, affects millions of individuals and their families, and its prevalence continues to rise with an aging population. This neurodegenerative condition is characterized by a gradual decline in cognitive abilities, memory loss, and challenges in performing daily tasks. While medical research has shed light on the biological aspects of dementia, it is essential to acknowledge that the perception and awareness of this condition are deeply rooted in cultural contexts (Alzheimer's Disease International, 2012). While dementia presents formidable cognitive and functional obstacles, it is crucial to recognize the desire of many individuals affected by this condition to maintain a sense of purpose and involvement in their everyday lives. Despite the cognitive decrease, people with dementia often desire to recall full and reasonable engagement in interests that bring significance and realization to them (Nakanishi et al., 2022).

1.1 Cultural Perception and Beliefs

Cultural perceptions and beliefs regarding dementia in Nigeria, like in many other countries, play a significant role in shaping how individuals and communities understand and respond to this condition. Dementia is often stigmatized in Nigeria, and misconceptions about the condition are prevalent. People with dementia may be seen as bewitched or suffering from spiritual afflictions rather than recognizing it as a medical condition. In some Nigerian communities, traditional beliefs and cultural practices may attribute dementia to supernatural causes or ancestral curses, leading to reluctance to seek medical help and preferring traditional healers or religious interventions (Akinyemi et al., 2022).

The Ibiaku Issiet community is situated in Uruan, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria's local government, is known for its rich cultural heritage and traditions. Like many other communities worldwide, the Ibiaku Issiet community is likely to have distinct beliefs, attitudes, and responses to dementia. Cultural practices, social norms, and traditional healing systems may influence how dementia is perceived, managed, and supported within the community. In Ibiaku, Issiet culture strongly emphasizes the importance of family and community support. In many cases, family members become primary caregivers for individuals with dementia, and community support networks have an essential role in providing care and understanding the condition. Some families may turn to traditional healing practices and herbal remedies to address the symptoms of dementia, often alongside medical treatments (Olsson & Akpan, 2023).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Dementia, marked by cognitive decline, memory loss, and impaired daily functioning, is a progressive neurodegenerative condition posing global challenges (Lamahewa et al., 2018a). Despite extensive research on dementia in diverse cultural contexts, a significant gap exists regarding the specific cultural perceptions and awareness within the Ibiaku Issiet community. Like many Nigerian communities, Ibiaku Issiet likely holds unique cultural beliefs that influence the understanding and management of dementia. However, there is limited research exploring the cultural dimensions of dementia in this community. Recognizing the cultural perceptions and beliefs surrounding dementia in Ibiaku Issiet is vital for effectively developing culturally appropriate interventions to support affected individuals and their families. The absence of awareness and comprehension of dementia could result in stigma, delayed diagnosis, and insufficient care for individuals within the Ibiaku Issiet community. Moreover, the impact of traditional beliefs attributing dementia to supernatural causes or ancestral curses may discourage individuals and families from seeking medical assistance and utilizing available support systems (Lamahewa et al., 2018b).

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The study was to explore how the community perceived and responded to dementia as a progressive neurodegenerative condition affecting cognitive functions, memory, and daily activities. Gained insights into how individuals within the Ibiaku Issiet community understand and interpret dementia, including their knowledge about dementia, its symptoms, and its impact on affected individuals and their families, to identify prevailing cultural beliefs and practices related to dementia within the community. Also, to assess the levels of awareness about dementia and available support systems within the Ibiaku Issiet community and for individuals and their caregivers. To propose culturally appropriate interventions that enhance the well-being and acceptance of individuals with dementia in the Ibiaku Issiet community.

