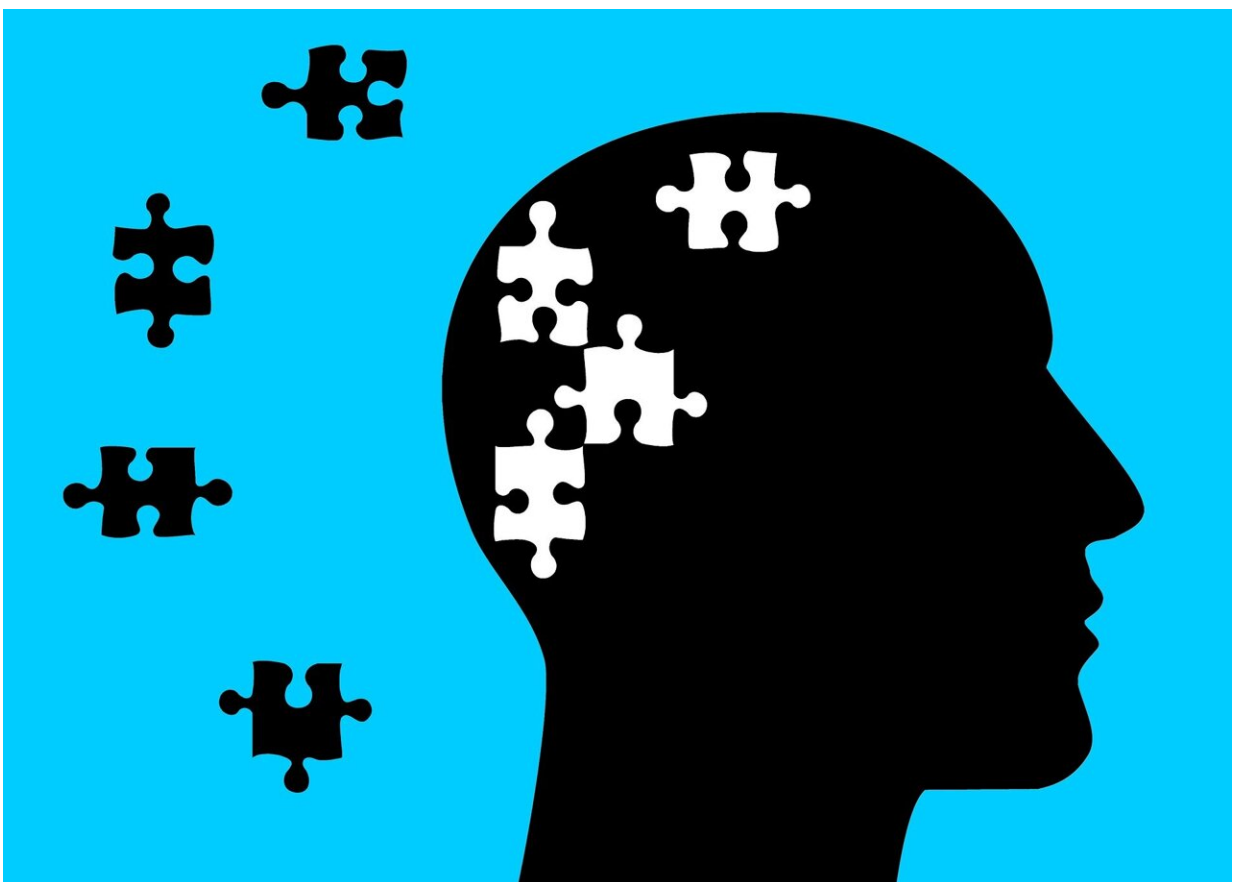


One in three Alzheimer's disease family caregivers has persistent symptoms of depression

September 29 2022



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

More than 60% of family caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's

disease (AD) experienced at least mild depressive symptoms already at the time the individual with AD was diagnosed. In one third of them, depressive symptoms worsened during a five-year follow-up.

The study carried out at the University of Eastern Finland included 226 [family caregivers](#) of individuals with AD. Depressive symptoms experienced by family caregivers were monitored for five years, starting from the diagnosis of the individual with AD. 61.5% of family caregivers experienced depressive symptoms at the time the individual with AD was diagnosed.

In more than half of them, depressive symptoms remained mild during the follow-up and even diminished in some few cases, but one third experienced an increase in depressive symptoms. In family caregivers whose depressive symptoms worsened during the follow-up, symptoms increased especially in the third and fifth year after the diagnosis of the individual with AD.

Family caregivers whose symptoms worsened were typically women caring for their spouse, and the spouse had more neuropsychiatric symptoms. However, the functional ability of the individual with AD, or the severity of their disease, were not associated with family caregivers' [depressive symptoms](#).

Depressive symptoms weaken, for their part, family caregivers' health. So far, data on how these symptoms change over the years of giving family care, and how family caregivers differ from one another, have been scarce.

Family caregivers' health and well-being should be monitored, too

"According to this study, about one third of family caregivers experience persistent depression when giving family care. It seems that the severity or progression of the memory disorder does not explain family caregivers' symptoms, but they are rather related to individual backgrounds," says Adjunct Professor Tarja Välimäki from the Department of Nursing Science at the University of Eastern Finland.

"Family caregivers enter the caregiving situation, which often lasts many years, from different backgrounds, and these differences persist."

The results support earlier findings of the ALSOVA study suggesting that it would be possible to identify those family caregivers who accumulate several strain factors during the years of giving care. Family care also involves maintaining the health and good life of family caregivers.

"It is important to consider the health of the family [caregiver](#) already when looking into the situation of the individual with AD. Assessment and continuous monitoring of family caregivers' health and well-being should be included in the treatment of memory disorders," Välimäki says.

The study, published in *Clinical Gerontologist*, was carried out as part of the ALSOVA study at the University of Eastern Finland, which has conducted a five-year follow-up of individuals with a recently diagnosed AD and their family caregivers. The multidisciplinary study combines medical, therapeutic, economic, pharmacological and psychological expertise. All study participants diagnosed with AD were examined and treated in accordance with the current care guidelines for Alzheimer's disease.

More information: Tarja Välimäki et al, Different Trajectories of Depressive Symptoms in Alzheimer's Disease Caregivers—5-Year

Follow-Up, *Clinical Gerontologist* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/07317115.2022.2119183](https://doi.org/10.1080/07317115.2022.2119183)

Provided by University of Eastern Finland

Citation: One in three Alzheimer's disease family caregivers has persistent symptoms of depression (2022, September 29) retrieved 25 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-09-alzheimer-disease-family-caregivers-persistent.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.