

The Juggling Act of Caregiving

Balancing Career, Health,
and Gender Roles



Wilson
Center



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THE JUGGLING ACT OF CAREGIVING: BALANCING CAREER, HEALTH, AND GENDER ROLES

Caregiving—the act of providing assistance and support to another person—is critical to the fabric of society. Caregiving for the young, elderly, sick, and disabled is a necessary part of human existence, but is often undervalued and excluded from policy agendas. Caring for another person can have a positive effect on a caregiver's life, but the lack of societal value on caregiving and the absence of supportive policies for caregivers can diminish this positive reward. Moreover, the pressure to manage multiple roles can significantly impact a caregiver's physical well-being, mental health, financial state, and career trajectory.

“There are only four kinds of people in the world: Those who have been caregivers; those who currently are caregivers; those who will be caregivers; and those who will need caregivers.”

Rosalynn Carter, Former First Lady of the United States

Paid caregiving is set to become the largest occupation in the United States. The UN Women's *Progress of the World's Women Report* acknowledged, “Domestic work makes all other work possible.”¹ In the

United States, the caregiving profession is increasingly important on a multigenerational scale. While 60 percent of families do not have a stay-at-home parent², baby boomers—who are currently aging into retirement—are on the brink of requiring care. Consequently, care-sector jobs are growing five times faster than other prominent job sectors and, by 2020, it is projected that caregiving will be the largest occupation in the United States.³ Just as they make up the majority of unpaid caregivers, women also dominate the formal caregiving space and currently take on 85 percent of paid caregiving work.⁴

So, who are the unpaid caregivers? In the United States alone,

- An estimated 43.5 million informal caregivers provide care to someone who is ill, disabled, or elderly.⁵
- Approximately 66 percent of those informal caregivers are women.⁶
- Thirty-seven percent of these female caregivers also have children or grandchildren under the age of 18 living with them.⁷
- Daughters and wives do the majority of caregiving. As more Americans age into retirement, a “conscientious daughter” is often seen as the best chance for a senior's long-term care.⁸
- Female spouses provide significantly more care to their male partners than the reverse.⁹

The Landscape of CAREGIVING

In the United States

43.5 MILLION

PEOPLE ARE UNPAID CAREGIVERS FOR SOMEONE WHO IS ILL, DISABLED, OR AGED



66%

OF UNPAID CAREGIVERS ARE WOMEN



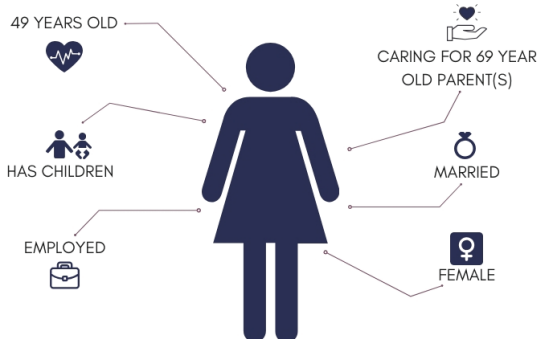
MORE THAN

1/3

OF THESE FEMALE CAREGIVERS ALSO HAVE CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 18 LIVING WITH THEM



A Typical Family CAREGIVER



Women often manage...



paid employment outside the home



unpaid care for elders and young children



unpaid household management



the physical labor of childbearing

Data from PEW Research Center, National Alliance for Caregiving & AARP, United Nations Development Program

Who is the typical informal caregiver in the United States?

The typical informal caregiver is a 49-year-old woman caring for her widowed 69-year-old mother who does not live with her. The caregiver is married and employed.¹⁰ Many women who care for elderly parents also care for young children. Thus, they are “sandwiched” between two generations needing care.

This so-called *sandwich generation* faces its own set of unique challenges, particularly because these care providers are supporting two distinct generations, each with a separate and distinct set of needs. As a result, the elderly and the young simultaneously compete for a sandwich generation caregiver’s time, energy, and resources.