1.4 The Research Questions

- (1) How do members of the Ibiaku Issiet community perceive and interpret dementia?
- (2) What societal beliefs and misconceptions exist regarding dementia within the Ibiaku Issiet community?
- (3) How do cultural attitudes towards dementia shape help-seeking behaviors and caregiving practices?
- (4) What is the current level of awareness about dementia and available support networks within the Ibiaku Issiet community?
- (5) What emotional and psychological challenges do family members encounter when caring for a loved one with dementia?
- (6) What are the most effective strategies for increasing awareness and promoting cultural understanding of dementia within the community?

1.5 Significance of the Study

By focusing on the Ibiaku Issiet community, the study fills a crucial knowledge gap concerning cultural perceptions and beliefs about dementia within this particular cultural context. It adds to the existing knowledge of dementia by offering insights into how cultural factors influence understanding, responses, and care practices related to the condition. The findings from this study can inform the development of culturally sensitive interventions and support systems for individuals living with dementia in the Ibiaku Issiet community. By understanding the community's cultural beliefs and practices, healthcare professionals and policymakers can design more effective and inclusive dementia care strategies. Addressing cultural perceptions and beliefs about dementia is essential for reducing stigma and misconceptions. It may lead to improved access to medical help and support services for affected individuals and their families within the community, thereby enhancing the overall quality of dementia care.

The study can significantly increase awareness about dementia as a medical condition within the Ibiaku Issiet community. Disseminating research findings can educate community members, families, and caregivers about dementia, its symptoms, and the importance of seeking appropriate medical care. The research outcomes can provide compelling evidence to support policy development and advocacy efforts in promoting dementia-friendly initiatives within the Ibiaku Issiet community. Policymakers can use the findings to address the cultural barriers to dementia care and advocate for resources and support tailored to the community's unique needs. Beyond the Ibiaku Issiet community, the study's insights may contribute to the global understanding of cultural perceptions of dementia. It can highlight the universality of cultural influences on dementia care and provide valuable comparative data for other regions with similar cultural contexts.

By recognizing and respecting the community's cultural beliefs, the study can help build resilience and strengthen community bonds. It may foster acceptance and support for individuals living with dementia, promoting a more inclusive and caring community environment. Overall, the significance of this qualitative study lies in its potential to shed light on the cultural nuances of dementia in the Ibiaku Issiet community, leading to culturally sensitive interventions and improved dementia care. The findings have broader implications for dementia care practices, research, and policy development, contributing to the global effort to address the challenges posed by dementia in diverse cultural contexts.

1.6 The Scope of the Study

The study is limited to the Ibiaku Issiet community in Nigeria. It aims to investigate cultural perceptions and beliefs about dementia within this community and does not extend to other geographical regions. The study will involve individuals representing different roles and perspectives within the community, including community members who may have varying experiences with dementia, caregivers who provide support to individuals with dementia, healthcare professionals with expertise in dementia care, traditional healers who may be sought for alternative interventions, and religious leaders who may play a role in shaping community beliefs.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Awareness and Knowledge of Dementia

Awareness and knowledge about dementia can vary across cultural contexts. A study has found that low awareness of dementia was prevalent in some rural communities, leading to limited access to healthcare services and support. In contrast, culturally tailored educational initiatives have increased dementia awareness in specific communities. Literature frequently addresses the challenges associated with cultural perceptions and stigma related to dementia while emphasizing the potential for developing culturally competent and inclusive dementia care approaches (Hillman & Latimer, 2017a). The impact of cultural perceptions on how communities understand and manage dementia is a crucial area of study. Cultural representations of dementia in a community where dementia was not culturally marked as something related to suffering or warranting medical intervention revealed that dementia is often perceived as a natural consequence of aging, leading to delays in seeking medical attention (Hillman & Latimer, 2017b). Additionally, cultural beliefs are significant in shaping the experiences and perceptions of dementia within a community. These studies underscore the need to recognize and address cultural factors when designing effective interventions and support systems for individuals with dementia (Nimmons et al., 2023).

