

# New research led sheds light on the behavioral and psychological symptoms of Alzheimer's and related dementias

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A study offering insights into understanding and managing the behavioral and psychological symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and

related dementias led by a team of UTHealth Houston researchers has been [published](#) in *Alzheimer's & Dementia*.

Carolyn Pickering, Ph.D., RN, professor and Isla Carrol Turner Chair in Gerontological Nursing at Cizik School of Nursing at UTHealth Houston and a noted expert in dementia family caregiving, led the research applying an innovative framework to identify patterns of behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia.

Her research distinguishes between general profiles of symptoms common among different people, known as subsyndromes, and the way symptoms group together based on daily variations in symptoms experienced by individuals, referred to as [symptom](#) clusters.

"Behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia can vary within the same person due to factors like the [time of day](#), [noise levels](#), and even hydration status," said Pickering, first and corresponding author on the study, and head of the Pickering Caregiver Lab team, a research hub to advance the care of people with dementia.

"Our study is significant because it offers a new way of thinking about how to manage symptoms for persons living with dementia that may be more effective than current approaches that tend to lump all symptoms together as one experience."

The study followed 68 family members who live with and care for [family members](#) living with dementia. Caregivers reported daily on their loved ones' 23 different symptoms related to dementia, including eating difficulties, uncooperativeness, delusions, depression, anxiety, apathy, and wandering, producing a total of 443 daily reports over the course of eight days. To analyze the data, Pickering and her team used a novel statistical method that considered the variation within each person and between different people.

Researchers noted a high occurrence of possible delirium in home care settings, usually associated with hospitals. The finding highlights the need for better awareness and education on how caregivers can manage delirium at home.

"By understanding and addressing both subsyndromes and symptom clusters, we can create new and targeted ways to help health care professionals and caregivers manage dementia symptoms more effectively," said Pickering. "This comprehensive approach will improve the quality of care and support for individuals with [dementia](#) and their families."

**More information:** Carolyn E. Z. Pickering et al, Subsyndromes and symptom clusters: Multilevel factor analysis of behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia with intensive longitudinal data, *Alzheimer's & Dementia* (2024). [DOI: 10.1002/alz.14075](https://doi.org/10.1002/alz.14075)

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