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### **Predictors of depressive symptoms in bereaved caregivers: a nation-wide prospective cohort study**

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**Background:** Depression in bereaved caregivers is an important health problem that leads to poor quality of life and increased health care use. The aim of this prospective study was to investigate predictors of depressive symptoms in bereaved caregivers.

**Methods:** Patients receiving drug reimbursement for terminal illness in Denmark in 2012 were mailed a questionnaire and requested to pass it on to their closest relative. Responding caregivers bereaved within six months also received a follow-up questionnaire six months after the loss. Depressive symptoms were assessed with Beck Depression Inventory-II. The following determinants were included in the analyses: pre-loss grief symptoms, pre-loss depressive symptoms, caregiver burden, preparedness for death, communication about dying, age, gender, relation and educational level.

**Results:** Participants comprised 3,635 caregivers at baseline (response 38%). At the end of the study, 2,420 caregivers were bereaved. Of these bereaved caregivers, 2,125 (88%) participated at follow-up. Severe pre-loss grief symptoms (OR=1.8 (95% CI: 1.2-2.8)), pre-loss depressive symptoms (OR=10.7 (95% CI: 7.3-15.8)), spousal relation (OR=1.8 (95% CI: 1.2-2.7)), low education (OR=1.7 (95% CI: 1.0-2.8)) and female gender (OR=1.6 (95% CI: 1.1-2.4)) were predictors of post-loss depressive symptoms.

**Conclusions:** Severe symptoms of grief and depression during caregiving along with being a spouse, low educational level and female gender may predict depression during bereavement. General practitioners and other health professionals should keep these factors in mind in the contact with caregivers during end-of-life patient trajectories as support for psychological distress during caregiving may both help caregivers during caregiving and diminish depressive symptoms during bereavement.