


# Evaluation of an Assessment Battery for Estimating Dementia Caregiver Needs for Health and Social Care Services

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** The aim of this study was to examine a battery of questionnaires for assessing the personal resources and vulnerabilities of family caregivers of persons with dementia (Alzheimer or other). **Methods:** A cross-sectional survey design was used to obtain dementia caregiver responses to questionnaires that targeted caregiver stress response, physical/mental health status, self-efficacy, personality, and social support. **Results:** A personality factor (neuroticism) explained over 20% of the variance in caregiver mental health status and depression. With caregiver distress as the dependent variable, personality and self-efficacy accounted for 15% to 17% of the explained variance. **Conclusions:** The results suggest that measures of personality factors, self-efficacy, mental health status, and distress response could be used for assessing caregiver vulnerabilities and health service needs. This individualized approach could ensure allocation of multicomponent intervention programs that have been shown to be more effective in sustaining caregiver role functions.

## Keywords

caregivers, assessment, service needs, dementia

## Introduction

Despite the fact that health care systems universally depend on family caregivers to provide much of the physical and social care needed by patients with dementia, there is little acknowledgment of caregiver needs when health support services are allocated. Rather, the quantity and intensity of community and health care support services provided are estimated according to the level of deterioration and autonomous functioning capacity of the patient with dementia. Consequently, assessment tools have focused primarily on determining the patient's level of functioning in terms of managing activities of daily living (ADLs) and instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs).<sup>1</sup>

While families willingly provide health care to dependent family members, they need health and social support services to ward off deterioration of their own physical and mental health which, left unattended, can result in premature admission of the care recipient to institutional care. An assessment system focused on determining caregiver resources and vulnerabilities can assist community health and social welfare providers to understand what caregivers need to manage caring tasks without compromising their own health status.

While a number of caregiver self-report assessment tools exist, few are used by health care and social service agencies to systematically assess caregiver needs.<sup>2</sup> The American Medical Association has developed a brief self-assessment questionnaire that health professionals can use to infer service

needs for caregivers.<sup>3</sup> Two caregiver assessment tools, that provide a comprehensive overview of caregiver burden, stress, and difficulties, provide important information for determining health care service needs; however, both are lengthy and require considerable amount of clinical professionals' time to be trained, administer, and interpret the responses.<sup>4,5</sup> Several organizations provide guidelines for identifying areas of risk for caregivers.<sup>6</sup> Some of the reviewed caregiver assessment tools are not based on a coherent conceptual framework, while others draw on a stress coping model to assess caregivers' needs.<sup>7</sup> Some of the tools can be used to assess caregiver needs in a broad spectrum of caregiver situations<sup>4</sup>; others are specific to caregiving with regard to a specific disease.<sup>8</sup>

## Conceptual Framework

For dementia caregivers, the degree of stress experienced is often related to the stage of dementia severity,<sup>9</sup> the number and

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