


Scottish Burden of Disease Study, 2015

Alzheimer's disease and other dementias technical overview



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Published by NHS Health Scotland

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Background

The Scottish Burden of Disease (SBoD) study team have published comprehensive estimates of the burden of disease and injury in Scotland for 2015 [1]. The purpose of this technical overview is to provide background information on the data and methodology used, noting any caveats associated with estimating the burden of Alzheimer's disease and other Dementias (ADOD) in SBoD.

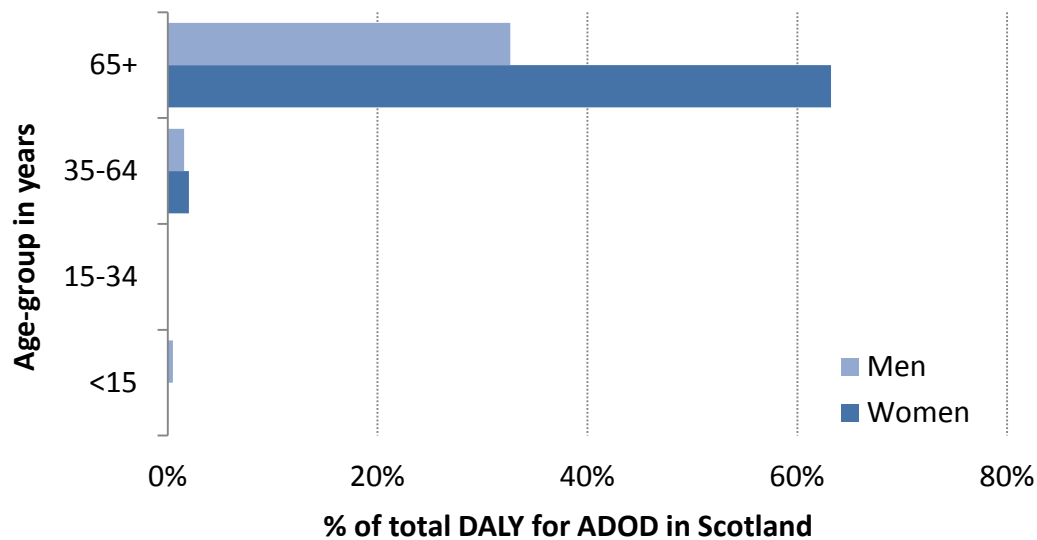
Burden of disease studies aim to estimate the difference between ideal and actual health in a country or region at a specific point in time. Individuals can suffer non-fatal health loss due to suffering disability attributable to a disease, condition or injury, or suffer fatal health loss which is early death due to a disease, condition or injury. To quantify the total burden, non-fatal and fatal health loss are combined to produce a single metric called the Disability-Adjusted Life Year (DALY).

Further information about the SBoD study, including a more thorough explanation of the methodology used, overview reports, detailed results and other specific disease briefings, can be found on the website of the Scottish Public Health Observatory (ScotPHO) [1].

Estimated burden due to Alzheimer's and other dementias

ADOD were the 7th most common cause of disease burden in Scotland in 2015, resulting in a total of approximately 56,300 DALYs. Of this total burden, 65% was due to the fatal burden of ADOD, with 35% being attributed to the non-fatal burden.

Figure 1 Percentage of total DALYs by gender and age-group for ADOD



Women contributed a higher proportion of the burden (65%) than men (35%). Overall, 96% of the total ADOD burden was contributed by individuals aged 65 years and over, as outlined in Figure 1. Note that the burden we are describing is the absolute burden and has not been adjusted for the age/gender case-mix.

How did we produce these estimates?

DALYs attributed to a disease, condition or injury are calculated by combining estimates from two individual metrics: Years of Life Lost (YLL) due to premature mortality and Years Lived with Disability (YLD).

Years of life lost (YLL) to Alzheimer’s and other dementias

YLL measures the years of life lost due to premature deaths i.e. the fatal component of burden of disease. YLLs are calculated by subtracting the age at each ADOD death from the expected remaining life expectancy for a person at that age.

