



Family/friend caregiving in Canada: Gender matters

Making a meaningful difference in the lives of older adults and their families by bridging research, policies and practice

Summary

Caregiving has traditionally been perceived as largely “women’s work”. However, economic and social realities are changing, with more women in the labour force and more men involved in domestic work than before. This calls for a re-examination of the gendered nature of caregiving and the consequences of providing care for both women and men caregivers. Using Statistics Canada’s 2002 General Social Survey (GSS) on aging and social support, we drew a sub-sample of people aged 45 and over who had provided assistance in the last year to an adult aged 65 or older with long-term health problems. We compared the characteristics of, and consequences faced by, men and women family/friend caregivers who provide care to older adults in Canada. We found that:

- Personal attributes like age and place of residence were similar for men and women caregivers; nearly half were aged 59-74 and three-quarters lived in urban areas.
- More men than women caregivers were married, had children under 15, and were employed full-time, demands which compete for their time. More women than men caregivers worked part-time or were not employed, perhaps as a way of managing the time required to provide care to older adults.
- Caring responsibilities differed slightly between men and women caregivers, with more men having cared for 2 years or more, cared for 2 or more persons, and cared for a parent(-in-law) or non-kin.
- Gender differences were noted on all measures of physical, social, and emotional consequences of care, with more women than men caregivers reporting negative consequences. In contrast, men and women caregivers reported equally the positive benefits of providing care.
- Caregiving affects employment, especially for women. More women than men caregivers reduced their hours of work or changed their work patterns; as a result their incomes also were reduced.
- More than one-third of all caregivers incurred extra out-of-pocket expenses, with few gender differences observed.
- More women caregivers incur economic costs. While few caregivers overall made decisions that affect future earnings, women caregivers were more likely than men to quit their jobs, decline a promotion, or postpone educational opportunities because of their care responsibilities.
- Gender differences in the impact of caregiving affirm the need for a gendered lens in developing policies and programs that better support both men and women family/friend caregivers and reduce their negative consequences.
- Additional research is needed to explore the attributes that place men and women caregivers at greatest risk of negative outcomes.

Men and women have gendered roles in society. While taking care of family members has traditionally been perceived as largely work done by women, the economic and social realities of our society are changing. There is a growing need for double-income households, due in part to the increased cost of living and lifestyle choices. As well, more women are in the labor force and men are more involved in domestic work than before. As a result, the traditional gender role boundaries between work and family life are becoming blurred. How might this blurring influence family/friend care to older adults? In this study we re-examine the gender differences in caregiving and the consequences of providing care to older adults.

Research objectives

- To describe men and women family/friend caregivers in Canada who provide assistance to older adults.
- To examine the gender differences in consequences of care for family/friend caregivers of older adults.

Data

We analyzed Statistics Canada's 2002 General Social Survey (GSS) on aging and social support. From the total sample of 24,870 respondents aged 45 and older, we drew a sub-sample of 4,621 people

who had provided assistance in the last year to an adult aged 65 or older who had long-term health problems. Care tasks included: housekeeping, meal preparation, outdoor maintenance, transportation, banking/bills, shopping, and personal care. Those who provided only care management, checking up, or emotional support were not included.