2.2 Cultural Barriers to Dementia Care

Cultural beliefs and attitudes can significantly impact access to dementia care and support services. The fear of stigma associated with dementia is a common barrier in some cultural communities, making individuals and families hesitant to seek medical assistance. The study by Rewerska-Juško and Rejdak (2020) sheds light on how this fear of stigma can hinder early diagnosis and appropriate medical help, ultimately affecting the quality of care received by individuals with dementia. Moreover, research by Olsson and Akpan (2023) highlights that specific ethnic communities may prefer traditional healers or folk remedies over formal healthcare services. This reliance on traditional medical practices can delay seeking a proper diagnosis and intervention for dementia. These findings illustrate the importance of understanding cultural beliefs and preferences to develop effective and accessible dementia care services that resonate with the community's values and practices.

2.3 Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Several studies have conducted cross-cultural comparisons of dementia perceptions and awareness. For instance, Calia, Johnson, and Cristea (2019) conducted a multinational study and found significant variations in cultural perceptions and experiences of dementia. These variations include [specific examples of cultural variations]. Such comparisons emphasize the importance of considering cultural contexts when developing dementia care policies and interventions. The literature review demonstrates that cultural perceptions and dementia awareness significantly influence how the condition is experienced and managed in the Ibiaku Issiet community and other cultural contexts. Understanding these cultural influences is crucial for providing effective dementia care and support that aligns with the community's beliefs and practices. Furthermore, cultural values and beliefs significantly shape caregiving practices for individuals with dementia in a community. Cultural norms and beliefs influence the way dementia care is approached, the roles of caregivers, and the support provided to affected individuals. Knowing these cultural factors is fundamental for creating efficient and culturally competent dementia care strategies (Nakanishi et al., 2022a).

2.3.1 Family and Community Cohesion

In many cultures, there is a strong emphasis on family and community cohesion. Caregiving responsibilities for individuals with dementia often fall on family members, mainly close relatives such as spouses, children, or siblings. The expectation of filial piety and the duty to care for elderly family members can be central to caregiving practices in such cultural contexts. Cultures that place a high value on respect for elders may influence how individuals with dementia are treated. Caregivers may prioritize maintaining the dignity and autonomy of the person with dementia while providing support and assistance (Nakanishi et al., 2022b).

2.3.2 Cultural Stigma and Taboos

Cultural stigma and taboos associated with dementia can profoundly impact caregiving practices. In some cultures, dementia may be considered a source of shame or linked to supernatural causes. This stigma can lead to social isolation, reluctance to seek medical help, and inadequate support for both caregivers and individuals with dementia (Nakanishi et al., 2022c). Spiritual and religious beliefs can guide caregiving practices in some cultures. Caregivers may seek comfort and meaning through religious rituals and prayer, and spirituality may serve as a coping mechanism during the caregiving journey. Cultural norms related to gender roles can influence caregiving practices. In some societies, caregiving responsibilities may be gender-specific, with women often assuming the primary caregiving role. These gender dynamics can impact the distribution of caregiving tasks and support available to caregivers (Nakanishi et al., 2022a).

2.3.3 Traditional Healing Practices, Community Support and Acceptance

Most cultures may prefer traditional healing practices, including herbal remedies or rituals, to address health issues, including dementia. This preference for traditional approaches can affect decisions about seeking formal medical help and interventions. Cultural values related to community and social support may influence caregivers' availability and acceptance of formal support services. In some communities, collective responsibility for caregiving may be emphasized, leading to the development of community-based support networks (Nakanishi et al., 2022a). However, cultural acceptance in some communities can be challenging because placing an elderly family member, including those with dementia, in a long-term care facility may be perceived negatively. Due to cultural norms around familial cohesiveness and respect for elders, families may prefer to keep the individual at home, even if the caregiving demands become overwhelming (Nakanishi et al., 2022b).

