

ABSTRACT

ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE, THE CARE GIVERS' CONCERNS, KNOWLEDGE, COPING ABILITY, AND VIEWS OF A SUPPORT SYSTEM

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Alzheimer's disease affects the aged population worldwide. Initially it was considered rare and was believed to occur in people under 60. Now research findings indicate that it is seen mostly in the older population. The incidence increases further with age; approximately 20% are aged over 80 years. It is a leading cause of death in the United States and studies indicate that up to 58% of nursing home population is afflicted with Alzheimer's disease although many may not have been diagnosed.

Patients will need constant help when they develop cognitive, physical, emotional or social disabilities. The care-giving role can be demanding and the ability of public health practitioners and community groups to offer support can help to create a positive emotional climate for caregivers.

This study was carried out in the Kingston and St. Andrew parishes of Jamaica during the period January to April 1995.

Information collected examined Alzheimer's disease and

the knowledge and attitude of caregivers. Caregivers identified were Family doctors, Registered Nurses, Practical Nurses, a house mother, domestic helpers and family members.

Findings revealed Alzheimer's disease was more common over age 60. The incidence is higher in females, and the disease knows no socioeconomic boundary. Main caregivers are health workers and the majority of patients are cared for in Nursing Homes. Major fears of doctors was the patients hyperactivity, while for Nurse Managers it was the increase stress for the caregiver, and communication difficulties the patient may experience. Families are concerned about finding a cure and the safety of the patient.

Caregivers were not found to be unduly stressed but there was a knowledge gap about the disease. All categories of caregivers identified the need for support systems. The primary function for an Alzheimer's disease association as seen by the caregivers would be education of all persons.