

19 Family caregivers are playing an increasingly important role

As people age or if they develop health conditions, they are likely to need care, and this care is commonly provided by family.¹ Driving a sibling to a medical appointment, cooking a meal for a grandparent, picking up a sick relative from school or work—caregiving includes a variety of activities. Many do not even think of these tasks as “caregiving” when they are being provided by family.

Caregiving is receiving growing attention from researchers and policymakers in Canada. This is partly due to the pressures and realities brought about by population aging, which is resulting in age-related needs and disabilities becoming more common.² Since couples today are having fewer children compared with previous generations, family households have also become smaller. This leaves fewer people in younger generations to provide care to family members when needed.

In the 2022 Canadian Social Survey (CSS), approximately one in seven people aged 15 and older (14.4%) provided unpaid care to care-dependent adults and/or youth aged 15 years or older during the past year.³ An additional 5.6% did so while also providing care to a child aged 14 and under (including their own children), an arrangement known as “sandwich caregiving.” More than one in five (21.9%) people aged 15 and older provided care to children under the age of 15.

Women (44.1%) were more likely than men (39.8%) to have provided care in 2022.³ They were also more likely than men to have been sandwich caregivers (6.6% and 4.5%, respectively). Slightly more women (14.7%) than men (14.2%) provided care to care-dependent adults. More than one-fifth of women (22.8%) provided care to children only, while 21.1% of men provided such care.

Families’ living arrangements may be chosen partially with providing care in mind. Almost two-thirds (65%) of those living in multigenerational households in 2022 provided unpaid care.³ In households without a grandparent present, only 42% of adults provided care. People who lived in multigenerational households were more than twice as likely as those who did not to provide sandwich care (14% and 6%, respectively).

The effects of caregiving on the care provider can be wide ranging. Caring for children may be less challenging than caring for adults. In 2022, only 5% of those who provided care for children reported struggling with providing care compared with 15% who cared for adults and 17% of sandwich caregivers.³ Further among those providing care only to adults, 18% reported having fair or poor mental health. For those caring for children and adults, the proportion was even higher at 21%, compared with 14% of those



who cared for children only or who were not caregivers.

Data from the 2018 General Social Survey showed that most caregivers reported that they found their caregiving experience to be rewarding. A similar proportion reported that their caregiving experience was rewarding among those who provided one to three hours of care per week (56%) and those who provided care for 20 hours or more per week (61%).⁴ Not surprisingly, though, those who spent long hours during the week caring for adults were far more likely than those providing one to three hours per week to report having less time for their partner, children, and other family members (86% vs. 53%). They were also more than twice as likely to report that they found their caregiving responsibilities to be stressful or very stressful (54% vs. 19%).

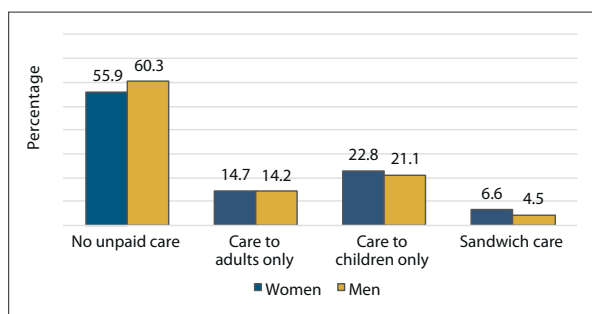
Why this matters

Population aging will continue to increase pressure on health and home care services in the coming decades.² Pressure on family caregivers—who already play an important role in society—will likely increase as a result, with implications for their wellbeing. In addition to supporting the wellbeing of loved ones for no pay, family caregivers make valuable contributions by reducing the social

costs associated with health services and institutionalization (e.g., long-term care residences).⁵

Providing care for a loved one is often viewed as a positive experience that can increase one's sense of competence and purpose.⁶ Young caregivers also report benefits such as a greater awareness of their abilities, feelings of satisfaction, the development of new skills, and enhanced family relationships.⁷ But providing care can also have a negative impact on the wellbeing of family caregivers. This can include time costs, increased stress, and strain on family relationships.⁵ Those who care for children while also providing care to adults with long-term conditions or disabilities face unique challenges and high demands on their time.⁸

Percentage of population aged 15 or older, by gender and type of care, Canada, 2022



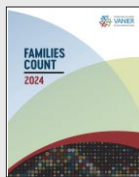
Source: Wray, D. (2024, April 2). "Sandwiched" between unpaid care for children and care-dependent adults: A gender-based study. *Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey*.³



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References

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