2.3.4 Psychological Effect for Family

Dementia, a chronic and continuing brain disorder, affects individuals directly experiencing the condition and significantly impacts their family members and caregivers. Taking care of family members with dementia can be emotionally and psychologically demanding, often leading to psychological effects on family members. Various literature reviews aim to explore the existing research on the psychological impact of caregiving for individuals living with dementia, focusing on family members. Numerous studies have highlighted the emotional distress experienced by family members caring for a person with dementia. Feelings of sadness, anxiety, and grief are common responses as caregivers witness the decline of their loved one's cognitive abilities. The burden of caregiving responsibilities, including managing daily activities and medical needs, can exacerbate emotional strain (Schulz et al., 2020). The psychological effects of dementia caregiving can extend to the caregiver's mental health. Research indicated the risk of depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues among family members caring for individuals with dementia (Wiegelmann et al., 2021).

2.3.5 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical perspective of the study is led by the perspective of social constructivism theory by Vygotsky and Social Cognitive Theory by Bandura. Different researchers in psychology, sociology, and gerontology, your insights and expertise are invaluable in advancing our understanding of how social constructivism can be applied to studying dementia in the Ibiaku Issiet community. Social constructivism emphasizes the function of social and cultural contexts in influencing individual perceptions and understandings. According to this theory, knowledge is not an objective reality but is constructed through interactions with others and the surrounding culture (Vygotsky, 1978). In dementia, cultural perceptions and awareness are influenced by the collective beliefs, values, and experiences of the Ibiaku Issiet community. The framework can be used to explore the cultural beliefs and values in the Ibiaku Issiet community that influence how dementia is perceived and understood. It can also help analyze the role of social interactions, communication, and cultural norms in shaping attitudes toward dementia and affecting help-seeking behaviors for individuals with dementia and their families.

Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes the reciprocal interactions between personal factors, behavioral factors, and the environment in shaping human behavior and learning. In the context of cultural perceptions and dementia awareness, SCT can help to understand how individuals in the Ibiaku Issiet community perceive dementia and how these perceptions influence their attitudes and actions towards dementia care and support. The Social Cognitive Theory explores how cultural perceptions and dementia awareness in the Ibiaku Issiet community influence attitudes toward dementia care, help-seeking behaviors, and the health of people with dementia and their caregivers (Bandura, 1986).

3. Method

3.1 Description of the Sample

The study utilized a qualitative research design to delve into the cultural perceptions and awareness of dementia within the Ibiaku Issiet Community. The qualitative methods were chosen for their ability to provide rich and nuanced insights into the experiences and perspectives of the participants.

3.2 Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Before commencing the study, researchers reviewed the Institutional Review Board or Ethics Committee to ensure that the research adheres to ethical guidelines and regulations. Researchers were transparent about their intentions and avoided misrepresenting the purpose or nature of the study to participants. The researchers accurately and truthfully reported the study's findings, avoiding any manipulation or distortion of data.

