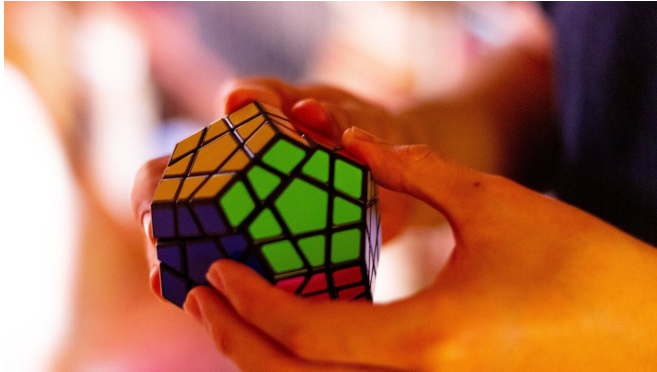


Study: Suicide risk higher for older adults diagnosed with dementia

31 May 2021, by Christopher Gardner



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Adults over age 65 who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or other dementia are more than twice as likely to die from suicide compared to older adults who do not suffer from dementia, according to a new study led by a Yale Department of Psychiatry researcher.

The findings, published in *Alzheimer's & Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer's Association*, reveal the risk of [suicide](#) was particularly elevated among adults aged 65-74 years and in the first 90 days following a [dementia](#) diagnosis. Patients diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia were also found to be at higher risk of suicide death.

"With the rapidly growing geriatric population and continued increase in suicide rates for aging adults, this study sheds light on an over-looked facet of caring for older persons with dementia," said Timothy Schmutte, PsyD, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Yale School of Medicine, and the paper's lead author. "Hopefully, this study will raise awareness and promote early detection of older adults who are at-risk for suicidal thoughts and acts."

Schmutte and researchers from Columbia University, University of Michigan, University of Pennsylvania, and the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System in Michigan studied the records of 2.66 million older adults.

They found that the number of suicide deaths within the first year of newly diagnosed dementia was 53 percent higher than expected when compared to the general population. The risk was far greater within the first three months of a diagnosis, according to the study.

The authors say the study supports the need for a more thorough assessment of patient and caregiver needs and referrals for services and supports. A patient's pre-existing mental health disorder must also be actively managed, they said.

"In addition to suicide risk screening and additional support at the time of receiving a dementia diagnosis—particularly older men and older adults living with chronic pain and mental health or substance use disorders—a take away message of this study is lethal means restriction and safety counseling may be appropriate with patients and caregivers, particularly safe storage or removal of firearms and certain medications," Schmutte said.

More information: Timothy Schmutte et al, Suicide risk in first year after dementia diagnosis in older adults, *Alzheimer's & Dementia* (2021). [DOI: 10.1002/alz.12390](https://doi.org/10.1002/alz.12390)

Provided by Yale University

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