Analysis

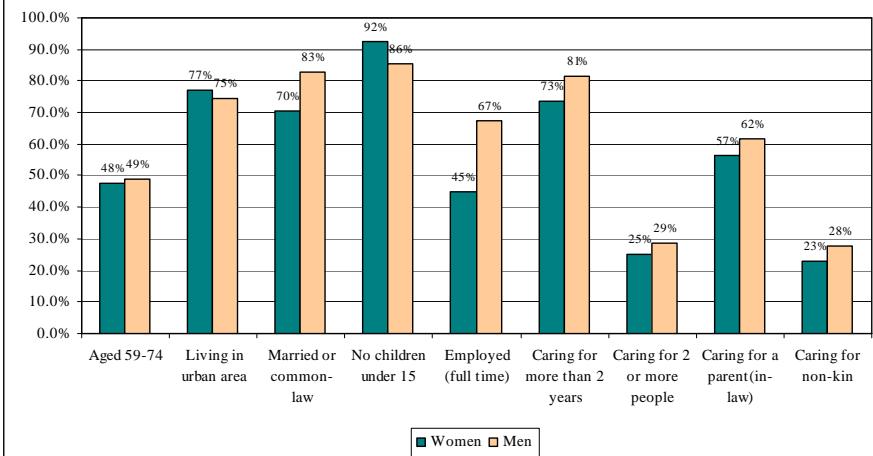
We used descriptive statistics to examine the characteristics of male and female Canadian family/friend caregivers and the impact that providing care had on their lives. Data were weighted to ensure that the sample was representative of the Canadian population. Because we were interested in gender differences, data were analyzed separately for women and men caregivers. Just over half the sample (54.4%) was female (F); 45.6% was male (M).

Personal attributes were similar by gender

The age distribution of caregivers was similar for men and women (see Figure 1). Almost half of caregivers were 59 to 74 years old (47.7% F. vs. 48.8% M.) and more than 40% were between 45 and 59 years of age (42.4% F. vs. 42.8% M.). Not surprisingly given gender differences in life expectancy, slightly more women than men caregivers were 75 years of age and older (9.9% F. vs. 8.4% M.).

Men and women caregivers were also similar in terms of their place of residence. Around three-quarters of men and women caregivers lived in urban areas (77.2% F. vs. 74.6% M.); one-quarter lived in rural areas. This is similar to the distribution of the population at large.

Figure 1: Characteristics of Canadian Caregivers by Gender



More men caregivers had competing demands

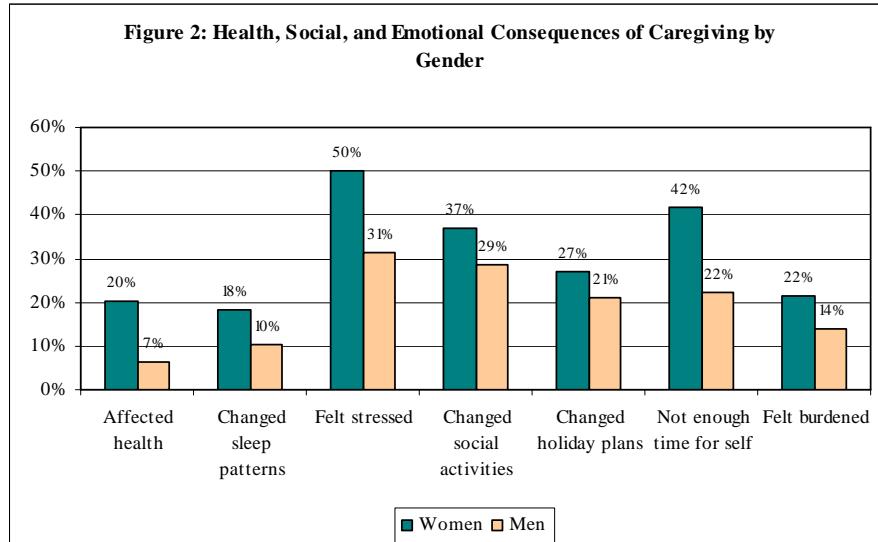
Men and women caregivers differed somewhat in their competing demands (see Figure 1). More men than women caregivers were married or in a common-law relationship (70.5% F. vs. 82.8% M.). Twice as many men as women caregivers had children under the age of 15 (7.6% F. vs. 14.2% M.). This may be because the sample was restricted to people aged 45 and women tend to marry men who are older than them.

Over two-thirds of men caregivers over age 45 were employed full time in contrast with less than half of women caregivers (44.8% F. vs. 67.4% M.). However, nearly three times as many women as men caregivers worked part-time (18.6% F. vs. 7% M.) and 1 ½ times as many women as men caregivers were not employed (36.6% F. vs. 25.6% M.).

Perhaps women's lower attachment to the labour force is a way of managing their unpaid care responsibilities.

