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## **Alzheimer's Disease and Women**

Since 1987, March has been recognized as National Women's History Month. Upon realizing that schools seldom emphasized the role that women have played throughout history, Congress dedicated a month to raise awareness of the often-overlooked impact that women have had on our society.

Alzheimer's care and diagnosis is another arena in which women's contributions must be recognized. A recent article suggests that Alzheimer's disease has a disproportionate impact on women over men in two ways.

First, women are much more likely than men to be caregivers for individuals suffering from Alzheimer's disease and dementia. Recent statistics indicate that women are 2.5 times more likely than men to provide around-the-clock care for a family member suffering from Alzheimer's. Nearly nineteen percent of these female caregivers have needed to quit their jobs in order to provide this care. Thus, in addition to the emotional roller-coaster of watching a loved one's health deteriorate and facing the often-thankless task of providing care (which, due to changes in the patient's personality, may even be met with hostility), they may encounter financial troubles as they no longer have a steady source of income. These financial hardships could have lasting effects, with the now-unemployed worker unable to accrue a meaningful savings for her own eventual retirement.

Alzheimer's disproportionately affects women in a second way, too, as evidence shows that two-thirds of the current Alzheimer's patients in the United States are women. Part of this astounding figure could be explained by longevity, since women statistically live longer than men. However, scientists are beginning to research whether

genetic, biological, or lifestyle factors may also play a role in the increased likelihood that women will develop this disease.

For example, one team of researchers is examining whether the onset of Alzheimer's is linked to the way women's brains often process stress and anxiety. Additionally, numerous studies have shown that exercising one's brain may decrease the risk of dementia, but many older women may not have been afforded the same educational opportunities as men of their generation.

While it is important to memorialize the impact that women have had in history, it is also vital to recognize and raise awareness of women's roles in the Alzheimer's arena - both as caregivers and patients.

Sources: <http://www.nwhp.org/womens-history-month/womens-history-month-history/>, <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/mind-guest-blog/alzheimers-falls-more-heavily-on-women-than-on-men/>