Estimating the number of deaths

There were approximately 6,000 deaths caused by ADOD in 2015. These deaths were identified from the underlying cause of death on the National Records of Scotland (NRS) register of deaths [2]. To classify deaths the GBD 2015 cause list was used, which has been created using the International Statistical Classification of

Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10) [3, 4]. The NRS register of deaths has a Community Health Index (CHI) number attached to each death, which allows for demographic data such as gender, geographical area of residence and age at death to be established for each individual.

Included in the total ADOD mortality count are deaths that have come from what are termed ill-defined causes of death in burden of disease studies. These ill-defined deaths are causes of death that have been coded with ICD-10 codes in vital registers but for the purposes of burden of disease studies, are not regarded as sufficiently specific causes of death. These ill-defined deaths are therefore redistributed amongst specific causes of death across the burden of disease cause list based on the redistribution of deaths method used in the GBD study [3]. For ADOD, approximately 1% of the mortality count comes from ill-defined death categories such as 'other and unspecified bacterial and infectious, endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases'. Further explanation of this method is available in the SBoD technical paper [1]. For this reason, the number of deaths due to ADOD which have been reported are different from that of officially reported sources.

Life expectancy and YLL

Each single death contributes to the total YLL through calculating the difference between the age at death and the life expectancy at that age. Life expectancy was defined using the 2013 gender-specific National Life Tables for Scotland [5]. There were approximately 36,800 YLL due to ADOD in Scotland in 2015. Dividing the total YLL for ADOD by the total mortality count indicates that, on average, individuals who die due to ADOD die approximately 6 years earlier than would otherwise be expected on the basis of the life expectancy of the general population.

Years lived with disability (YLD) due to Alzheimer's and other dementias

Years lived with disability (YLD) are estimated using:

- disease and injury prevalence estimates
- levels of severity
- disability weights

Our sources of information for these three components are as follows:

Estimating the number of individuals suffering disability

To estimate prevalent cases of ADOD in 2015, the Practice Team Information dataset (PTI) was used [6]. This dataset was collected by ISD Scotland from April 2003 to September 2013. It includes information from a nationally representative 5% sample of Scottish General Practices regarding face-to-face consultations between individuals and a member of the practice team (GPs, nurses and clinical assistants). The presence of a unique patient-identifier on the dataset allows for the grouping of consultations for each individual. The reason for each consultation was coded using Read codes [7]. The number of individuals that had a Read code specific to ADOD, between 1 April 2003 and 31 September 2013, were used to estimate prevalence. Individuals were counted once in any year in which they attended their GP and consulted for ADOD. We projected the estimated annual incidence trends of ADOD, censoring for mortality, for the time period (2003-2013) to estimate the number of prevalent cases in 2015. Vital status for individuals was not available, so adjustments to account for deaths were made using age-sex specific excess mortality rates for ADOD as defined in GBD 2015 [8].

Using this method of identifying prevalent cases of ADOD, we estimated that there were approximately 116,200 individuals in the Scottish population suffering disability due to ADOD in 2015.

Severity distribution and disability weights

The levels of severity and disability due to ADOD in Scotland were based on the specifications of the GBD 2015 study [9]. This allowed prevalent cases to be disaggregated by levels of severity and the associated disability at each level of severity. The disability weights were developed by the GBD study through surveys of the general public and take into account the consequences of each disease, condition and injury [10]. The severity distribution and disability weights for ADOD are outlined in Table 1.

Once the severity of ADOD and associated disability were taken into account, individuals were estimated to be suffering approximately 19,600 YLDs in 2015 due to living with ADOD.