Caring responsibilities differ slightly by gender

There were slight differences between men and women caregivers in terms of who they cared for and for how long. More than half of caregivers cared for a parent (-in-law), and slightly more men than women



did so (56.6% F. vs. 61.8% M.). About one-quarter of caregivers cared for non-kin, slightly more men than women (22.8% F. vs. 27.5% M.). More women than men cared for distant kin (10.4% F. vs. 9.2% M.) or a spouse (5.6% F. vs. 3.8% M.). Caring for a spouse may be under-reported because married people may consider their spousal support as 'care' only if their spouse is very ill or frail.

Many caregivers had been providing care for 2 years or more, slightly more men than women (73.4% F. vs. 81.4% M.). Over ¼ of all caregivers cared for 2 or more persons, but slightly more men than women did so (25.2% F. vs. 28.6% M.). These figures underscore the significant commitment caregivers make.

Women incurred more caregiving consequences

Gender differences were noted on all measures of physical,

social, and emotional consequences of care, with more women than men caregivers experiencing negative consequences (see Figure 2).

One in 5 women caregivers felt that their **physical health** was affected, while only 1 in 15 of their male counterparts reported health impacts (20.2% F. vs. 6.5% M.). Almost twice as many women as men caregivers reported that caregiving changed their sleep patterns (18.1% F. vs. 10.3% M.). Half of women caregivers felt stressed because of their care responsibilities, but only one-third of their male counterparts did (49.9% F. vs. 31.4% M.).

Caregiving also impacted the **social well-being** of women more than men. More women than men changed their social activities (37.1% F. vs. 28.5% M.) and holiday plans (27.2% F. vs. 21.2% M.) to accommodate caregiving.

As well, providing care affected women caregivers' **emotional well-being** much more than their male peers. Twice as many women as men caregivers reported not having enough personal time (41.9% F. vs. 22.2% M.). Over 1 in 5 women caregivers felt moderately to extremely burdened by their caring responsibilities while only 1 in 7 men felt similarly burdened. More women than men caregivers always or sometimes felt angry (19.3% F. vs. 12.6% M.), wished others would take over their caregiving duties (33.2% F. vs. 19.78% M.), or wished others would help them more (30.3% F. vs. 25.7% M.).

More women reported employment impacts

In comparison to men, more women caregivers reported employment-related impacts. One in 7 women and 1 in 10 men reduced their hours of work to accommodate caregiving.

Similarly, 1 in 5 women caregivers changed their work patterns to accommodate caregiving, but only 1 in 8 men did so (19% F. vs. 12.6% M.).

More women incur economic costs

Women caregivers also experienced greater economic consequences than men. Nearly 1 ½ times more women than men caregivers reported reduced income because of their unpaid care (9.8% F. vs. 6.6% M.). More than one-third of all caregivers incurred extra out-of-pocket expenses because of caregiving, but slightly more women than men did so (39.9% F. vs. 36.7% M.).

Overall, few caregivers made decisions that affected future earnings. Caregiving caused 2% of women caregivers to quit their jobs (the value for men is too small to report). Similar proportions of women and men declined a promotion (2.7% F.

and 2.4% M.), while more than twice as many women as men postponed educational opportunities (5.5% F. vs. 2.2% M.), decisions that would likely reduce their incomes.

Despite the greater toll that caregiving takes on women, they reported **positive consequences** almost equally as often as men caregivers. A similar proportion of men and women caregivers felt that caregiving allowed them to give back what others had given them (80.9% F. vs. 77.2% M.) and that it strengthened their relationship with the person they cared for (91.4% F. vs. 89.7% M.).

Implications

Women experience more health, social, emotional, employment-related, and economic consequences because of their care work than men. Such gender differences affirm the need for a gendered lens in developing policies and programs that better support men and women family/friend caregivers and reduce their negative consequences.

Additional research is needed to explore the attributes that place men and women caregivers at greatest risk of negative outcomes.



This fact sheet was written by Julia Rozanova, RAPP doctoral student.