

Daughters provide as much elderly parent care as they can, sons do as little as possible

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Parents are better off having daughters if they want to be cared for in their old age suggests a new study, which finds that women appear to provide as much elderly parent care as they can, while men contribute as little as possible.

"Whereas the amount of elderly parent care daughters provide is associated with constraints they face, such as employment or childcare, sons' caregiving is associated only with the presence or absence of other helpers, such as sisters or a parent's spouse," said study author Angelina Grigoryeva, a doctoral candidate in sociology at Princeton University.

According to the study, daughters provide an average of 12.3 hours of elderly parent care per month as compared to sons' 5.6 hours. "In other words, daughters spend twice as much time, or almost seven more hours each month, providing care to elderly parents than sons," said Grigoryeva, who will present her research at the 109th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association.

The study also indicates that in the division of elderly parent care among siblings in mixed-sex sibling groups, gender is the single most important factor in the amount of assistance each sibling provides.

"Sons reduce their relative caregiving efforts when they have a sister, while daughters increase theirs when they have a brother," Grigoryeva said. "This suggests that sons pass on parent caregiving responsibilities to their sisters."

Grigoryeva's paper relies on data from the 2004 wave of the University of Michigan Health and Retirement Study, a longitudinal panel study that surveys a nationally representative sample of more than 26,000 Americans over the age of 50 every two years.

In terms of the implications of her findings, Grigoryeva said the gender inequality in elderly parent care is particularly significant due to the consequences of elder care for caregivers.

"Numerous empirical studies report negative mental and physical health consequences, including a higher mortality rate, for people who provide care for elderly family members," Grigoryeva said. "In addition, these caregivers often have to balance elder care with employment, potentially resulting in career sacrifices and lower earnings. Providing care for elderly relatives can also impose significant financial burdens on caregivers in the form of direct expenses, as they often pay for goods and services for their care recipients."

Considering that caregiving for elderly parents is disproportionately the responsibility of [daughters](#), and previous research has shown women suffer from higher negative consequences associated with caregiving than men, the detrimental side-effects of caregiving for elderly parents could have "potentially intensifying effects on a series of gender inequalities pertaining to health and economic well-being," Grigoryeva said.

Although, "the U.S. has been gradually becoming a more gender egalitarian society since the 1970s, my study shows [gender inequality](#) remains acute when it comes to elderly parent care," Grigoryeva said.

More information: The paper, "When Gender Trumps Everything: The Division of Parent Care Among Siblings," will be presented on Tuesday, Aug. 19, at 2:30 p.m. PDT in San Francisco at the American

Sociological Association's 109th Annual Meeting.

Provided by American Sociological Association

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