

Cultural and dementia : The Irish community in Britain

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Irish in Britain

Cultural beliefs and perceptions

- ▶ Easy to forget cultural beliefs of Irish people
- ▶ Heterogeneous group -no single set of beliefs
- ▶ Similar to UK community but more akin to BME groups
- ▶ Believe dementia is “normal” feature of old age,
- ▶ Embarrassing, shameful, tend to isolate themselves
- ▶ No cure, nothing can be done to help, muddle along
- ▶ Cant make decisions, “Second childhood”- need protection,
- ▶ Intense fear of being “put away”

Irish people, the same but different

- ▶ Distinctive culture, migration experience, occupations
- ▶ Long experiences of overt and covert anti-Irish racism
- ▶ Irish Travellers, anti- Traveller discrimination
- ▶ Problems with Irish accent, use of English, Irish names
- ▶ Native Irish speakers may lose second language ability
- ▶ Family don't see themselves as carers, don't seek help
- ▶ Suspicion, fear of authority, subservient to professionals

Access to earlier memories

- ▶ Working /raising family against a backdrop of anti-Irish racism
- ▶ Experiences of Prevention of Terrorism Act 1970s onwards
- ▶ Feeling unwanted, suspect during World War 2
- ▶ Irish dancehalls, meeting partners, courtship, parenting
- ▶ Leaving home, family to escape poverty, expect/aim to return
- ▶ Having to leave to escape domestic or institutional abuse,
- ▶ Leaving because pregnant, gay, in trouble with police
- ▶ Irish childhood, poor, oppressive, disciplinarian for many

Culturally sensitive care of Irish people with dementia

- ▶ Recognise Irish people have specific cultural needs
- ▶ Understand Irish accents, Irish names, migration experience
- ▶ Early memories relate to migration, leaving home, life in UK, Irish childhood etc
- ▶ Understand the biography, ethno-history, factors which cause stigma and shame
- ▶ Help resolve internalised anger, shame, loss, fear safely
- ▶ Reduce social isolation, educate and inform about dementia in acceptable, accessible ways
- ▶ “Irish environment”, music, activities, food, religious and cultural events



Irish Memory Loss Alliance

