

Unpaid carers going hungry during COVID lockdown says study

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Unpaid carers are twice as likely as the general public to have relied on a food bank during the COVID-19 pandemic says a new study.

The research, carried out by the Universities of Birmingham and Sheffield in partnership with charity Carers UK, adds to an already worrying picture of unpaid carers facing intolerable pressures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It shows that 106,000 adults in the UK currently caring for someone outside of their household who is older, disabled or seriously ill, have used a foodbank.

The analysis also reveals that, among this group of unpaid carers, almost 229,000 have had someone in their household go hungry during lockdown. Younger carers were more likely to live in a household with someone who experienced hunger; this affected 55,153 (12.2%) of those aged 17-30, compared with 9,294 (0.7%) carers aged 66 or older.

Research carried out by Carers UK in April showed

that 70% of people caring for more than 50 hours a week are providing even more care during the pandemic, and 55% told the charity they feel overwhelmed managing their caring responsibilities and are worried about the weeks ahead. 81% of carers had to spend more money on necessities such as food and household bills.

Dr. Matthew Bennett, Senior Lecturer at the University of Birmingham said: "Before the COVID-19 pandemic, unpaid carers were already more likely to experience negative health and [economic consequences](#) compared to people without caring responsibilities. Our research demonstrates this has been compounded since the crisis: carers' households are more likely to experience hunger and use food banks, and their mental wellbeing has also deteriorated. Our findings are worrying and unacceptable. We hope that this report raises awareness of carers and their circumstances. Policy makers need to act to support carers during these unprecedented times."

Helen Walker, Chief Executive of Carers UK, said: "This pandemic is pushing unpaid carers to breaking point physically and mentally. The fact that carers are also twice as likely as the average person to be relying on foodbanks demonstrates just how difficult life is for them right now. It is simply unacceptable that carers are having to go hungry because they do not have support.

"Surely, when the majority of carers are providing even more care for relatives during this pandemic, and spending more to do so, they deserve some help? The Government must acknowledge the impact the pandemic is having on carers' finances and job prospects and raise Carer's Allowance as a matter of urgency."

Carer's Allowance is the benefit for people caring for 35 hours or more each week and is just £67.25 a week. While many costs have been relaxed for various groups of people, carers and their families

remain under extraordinary pressure. Carers UK wants to see the benefit raised and is also urging the Government to provide a one-off coronavirus Supplement of £20 a week to those entitled to Carer's Allowance—to match the rise it has made for those receiving Universal Credit to meet extra costs during the pandemic.

Carers UK is further emphasising the need for the Government to continue to bring forward schemes that identify carers and help them access food more easily where they have a clear need. It is calling for care and support services to be reinstated as soon as possible so that carers can take a much-needed break from caring, and have better chances of staying in paid work.

The study used data from Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study, the largest longitudinal household panel study of its kind. In April 2020, Understanding Society began a monthly COVID-19 survey of the socio-economic and health consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data used were from this survey and from the 2017-2019 wave of the regular Understanding Society survey. Based on the questions asked in the April 2020 survey, 'co-resident' carers (people who care for a member of their own household with long-term illness or disability) could not be included in the analyses presented in this report. The report is the first of a series relating to experience of the COVID-19 [pandemic](#) due to be released in 2020-21 as part of the Sustainable Care team's Care Matters series.

Provided by University of Birmingham

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