



In a study by the University of California, Irvine, Program in Geriatrics published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2010 Mar;58(3):493-500), nearly half of the people with dementia who participated had been mistreated. One hundred twenty-nine persons diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or a related disorder and their caregivers were seen in their homes. The researchers determined that

- 47% of participants with dementia (61) had been mistreated by their caregivers.
- Specifically, 42% (54) experienced psychological abuse, 10% (13) physical abuse and 14% (18) caregiver neglect.

An expert panel met monthly throughout the study, considered the evidence, and decided on occurrences of psychological abuse, physical abuse, and neglect. The pairs of people with dementia and their caregivers were assessed for evidence of mistreatment as well as factors that might be related to mistreatment. Most of the data was provided by the caregivers. The following factors or characteristics of the caregivers and the participants with dementia were risk factors for one or more types of mistreatment.

- *Caregiver*: higher anxiety, more depressive symptoms, fewer social contacts, greater perceived burden, as well as two other measures of poor emotional well-being from a widely used survey.
- *Person with dementia*: more psychological aggression (for example, swearing at the caregiver) and any physical assault (for example pushing or shoving the caregiver) behaviors.\*

The best combination of factors for predicting which people with dementia have been mistreated is their own behavior toward their caregiver, i.e., *physical assault* and *psychological aggression of the person with dementia*. The findings suggest that caregivers can be asked about the behavior of the person with dementia that they care for and based on their responses, follow-up questions about their own behavior may bring to light a mistreatment situation.

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\* It is important to note that the study does not determine whether these behaviors preceded or followed the mistreatment.