Sample chapter

**4 effect on carers**

***“I don’t want her back here! She is a thief! I’m going to report her to the police!” Essie***

Due to the emotional impact, those who care for a relative or loved one with delusions of theft are at increased risk of developing anxiety, depression and feelings of guilt and loss. Carers are vulnerable to social pressure and stigma about their loved one’s behaviour which can affect their physical health and cause psychological distress. This ongoing and relentless stress on the carer, ultimately impacts the care they are providing to the person with Dementia.

Most carers who provide care for those suffering from delusions of theft are informal carers and have a connection with the cared for person, either being a spouse, relative, friend or neighbour. Many provide unpaid care and make sacrifices in order to support their loves ones. Caring can be physically, mentally and emotionally draining, as well as impacting on work and finances. To add to that the additional pressure of accusations of theft can be overwhelming for a carer, especially if they find themselves the person “accused”. Many carers are likely to take things personally and be offended that their loved one could believe that the incidence ever occurred. Other carers will just ignore accusations, expecting delusions to be short term and wait for all to return to normal. However, if the situation fails to rectify itself in a short space of time, carers may feel a range of emotions including frustration or even anger, believing that the person with Dementia is just being difficult or vindictive. Any historic relational issues will make the situation more hurtful and painful for the carer which can become a barrier to carers providing sensitive and appropriate care.

*“After that I realised something was wrong with her. She accused me of lots of different things, but by that time I had stopped talking to her. I decided I would not go back to her house. When someone comes and accuses you, you keep your distance” Rosie*

The long-term result may be that many carers find themselves unable to take the barrage of accusations, insults and emotional trauma involved in being around their loved ones. They may eventually withdraw emotionally and sometimes withdraw their support physically by relocating or ending their caring role. The burden of caring for someone with delusion of theft and the impact of any reduction in support from carers may be a factor in earlier admittance to residential care for an older person due to emotional burnout of the main carer. If the person with Dementia remains in the community however, delusions of this kind can put people with Dementia at an increased risk of abuse. A study of carers in 1993 suggested that carers experiencing abuse from those suffering from Dementia were at a higher risk of being abusive back. This study suggested that there was a relationship between the high psychological and physical demands placed on carers and elder abuse.

Carers that continue to care during episodes of delusions of theft have reported feeling a high level of stress, experiencing low mood and insomnia and even feeling suicidal. Carers can feel isolated and scapegoated especially if accusations are believed by family and community. Just when a supportive network is most needed, family and support networks can be negatively impacted with people taking sides of who they believe is telling the truth. In my family, the first person to be targeted on a consistent basis was my older sister, Rosie. Essie accused Rosie of stealing plates, clothes and hats for years. Watching close hand, I know these accusations have been deeply hurtful for Rosie and have had a negative impact on her relationship with her mother despite her understanding of Dementia.

*“My daughter Kandaze was about 9 or 10 years old and I remember her running up and down the corridor crying. I remember Kandaze crying and I was thinking, look at what the child is seeing. From that day, she couldn’t really get close to her grandmother. It affected her relationship with her grandmother because her grandmother was making all that noise. She was seeing her mum so upset and all over plates” Rosie*