Careers and Caregiving

This juggling act can be hard to balance. Women typically manage paid employment outside the home, provide unpaid care for elders and young children, orchestrate the daily management of the home,¹¹ and often bear the physical toll of pregnancy, delivery, and post-partum recovery.

Professional compromises to accommodate family needs. According to a global survey, more than one in five women feel their role as an unpaid caregiver has negatively affected their career.¹² In comparison to their male counterparts, women providing care were twice as likely to report that taking time away from work had taken a toll on their career.¹³

Women, for example, are more likely to adjust their schedules and make compromises in their professional lives to accommodate family and children than men.¹⁴ To adapt to the demands of caregiving, about one-third of women caregivers reduce their hours of paid employment or are compelled to give up their paid jobs completely.¹⁵ Similarly, women are about three times more likely than their male counterparts to report that they quit a job so they could care for a family member.¹⁶

Women burdened with long-term financial costs of caregiving.

Fewer work hours or leaving the paid work force entirely has more than just an immediate impact on women’s financial well-being. Unfortunately, the

The Impact of Caregiving on Women's Careers



1/3

of women caregivers reduce their hours of paid employment

Labor force trends are ahead of gender role trends



While women represent nearly **half of the workforce** in the United States, they are still spending more time each week devoted to housework and childcare than men.



This can be over **20 hours** of caregiving per Week.



And while **70%** of Americans believe that having a father working full-time would be ideal for young children, only **16%** believe the same for mothers.

Data from PEW Research Center, EMD Serono, and Women's Brain Project.

long-term implications of unemployment, like reduced pensions and retirement funds, often cause women to suffer when they are older.¹⁷ The estimated loss on average, for women caregivers who leave the workforce early, is over \$324,000, while the average loss for male caregivers is approximately \$283,000.¹⁸ This financial stress is often exacerbated by the high costs associated with providing care for an elderly, disabled, or chronically ill individual.

According to a recent study, "The Journey of Caregiving," 68 percent of family caregivers are financial contributors, spending an estimated \$190 billion a year on their care recipients for out-of-pocket, care-related expenses.¹⁹ Most caregivers do not plan for the financial outlays associated with caregiving.

Current labor force trends have moved ahead of gender roles. Women represent nearly half of the workforce in the United States, but they are still spending more time each week devoted to housework and childcare than men.²⁰

Many American women work full-time and provide 20 hours of caregiving per week.²¹ This is the equivalent of another part-time job.

Because gender roles have not evolved at the same rate as labor force trends, there is still a discrepancy in perceived responsibilities between men and women when it comes to caretaking. When looking at social trends, 79 percent of Americans said they did not want to see women return to more traditional roles,²² and yet only 16 percent said that having a mother working full-time is what is best for young children. In direct contrast, 70 percent of Americans said that having a father working full-time would be ideal for small children.²³

Caregiving often lacks flexibility for women. While society often expects women to reduce their work hours to provide the more tangible, physical assistance often required for elder care, societal pressures encourage men to remain in the workforce in order to contribute financially for their ailing family member. Whereas male caregivers might pay for health services, take over bills and finances, provide transportation, or go shopping, women often find themselves tasked with activities that are harder to schedule around paid work²⁴—such as dressing, bathing, feeding, cleaning, and administering multiple prescription medications (just to name a few). This lack of flexibility

further limits a woman's ability to create work-life balance, which can lead to their diminished health.

