# National Institute of Nursing Research: Depressive Symptoms in Spousal Caregivers

*The researchers utilize a specific type of longitudinal analysis ('Latent Class Trajectory Analysis' or LCTA) in an effort to improve understanding of the changes over time in the depressive symptoms of spousal caregivers of elderly men with dementia.*

## Lead Agency:

National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR)/National Institutes of Health (NIH)

## Agency Mission:

The mission of NINR is to support research to establish the evidence base for patient care across the lifespan. From premature infants in the neonatal intensive care unit, to middle-aged adults with chronic illness and elders at the end of life, NINR-supported research focuses on developing innovative and effective techniques and interventions that prevent disease and disability, and improve quality of life and health outcomes for patients and their caregivers.

## Principal Investigator:

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## General Description:

### Depresive Symptoms in Spousal Caregivers

Approximately 7 million persons in the United States provide informal care to a family member aged 65 or older who is suffering from a long-term debilitating illness or disability. Virtually all of the more than 5 million Americans living with Alzheimer's disease in the community receive such care. Caregiving has been found to be costly and, on balance, impacts caregivers. As the prevalence of caregiving is anticipated to increase to 40 million persons caring for 28 million elderly disabled persons by 2050, development of statistical procedures such as 'Latent Class Trajectory Analysis (LCTA),' provides new techniques to identify the effects of spousal caregiving on caregiver depressive symptoms.

Respondents to the National Longitudinal Caregiver Survey were used to identify data on 1,580 spousal caregivers of veterans with dementia. The mean number of depressive symptoms was measured using the *Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale* (*CES-D*, 20-item scale). Although the overall mean depressive symptoms of wife caregivers (6.2 of 20) was below the minimum value (8 or 9 of 20) associated with clinical depression, approximately one in three caregivers, throughout the study period, had a number of depressive symptoms that were consistent with true clinical depression.

***Excellence***:  What makes this project exceptional?

Although there is a significant body of research on the relationship between caregiver burden and depressive symptoms, little is understood about how these depressive symptoms change over time for the caregiver population as well as for specific subgroups of caregivers.  In this study the researchers utilized an innovative statistical analysis method (LCTA) to examine and uncover key trends in depressive symptoms experienced by spousal caregivers of men with dementia.

***Significance***:  How is this research relevant to older persons, populations and/or an aging society?

As the U.S. population ages and there are fewer younger persons to care for the elderly, spousal caregiving is likely to become more prevalent. More work is needed to determine the need for and feasibility of screening for depressive symptoms in these caregivers.

***Effectiveness***:  What is the impact and/or application of this research to older persons?

Methods such as LCTA may help improve the understanding of caregiver symptoms over time, as well as identify caregivers at risk for depression.

***Innovativeness***:  Why is this research exciting or newsworthy?

Through their use of an innovative statistical method for studying trajectories in longitudinal data ('Latent Class Trajectory Analysis' or LCTA), the researchers have successfully identified important depressive symptom subgroups of spousal caregivers.