3.3 Data Collection

In this study, participants were thoughtfully chosen to ensure a diverse representation across various age brackets, genders, and caregiving backgrounds. This intentional selection strategy aimed to capture various perceptions and experiences of the research study. Data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews with community members who have family members affected by dementia, aged between 46 and 75 years. The research employed multiple instruments, including audio face-to-face and telephone interviews and note-taking. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. Transcription of interviews occurred within 30 days, followed by coding. So, the semi-structured interviews were chosen for their ability to balance predefined questions with the flexibility to delve into unforeseen aspects, facilitating a more profound comprehension of participants' perceptions regarding dementia and its cultural nuances. Key areas explored during the interviews encompassed participants' understandings of dementia, cultural beliefs surrounding the condition, and personal caregiving experiences within the context of dementia. By exploring these facets, researchers aimed to gain comprehensive insights into the understanding and managing dementia within the Ibiaku Issiet community.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis employed thematic analysis, a qualitative technique that involves identifying and analyzing recurring patterns or themes within the interview transcripts (Charmaz, 2010). The process enabled the researchers to identify common cultural perceptions and awareness of dementia prevalent within the Ibiaku Issiet Community. Member checking and data triangulation were implemented to check the accuracy and confirm the accuracy and reliability of the findings (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). It includes sharing the research findings with the participants to verify their accuracy and provide an opportunity for their input. Triangulation involves cross verifying the results by using multiple data sources or involving multiple researchers to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. By employing these rigorous qualitative research methods, the study generated valuable insights into the cultural perceptions and awareness of dementia in the Ibiaku Issiet Community.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount in any research study, and this qualitative study exploring cultural perceptions and awareness of dementia in the Ibiaku Issiet Community is no exception. The researchers must ensure that the study is conducted ethically, respecting the rights and well-being of the participants. Before participating in the study, all potential participants were informed about the purpose of the study, methods, risks, benefits, and their right to withdraw without consequences. The researchers obtained Informed consent from each participant, and special care was taken as participants were interviewed. Participants' privacy and all data collected should be kept confidential, and identifying information should be removed. The research findings did not disclose participants' names or personal identifying details. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were not pressured to participate. The participants were told that they had the freedom to decline or withdraw from the study at any stage without facing any negative consequences (American Psychological Association, 2020a). The study should be designed to minimize any potential harm or discomfort to the participants. Researchers were sensitive to the emotional well-being of family members who have a person with dementia during data collection and ensuring appropriate support was available if needed. Given the cultural context of the study, researchers must be culturally sensitive and respectful of local norms, beliefs, and practices. Understanding and acknowledging cultural differences is essential to creating a positive relationship with members of the community (American Psychological Association, 2020b).

4. Result

The study conducted in the Ibiaku Issiet community revealed that participants perceive dementia as a consequence of supernatural forces and a punishment for wrongdoing. This belief system contributes significantly to a sense of shame and guilt among individuals who have family members affected by dementia. Among the 15 participants interviewed, comprising eight men and seven women, thematic analysis revealed alignment with the existing literature on cultural awareness regarding dementia in the community. Specifically, themes emerged suggesting that dementia is viewed as a spiritual attack and traditional and religious practices are seen as the only means of addressing it. Throughout the study, the symbol M represents men, and W represents women. The demographic data of the participants is summarized in the table below:

Table 1. The demographic information of 7 female participants

	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
Age	46	45	52	76	55	53	40
Marital status	Single	Single	Single	Widow	Single	Widow	Married
Children	1	0	1	8	0	2	4
Education	Associate degree	B.Sc.	Associate degree	High School	High School	High School	B.Sc.
Occupation	Teacher	Business	Health Worker	Business	Business	Business	Teacher

Table 2. The demographic information of 8 male participants

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male
Age	56	40	34	57	48	50	55	54
Marital Status	Married	Married	Single	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married
Children	3	3	1	3	0	0	2	2
Education	Master	Associate degree	Associate degree	High School	High School	BSc	High School	High School
Occupation	Electrician	Teacher	Designer	Business	Business	Teacher	Famer	Driver

4.1 Emerging Themes

The interviews identified six emergent themes, offering valuable insights into the community's perception and response to dementia. These themes encompass exploring spiritual influences, punishment, limited awareness, stigmatization, spiritual beliefs, lack of accessibility, frustration, helplessness, and advocacy for educational awareness and support.

4.2 Theme 1 Emerged as: *Exploration of Spiritual Influences*

The first theme that emerged was spiritual influences, as participants attributed the contributing factors to the development of dementia.

How would you describe dementia, and what factors do you think contribute to its development?

W1 reports: "I cannot really define dementia and I do not know the cause, but I believe demonic attack from the enemies."

W2 states: "Dementia spiritual causes from demonic realm."

W3 responses: "Dementia is a general term used to describe a decline in cognitive abilities, such as memory. However, I did not know about it until I read it and I believe it evil attack."

M 1 reports: "I am familiar with dementia, which involves memory and cognitive decline due to damage to blood vessels and loss of nerve cells in the brain. I perceive this as a form of evil manipulation targeting human beings."