“Both men and women should have the opportunity and joy of caring for one’s family and combining this with work.”²⁵

Felicia Knaul, Ph.D., international health economist

Health of Caregivers

Caregiving impacts the health of the care provider. Caregiving responsibilities can take an enormous toll on the physical and mental health of the caregiver. Informal caregivers often suffer from mental and emotional stress related to their role as a care provider,²⁶ and this stress can increase the risk of various stress-related diseases and mental health disorders.²⁷ Women juggling *both* elder care and childcare face an even greater risk for depression, chronic illness, and a diminished quality of life than their caregiving counterparts.²⁸

Caregivers tend not to make time for self-care. Many of the major health issues that often beset caregivers stem from having too little time to take proper care of their own health needs. Such issues include sleep deprivation, poor eating habits, lack of exercise, failure to stay in bed when ill, and postponement or disregard of the caregiver's own medical appointments.²⁹ Women in particular struggle to maintain their own self-care³⁰ and often give up personal and leisure time to work a “second shift”³¹ fulfilling both domestic duties and caregiving responsibilities in addition to their paid work.³² Caregivers are also prone to excessive use of alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. This lack of self-care makes caregivers more vulnerable to chronic illnesses like high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and obesity,³³ in addition to elevated insulin, heart problems, and weakened immunities.³⁴

Caregiving and depression are commonly linked. A conservative estimate reports that 20 percent of informal caregivers suffer from depression, which is twice the rate of the general population.³⁵ Due to the constant need

for care, those caring for people with dementia or Alzheimer's are even more likely to have health problems than caregivers of people who do not need constant care.³⁶ For example, studies show these caregivers are twice as likely to be depressed as other groups of caregivers.³⁷

Currently, one in nine adults over 65 are diagnosed with Alzheimer's,³⁸ making this a critical issue as baby boomers continue to age into this vulnerable demographic. It is projected that by 2030, one in five Americans will be 65 or older, and the number of elderly Americans living with dementia is expected to increase to 8.5 million, up from 5.5 million currently.³⁹ The increasing number of seniors needing constant care will greatly influence the health and well-being of the generation caring for them. The physical demands placed upon caregivers are quite challenging, and care providers who give constant care, often say their own poor health was why they ultimately decided to put a family member in a caregiving facility.⁴⁰

Caregiving does not stop at old age. It is quite common for caregivers to continue providing support to a spouse even as they too age into retirement. Women's caregiving often extends into old age, becoming increasingly complex as they simultaneously care for spouses and for grandchildren.⁴¹ Caregiving stress can have a particularly grave impact on older caregivers. Highly strained caregivers over the age of forty-five were found to be almost twice as likely to die over a five-year period than caregivers of the same age who reported less stressful caregiving duties.⁴²

Valuing Caregivers

Supportive policies are rare. Even though 68 percent of women with children under age six are in the workforce, there remains a large gap in policies and directives aimed at helping women who are in both professional and caretaking positions.⁴³ The absence of supportive policies, like paid family leave or telecommuting, makes returning to work after birthing or adopting a child difficult and strenuous. Additionally, failure to account for the demands of caregiving often leads to frequent absenteeism and forgone opportunities to take on high-level proj-

The Impact of Caregiving on Health



20%

of all caregivers suffer from depression, which is two times the national average

Caregivers typically face greater health issues as a result of poor self-care



Sleep deprivation



Poor eating habits



Lack of exercise



Failure to stay in bed when ill



Postponement or cancellation of their own medical appointments



Susceptibility to alcohol, cigarette, and drug additions



Higher likelihood for chronic illness



Greater chance of depression

Data from the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP

ects or promotions, further impeding women's capacity to reach their highest career-related potential.⁴⁴

Policies such as maternity protection legislation, equal hiring employer training, non-transferable parental leave and elderly care policies, flexible schedules, and educational programs can go a long way in balancing caregiving responsibilities and supporting women's economic empowerment. In addition to creating policies, each workplace must also encourage and support both men and women to take offered leave. The success of non-transferable leave has been documented with evidence suggesting that the more involved men become in caregiving, the more able women are to be active members of the workforce and economic stability of their countries. Research also shows that children thrive when there is more than one caregiver and that men can benefit from doing caregiving.⁴⁵ For men to truly be able to take parental leave and be a consistent caregiver, policies need to be available and workplaces need to encourage and support men to take the allocated time.

