

ABSTRACT
DEVELOPING CAREGIVER RELATIONSHIPS
FOR PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA: A
GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

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There were 6 million people living with dementia in 2020 and 24 million caregivers in 2022 in the United States of America (US) (Rajan et al., 2021; Wolff et al., 2025). It is estimated that the number of people with dementia will continue to climb as well as the number of caregivers.

The purpose of this study was to understand the process of how caregiving relationships are formed for a person with dementia (PWD), what the milestones are in the process, and when these relationships accepted outside assistance. Grounded theory was utilized as the research questions drive method (Charmaz, 2025). The literature review described the process of symptom identification, diagnosis, and adjustment. These studies are missing the perspective from the US, milestones of dementia caregiving, and when relationships accept outside help.

A study was completed with 20 caregivers who were spouses, siblings, adult children, and adult grandchildren. Caregivers described core concepts of the relationships before diagnosis, recognizing changes, seeking answers, managing symptoms, and seeking outside assistance. Milestones identified in the PWD were cessation of driving, unable to use technology, cannot leave alone, and loss of recognition. Outside assistance was obtained when the caregiver felt they could not leave the person alone. This study shows the development of the caregiving relationship, as well as the milestones. A major finding was the effect of driving cessation on the caregiver's identification of that role.