M2 reports: Dementia is a new thing to me I have not heard before and I know is the work of Satan."

4.2.1 Theme 2 Emerged as: Punishment and Limited Awareness

Participants perceived dementia as a form of divine punishment and a manifestation of demonic possession, resulting in social stigma and a hesitancy to seek medical assistance.

What cultural beliefs or practices regarding dementia prevail in their community and lack?

W4 states: "I was unaware of dementia until my last husband was diagnosed with it. My daughter, who is a doctor, explained it to me. I perceive it as a demonic possession, which leads to social stigma and reluctance to seek medical help."

W6 reports: "I was unaware of this condition until my uncle was diagnosed with dementia. In our community, there is a belief in demonic control, making it challenging and shameful to discuss openly outside of the family unit."

M3 reports: "I am unfamiliar with dementia, and if it exists, it is often perceived as a demonic spell."

M4 expressed: "Prior to this, I did not know about dementia, and I perceive it as originating from the realm of Satan."

W7 reports: "I understand dementia as a decline in cognitive abilities, particularly memory. From a cultural perspective, I attribute such illnesses to the demonic realm."

4.2.2 Emerged Theme 3: Stigmatization and Spiritual Beliefs

How do cultural perceptions of dementia influence individuals in the community seeking help and care?

M6 reports: "In the community where dementia carries stigma that linked to spiritual beliefs, individuals may avoid seeking medical assistance.

M7 reports: "Due to the stigma people in community instead of medical intervention, individuals may turn to traditional or religious practices, which may not adequately address the medical aspects of dementia.

M8 reports: "I believe the cultural beliefs and shame have influenced family not to seeking help potentially affecting their support and understanding provided to individuals with dementia."

M1 reports: "Cultural perceptions significantly shape attitudes towards dementia, impacting the accessibility and quality of care available to affected individuals within the community."

M2 states "families refrain from seeking medical assistance due to spiritual beliefs."

4.2.3 Theme 4 Emerged as: Lack of Accessibility

What resources and services are available to support individuals with dementia and their families in the community?

W1 reports: "Resources and services for support are lacking, with only the church and family members providing assistance."

W2 states: "There is no resources to support people with dementia only the family."

W3 responses: "There is no help from the government and no resources available to help family."

M1 reports: "There is nothing in the community because the community does not even have health care center to treat people in the community when people fall sick."

M3 reports "There is no support in the community."

4.2.4 Emerged Theme 5: Frustration and Helplessness

What emotional and psychological challenges do family members encounter when caring for a loved one with dementia?

W1 reports: "In 2019, I experienced feelings of frustration and helplessness while providing care for my late uncle, who eventually passed away from illness. He often felt disoriented, confused about time and place, and struggled with maintaining a sense of personal identity."

W2 reports: "I can share a personal experience concerning my father with dementia. I was sad and pain seeing my wonderful father going challenging behaviors such as agitation and aggression and not being able to spend as much time with friends or pursue his own interests."

W2 reports: "In my personal experience with my father's dementia, I felt sadness and distress as I witnessed my once wonderful father exhibiting challenging behaviors such as agitation. Additionally, I found it difficult to dedicate as much time to socializing with friends or pursuing my own interests due to the demands of caring for him."

W7 expresses: "frustration and helplessness witnessing their uncle's suffering, mainly as he was the sole surviving family member after the passing of their mother, father, and elder brother. Despite their desire to alleviate his pain, they feel unable to provide the support he needs."

M5 expresses "I feel sadness as experienced while witnessing the suffering of my uncle."

4.2.5 Theme 6 Emerged as: Advocacy for Educational Awareness and Support

What strategies can be employed to effectively increase awareness and foster cultural sensitivity regarding dementia within the community?

W1 suggests: "Implementing educational workshops is crucial for enhancing community awareness about dementia."

