

## Pupil's Perceiving of Great-Grandparent with Dementia: A Case Study

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**Received:** 19 May 2019; **Accepted:** 12 June 2019

**Citation:** Zlata Felc, Brina Felc. Pupil's Perceiving of Great-Grandparent with Dementia: A Case Study. Int J Psychiatr Res. 2019; 2(3): 1-2.

**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** With increasing life expectancy the number of people with Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia is rising. Therefore, many children will encounter dementia among family members, their grandparents and great-grandparents in particular. They benefit from grandchildren's and great-grandchildren's visits. The latter are mostly pupils in primary schools without accessible educational program in dementia knowledge, and their view of dementia is under-explored. The purpose of this article was to establish pupil's view of people with dementia.

**Case Presentation:** We report a case of a 7 year-old second form pupil, great-granddaughter of great-grandfather with moderately advanced Alzheimer's disease who is living in elderly home, and she visits him frequently. To gain an insight into this girl's view of dementia in attendance of her mother the face-to-face interview was used. Girl's responses revealed her view of dementia that a) dementia means forgetfulness, and it comes because brain in someone old get sick, b) people with dementia forget because of their illness, and not on purpose, c) people with dementia like to touch grandchildren, and sometimes they feel uncomfortable because of this, d) in primary school teachers don't speak about dementia, and schoolmates never speak about their relatives with dementia.

**Conclusion:** This case study highlights the importance of preparing children for what to expect from a visit of a person with dementia. Efforts to raise an awareness about dementia should be expanded especially in families with older members. Additionally, this case study supports an introduction of simple programme of dementia education to primary schools to help pupils to understand what it's like to live with dementia.

**Keywords**

People with dementia, Pupil's perceiving, Education in primary school.

**Introduction**

With increasing life expectancy the number of people with dementia is rising. Therefore, many children encounter dementia among family members, their grandparents and great-grandparents in particular. Children are often involved in care giving of grandparents and great-grandparents with Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia [1]. The best way to help grand- and great-grandparents with dementia is to stay interested, stay in touch and let them know they are loved [2]. One of the way is to begin to raise the awareness of dementia throughout the curriculum in primary school [3,4]. Lessons in dementia are designed to inform pupils about the condition and explain how they can best support people

with dementia [3]. From this training can also benefit both the pupils and the staff and it brings more discussion about dementia awareness into the open.

Although the scientific literature on dementia is particularly extensive, in the international literature young children's views of dementia are under-explored [5-7]. Similar, dementia-related material targeted at a children's readership is very modest [8]. In this case report we represent how young pupil perceives the great-grandparent who suffers from dementia.

**Case Description**

The case of a 7 year-old second form pupil, great-granddaughter of great-grandfather with moderately advanced Alzheimer's disease is presented. Great-grandfather is living in elderly home, and she visits him frequently. To gain an insight into girl's view of

dementia in attendance of her mother the face-to-face interview was used. Girl's responses revealed her view of dementia that a) dementia means forgetfulness, and it comes because brain in someone old get's sick, b) people with dementia forget because of their illness, and not on purpose, c) people with dementia like to touch grandchildren, and sometimes they feel uncomfortable because of this, d) in primary school teachers don't speak about dementia, and schoolmates never speak about their relatives with dementia.

### Discussion

Interview is interpreted and described thematically. The interviewee has developed a positive understanding of dementia except how it affects person's touching. The key finding of this case report is an information that sometimes persons with dementia could cause young child's discomfort because of frequent touching. This probably doesn't reflect a negative attitude towards the person with dementia, but rather the unknowing to the fact that the tactile system is the earliest sensory system to become functional (in the embryo) and may be the last to fade [9]. Young child doesn't know that touch remains the most powerful form of communication throughout the course of life of person with dementia.

### Conclusion

Introducing dementia education in primary school is necessary because it helps pupils to understand how dementia affects a person. In lessons about dementia touch should be considered as important as information about the difference between short-term and long-term memory.

Coaching children to patiently answer the same question multiple times, or accept loved ones' realities in the moment (if they confuse names or details, for instance) can prepare children to navigate some of the unfortunate realities of the disease. This education helps both the pupils and the staff to establish a dementia friendly society.

### Acknowledgments

We thank the young girl I. O. for speaking honestly about her view of dementia.

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