



# Gender Differences in Family Caregiving

Darby Morhardt PhD, LCSW

Associate Professor

Cognitive Neurology and Alzheimer's Disease Center

Department of Preventive Medicine

Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine





# Women Predominate Care for Older Adults



- 70-80% of older adults are cared for at home by family
- 57-81% of caregivers are women
- Most female caregivers are wives or adult daughters, middle – aged and substantial number 65+
- Care-receivers are chronically ill, frail, most have dementia
- Female caregivers have higher levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms and lower life satisfaction.
- Women provide care for a longer period of time and more time per day.
- Women have higher level of stressors
  - Fewer social resources
  - Report lower levels of psychological and physical health
- More women work outside the home
- Smaller families increase pressure on men to assume caregiving roles
- 20-33% of caregivers are men and increasing
- It appears that men approach caregiving differently

# Gender Differences in the Caregiving Experience

## Motivation for Providing Care

- Attachment
  - Emotional and social connectedness and sense of family obligation
  - Women appear to be more concerned about the emotional well-being of people for whom they provide care.
- Attitudes
  - Women express greater sense of responsibility towards family member, altruism and self sacrifice

Complex mix of expectation and obligation – also love and gratitude.

Some studies suggest that male caregivers are also driven by similar sense of affection, commitment and family responsibility.

# Gender Differences in the Caregiving Experience

## Time Spent and Duration

- Meta-analytic review of evidence supports women devote greater time to caregiving compared to men
- WHY?
  - Gendered nature of paid work
    - Women are less likely to be employed outside home
    - Women's work roles are viewed as home centered and reflect greater sense of family obligation
- HOWEVER
- There are some inconsistencies on the amount of time spent between men and women
  - Two meta-analytic reviews conclude differences were small
- Agreement that time spent is confounded by other variables
  - Kinship (spouses vs children)
  - Cultural and ethnic influences

# Gender Differences in the Caregiving Experience

## Types of Tasks

- Studies find that women provide more personal care than men; however, differences are small
- Influenced by
  - patient gender
  - disability levels
  - kinship
  - caregivers marital and employments status
  - family composition
  - race/ethnicity

# Gender Differences in the Caregiving Experience

## Role-Strain and Role-Conflict

### Role-Strain

- Occurs when one is unable to meet the expectations and obligations of multiple roles
- Role-overload – competing demands overwhelm the ability to carry out role.
- Role-captivity – feeling trapped in role

### Role-Conflict

- Perceived difficulties fulfilling the caregiver role
- Conflicting and incompatible demands
- Negative consequences emanating from this role

- Studies find that female caregivers experience greater role-strain and role-conflict than male caregivers
- Women have greater interference and limitations in their work and social life due to caregiving
- Greater role strain due to the more intense care they provide leading to greater health problems, less positive outlook on life and greater need for external support.
- Mediated by kinship

# Gender Differences in Family Caregiving

## Probable Explanations

### Sociological –

#### Expectations of traditional gender roles

- Women are expected to adopt the role of caregiver, men are not
- Role socialization: social and cultural experiences from childhood lead to a different approach to caregiving
  - Ingrained in women
  - Historical labor segregation makes women more available
  - Men may be less adept at expressing their difficulties or emotions
  - Men may be less likely to report difficulties in providing care than women
- Empirical support for theory is lacking

### Stress—Coping Theory

- Women have greater exposure to caregiving stressors and differ in appraisal, coping and availability of social support
- Empirical support is lacking

### Differences in coping strategies

- Women use more emotion-focused coping and other ineffective coping styles such as fantasy, wishful thinking, denial, escape, avoidance more than men
- Men have wider coping repertoire – problem-solving, acceptance, detachment, distancing
- Could explain higher levels of caregiver burden in women

# Gender Differences in Family Caregiving

## Other Variables

- Characteristics of the care-receiver
- Severity of illness
  - Behavioral problems
  - Disabilities
- Family composition
- Relationship with care-receiver
- Caregiver demographics
  - Age
  - Marital status
  - Education, employment
  - SES
  - Culture / ethnicity



## Culture / Ethnicity

- In some cultures female caregivers are at greatest risk for caregiver burden
  - Familism – precedence given to the family needs over the needs of the individual
  - Family-cohesion – emotional bonding that family members have towards one another
  - Filial responsibility (piety) – tradition of caring for one's elders
- Gender differences within these variables is unclear.
- Higher burden is seen among female caregivers or similar levels of burden between the two genders
- Kinship factors are thought to have significant bearing on gender differences in caregiving.
- Greater burden or strain among spouses (usually wives) than children, although some studies find the reverse

## Conclusion

- Women constitute the majority of caregivers.
- Proportion of men is steadily increasing.
- Large body of evidence indicates that women suffer more from negative consequences of providing care
- Gender differences have not been consistently or conclusively documented.
- Magnitude and significance of gender differences is uncertain.
- Majority of studies have been carried out among women; experience of male caregivers has been neglected.
- The effect of variables that mediate the influence of gender on outcomes of caregiving is uncertain.
- Methodological variations among studies complicate the true nature of gender differences.
- Need to address these areas.
- **If gender differences are significant this has major implications for the development of gender-specific caregiver interventions and social policy recommendations to improve the experience of female caregivers.**

## References

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Thank You.