W2 reports: Providing seminars and educating community members the dementia and its symptoms.

W3 reports: "Enhancing awareness and fostering cultural understanding of dementia within the community while offering support to individuals affected by the condition."

W7 reports: "Conducting training sessions for caregivers and community leaders to enhance cultural competency in dementia care, ensuring culturally appropriate approaches."

W4 reports: "Collaborating with community leaders, religious figures, and elders to raise awareness of dementia and promote acceptance within the community."

M1 reports "Tapping into existing community networks such as religious congregations, cultural organizations, and social clubs to disseminate information about dementia and provide support to affected individuals and families."

M2 reports "Sharing stories and personal experiences of individuals living with dementia and their caregivers within the community to humanize the experience and foster empathy and understanding."

M3 reports: "Ensuring that educational materials and resources about dementia are available in multiple languages spoken within the community to overcome language barriers and ensure inclusivity."

M6 reports: "Creating support groups and peer networks tailored to individuals and families affected by dementia within the community to provide a safe space for sharing experiences and accessing support."

M7 reports: "Collaborating with neighborhood cultural hubs like community centers to organize events focusing on dementia awareness, featuring cultural showcases and performances, fostering active community involvement through creative and impactful avenues."

5. Discussion of the Findings

This study aimed to delve into the community's perceptions and responses to dementia, a progressive neurodegenerative condition affecting cognitive functions, memory, and daily activities. Through interviews with 15 participants from the Ibiaku Issiet community, we gained valuable insights into how individuals comprehend and interpret dementia, encompassing their understanding of its symptoms, its impact on affected individuals and their families, and prevailing cultural beliefs and practices related to dementia within the community.

The practical implications of our research, as elucidated by Nakanishi et al. (2022a), are significant. Our findings reveal that dementia is commonly perceived across various cultures as having supernatural causes intertwined with spiritual beliefs, leading to social isolation due to the associated stigma. Moreover, our study sheds light on the prevalent inclination in many cultures towards traditional healing practices, such as herbal remedies or rituals, to address health issues, including dementia. These insights can inform healthcare professionals and policymakers about the need to consider cultural beliefs and practices when designing interventions for dementia.

The study emphasizes the intricate interplay between cultural beliefs, spiritual interpretations, and practical challenges in dementia care, particularly within the Ibiaku Issiet community. These findings underscore the need for developing culturally sensitive interventions and support systems that address the various needs of people living with dementia and their families.

Awareness and understanding of dementia vary significantly across cultural contexts, with some cultures exhibiting a notable lack of awareness (Hillman & Latimer, 2017). They stress the importance of developing culturally competent and inclusive approaches to dementia care to address these discrepancies. Drawing from the social constructivist perspective of Vygotsky and Bandura (1987; 1986), which emphasizes the influence of social and cultural contexts on individual perceptions and understandings, it becomes clear that knowledge is not an objective reality but is instead shaped through interactions within one's social and cultural environment (Vygotsky, 1978). This construction of knowledge also reflects cultural perceptions and the level of awareness, which are influenced by the collective beliefs, values, and experiences of community members, as highlighted by the participants. Therefore, the cultural beliefs and values prevalent within a community significantly impact perceptions of dementia and subsequently influence attitudes and help-seeking behaviors towards individuals

with dementia and their families. Therefore, understanding these cultural dynamics is essential for developing effective interventions and support systems sensitive to the community's cultural nuances and beliefs.

The Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) underscores the reciprocal interactions between personal factors, behavioral factors, and the environment in shaping human behavior and learning. Within the context of cultural perceptions and awareness of dementia, SCT provides valuable insights into how individuals within a community perceive dementia and how these perceptions influence their attitudes and actions toward dementia care and support. The cultural perceptions and lack of awareness of dementia observed in the Ibiaku Issiet community significantly impact attitudes toward dementia care, help-seeking behaviors, and the health of individuals with dementia and their caregivers (Bandura, 1986).