Millennials could help balance the burden. Despite the prevalence of pre-defined gender roles, there are signs of an upcoming generational shift with millennial men and women equally likely to state that having children would slow their career progress.⁴⁶ Moreover, a recent study showed that half or more of the millennial men surveyed said they spent too little time with their children due to their job.⁴⁷ This may indicate that millennial men are entering the work force with a different set of expectations and beliefs around how to balance work and family than prior generations.

“The benefits to having men do more unpaid care work could fill up pages.”⁴⁸

Gary Barker, Ph.D., CEO and founder, Promundo US

According to the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP), millennials make up 25 percent of America's 40 million unpaid family caregivers, spend an average

of 20 hours per week caring for a parent or family member,⁴⁹ and are increasingly dividing caregiving responsibilities evenly by gender.⁵⁰ As baby boomers age out of caregiving and into being cared for, society will heavily rely on millennials. Currently, however, millennials report facing greater penalties at work for attendance and performance issues due to their caregiving role than their older counterparts.⁵¹ Employers need to create policies and practices that support all their employees, particularly as the caregiving demographic expands and diversifies.

The future of caregiving. While researchers, policy makers, and advocates work to aid in the evolution of caregiving, advances in technology and growing online

platforms are increasingly available to help caregivers better understand their rights, improve their health and well-being, and provide them a community of support.⁵² Looking ahead, innovative policies that support women and men both in the workforce and at home as providers of care could shape a more equitable future for caregivers. If policies evolve so that the burden historically placed on women is more evenly distributed, it will become easier for men and women to share tasks. As a result, the work of caring for others could become less of a burden and more of a shared experience that enriches the lives of caregivers.

* See Appendix A for a list of current online resources related to caregiving and caregiver support.

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Appendix A: Caregiving Resources

Aging Care

Aging Care facilitates an online forum where caregivers can share their experiences and learn from others, helps caregivers find and compare local service providers, and provides helpful, actionable and insightful resources for caregivers, such as articles, e-books, and legal forms produced by professional care experts.

American Association for Retired Persons

AARP provides an array of online resources to support caregivers. These resources include guides on navigating emotional and physical health, home safety tips, financial and legal advice, and provides a platform for caregivers to share their experiences.

Caregiver Action Network

CAN is the nation's leading family caregiver organization working to improve the quality of life for the more than 90 million Americans who care for loved ones. They provide education, peer support, and resources to family caregivers across the country free of charge.

Care.com

Care.com aims to improve the lives of families and caregivers by helping them connect in a reliable and easy way. This growing online platform helps families find caregivers and helps quality caregivers find fulfilling employment.

Care Economy Spotlight

The Wilson Center partnered with Apolitical to create the Care Economy Spotlight, an 18-part article spotlight, to understand the most pertinent issues facing unpaid and paid caregivers in the care economy. The spotlight discusses issues ranging from the effect caregiving has on women's health, to innovative policies that promote gender equality, and finally, how governments can reap economic and social benefits by investing and valuing caregivers.

Embracing Carers

Embracing Carers aims to fill the need for better support and recognition of caregivers. They are focused on improving caregivers' health and wellness, while increasing awareness and support for them within healthcare systems around the globe.

Healthy Women, Healthy Economies Toolkit

The Healthy Women, Healthy Economies initiative strives to unleash the economic power of women by bringing governments, employers and other interested stakeholders together to help improve women's health. The Policy Toolkit classifies recommendations into five areas: workplace health and safety; health access and awareness; sexual and reproductive health; gender-based violence; and work life balance.

Promundo

Promundo provides concrete strategies for engaging men in active caregiving from their partner's pregnancy through their child's early years. They identify best practices on engaging men in maternal and child health, caregiving, and preventing violence against women and children.

Stories for Caregivers

Stories for Caregivers is an initiative developed by The Coup Company to generate awareness about caregiving through the creation of original web series that showcase the inspiring work of caregivers across Canada.



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