Table 1 Description and allocation to severity levels for ADOD with corresponding disability weight

Severity level	Description	% of individuals	Disability weight
Mild	Has some trouble remembering recent events, and finds it hard to concentrate and make decisions and plans.	68	0.069
Moderate	Has memory problems and confusion, feels disoriented, at times hears voices that are not real, and needs help with some daily activities.	22	0.377
Severe	Has complete memory loss; no longer recognizes close family members; and requires help with all daily activities.	10	0.449

Data quality

In order to provide a measure of the degree of accuracy¹ and relevance² of the estimated disease DALYs to users, a measure of data quality has been developed for the SBoD study. This measure assigns a RAG (Red; Amber; Green) status to each disease or injury indicative of the accuracy and relevance of the estimates. Interpretation of the RAG status can be defined as follows:

Highly accurate and relevant

Estimates have been derived using relevant and robust data sources with only a small degree of adjustments performed to the input data. These estimates can be considered a highly accurate depiction of the burden incurred from the disease, condition or injury.

¹ How precise, unbiased or certain the estimate is.

² Do we measure the thing we want to measure?

Moderately accurate and relevant

Estimates have been derived using reasonably relevant and robust data sources with only a moderate degree of adjustments performed to the input data. These estimates can be considered a moderately accurate depiction of the burden incurred from the disease, condition or injury.


Uncertainties over accuracy and relevance

Estimates have been derived using less comprehensive or relevant data sources with a high degree of adjustments performed to the input data. These estimates contain substantial uncertainties and should be used with some caution.

The data quality has been assessed using three main criteria:

- Relevance and accuracy of the data source used to measuring the population of interest
- Likelihood that the implemented disease model captured the overall burden of disease or injury
- The relative contribution of ill-defined deaths to YLL, and YLL to DALY.

These criteria are subjectively assessed and each criterion is scored on a scale of 1 to 5. Further details on these data quality measures are available on the ScotPHO website [1].

Based on these criteria, the estimates of burden of ADOD in Scotland are  **highly accurate and relevant.**

ADOD is a growing health concern; however diagnosis in primary care is dependent on clinical suspicion, or suspicions from carers, meaning that there is a possibility of bias due to missed diagnoses [11]. We have chosen to use GP consultations to determine the number of patients that suffer disability due to ADOD, for which we have a decade of patient-consultation data. Our estimates of prevalence are cumulative, to take advantage of the large sampling period available for each individual.

The Global Burden of Disease study (GBD) 2015 estimated an ADOD prevalence of 1.3% in Scotland in 2015 [12]. Alzheimer's Scotland estimate a prevalence of 1.7% which is based on a composite of age-specific rates from findings from two previous studies [13, 14] that were applied to Scottish population estimates. Our prevalence estimate of 2.2% is higher than both the GBD 2015 and Alzheimer's Scotland estimates. We think this may in part be due to our large sample period, for which we have up to a period of a decade to identify only a single ADOD consultation for each individual. A shorter sampling period would give less opportunity for individuals to consult with their GP. However, the method we used may underestimate excess mortality in individuals with ADOD. To account for excess mortality, we used estimates from GBD 2015. As Scotland has a lower life expectancy than is used in the GBD 2015 study, the probability of death will be higher at younger ages in Scotland than it would be from the GBD 2015 study. However, we have insufficient data or evidence to try to refine our estimates. The effect that this will have means that excess mortality in individuals with ADOD is only partially accounted for when using estimates derived from PTI, which will result in an overestimate of YLD.

What next to improve estimates for Alzheimer's and other dementias?

Future work on the SBoD study will attempt to refine the estimates of prevalence. This work will include reviewing the coding and recording of ADOD in alternative national datasets and exploring surveys and local area datasets for information. The development of the Scottish Primary Care Information Resource (SPIRE) will help us to improve our estimates of the burden of disease in Scotland [15]. Further to this, work will be carried out to attempt to derive estimates of severity levels that are dependent on age and that are specific to the Scottish population.

These improvements are partly dependant on exploring other data sources and reviewing evidence from high quality research that it is relevant to Scotland. Please contact the SBoD project team (nhs.healthscotland-sbod-team@nhs.net) for enquiries and suggestions on how to improve our estimates.

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