According to Schulz and Martire (2004), taking care of a person with this condition indicates profound emotional and psychological challenges for caregivers, who often grapple with feelings of frustration and helplessness. Research consistently underscores the toll this responsibility takes on caregivers, revealing prevalent themes of sadness, anxiety, and a sense of loss as they witness their loved one's cognitive decline. The burden of managing daily tasks and medical needs further compounds stress levels, amplifying the emotional strain experienced by caregivers. Studies, such as that conducted by Wiegelmann et al. (2021), shed light on the significant psychological impacts caregivers face, such as depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues are frequently reported among those caring for individuals with dementia, highlighting the urgent need for support and interventions to alleviate caregiver distress and enhance overall well-being.

5.1 Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the study is its narrow focus exclusively on the Ibiaku Issiet community, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other communities with different cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, or healthcare systems. By not including perspectives from a broader range of communities, the study may miss out on valuable insights into the diversity of cultural perceptions and awareness of dementia across different contexts. Additionally, by solely focusing on one community, the study may not capture variations in attitudes, beliefs, and experiences related to dementia care and support within and between different communities. Different regions or populations may have unique cultural norms, traditions, and resources available for dementia care, which could impact how dementia is perceived and addressed. Furthermore, by limiting the study to one community, there may be missed opportunities to compare and contrast findings with other communities, potentially hindering a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing attitudes and behaviors related to dementia.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to delve into the understanding and interpretations of dementia within the Ibiaku Issiet community, shedding light on their knowledge about the condition, its symptoms, and its impact on affected individuals and their families. The investigation also sought to uncover prevalent cultural beliefs and practices related to dementia within the community. Through interviews, six key themes emerged, including exploring spiritual influences, notions of punishment and spiritual affliction, experiences of stigmatization intertwined with spiritual beliefs, challenges related to resource accessibility, and the profound feelings of frustration and helplessness among caregivers. These themes provide valuable insights into the community's perception and response to dementia.

Consistent with research by Nakanishi et al. (2022), which highlights the perception of dementia across various cultures as often attributed to supernatural causes intertwined with spiritual beliefs, our findings underscore the significance of such cultural interpretations. The research emphasizes the considerable variation in awareness and understanding of dementia across cultural contexts, with some cultures exhibiting a notable lack of awareness (Hillman & Latimer, 2017).

Drawing from the social constructivist perspective of Vygotsky and Bandura (1987; 1986), our findings underscore the influence of social and cultural contexts on individual perceptions and understandings of dementia. This perspective emphasizes how broader societal and cultural norms shape attitudes and help-seeking behaviors toward individuals with dementia and their families. By recognizing these cultural nuances, interventions and resources can be made available to help with specific needs and challenges faced by communities like Ibiaku Issiet, ultimately enhancing dementia care and support within diverse cultural contexts. These practical implications highlight the importance of our research in improving the lives of those affected by dementia.

6.1 Recommendation and Future Research

The recommendation is that governments prioritize providing educational awareness and allocate resources to establish tailored support programs for caregivers of individuals with dementia across diverse cultural communities. These programs should encompass comprehensive services, including financial assistance, respite care services, counseling, support groups, and culturally sensitive educational resources. By offering tangible support and resources, governments can effectively alleviate the burden on caregivers and improve the lives of individuals with dementia. This proactive approach will enhance these communities' overall well-being and quality of life. Future research should prioritize the development of culturally sensitive interventions and support programs tailored to meet the needs and help individuals with dementia and their caregivers across diverse cultural settings. These interventions should be meticulously designed to align with cultural norms, beliefs, and values. This approach is crucial as it ensures their effectiveness and relevance in various cultural contexts, thereby significantly enhancing the robustness and applicability of research findings. By ensuring that interventions are culturally appropriate, researchers can ultimately lead to more effective support programs for individuals with dementia and their caregivers.

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