

Caregiver burden in dementia during the COVID-19 crisis

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Caregivers of people with dementia and milder forms of neurocognitive disorder bear a heavy burden. They are constantly confronted with challenging symptoms and behaviors and feel they are up against their

limits. The latest results from a study indicate that the COVID-19 crisis affects this burden since the pandemic has mental health implications.

Scientists and clinicians from the universities of Athens and Patras and the Corporation for Succor and Care of Elderly and Disabled-FRODIZO studied the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on caregiver distress. They contacted during the first lockdown in Greece carers of people with a neurocognitive disorder of the psychogeriatric unit at the Eginition Hospital in Athens, the Patras dementia day center, and the psychogeriatric department for neurocognitive assessment at the Patras office of the Hellenic Red Cross.

Based on a standardized questionnaire, they asked caregivers over the telephone about difficulties of patients with [memory function](#), [neuropsychiatric symptoms](#) such as [depressive mood](#), [sleep problems](#) or anxiety, and last but not least about patients' problems with [everyday activities](#) (e.g., preparing meals, managing household, personal hygiene). In addition, caregivers depicted their distress due to these symptoms and reported their feelings and worries regarding the COVID-19 crisis.

Symptoms related to the pandemic, such as feeling on guard, trouble falling asleep, or concentrating, were significantly associated with caregiver distress due to dementia symptoms. "This clear association highlights the effect of the pandemic on the way difficulties of dementia care are encountered," underscores associate professor Panagiotis Alexopoulos, Department of Psychiatry at the Patras University Hospital at the University of Patras. Progression of memory deficits and neuropsychiatric symptoms also pertained significantly to caregiver burden.

"Our observations are an alarming voice for the support needs of caregivers of people with the neurocognitive disorder during the COVID-19 pandemic since they seem to belong to the hidden victims of

the current crisis," states professor Antonios Politis, head psychiatrist of the old age [mental health services](#) at the Eginition Hospital at the University of Athens.

More information: Panagiotis Alexopoulos et al, COVID-19 Crisis Effects on Caregiver Distress in Neurocognitive Disorder, *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease* (2020). [DOI: 10.3233/JAD-200991](https://doi.org/10.3233/JAD-200991)

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