

Women Report Worse Employment Impacts from Family Caregiving

Claire Pendergrast

29.2 million people, or 61% of all family caregivers in the U.S., provide care for family members while also holding down a paying job.¹ Most caregivers are women, with one in four adult women providing care to a friend or family member.² U.S. social policy is notoriously unsupportive of family caregivers, which results in stress and negative financial consequences for families and contributes to social and economic disadvantages across women's lives.³

The National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) is funded through the Older Americans Act and supports state- and community-based services to assist caregivers in caring for their family members in the community for as long as possible, therefore avoiding or delaying nursing home admission.⁴ NFCSP services include:

- Access Assistance Services, which help caregivers locate services;
- Counseling and Training Services, which provide counseling; peer support groups; and training to help cope with the stresses of caregiving; and
- Respite Care Services, which provide hours of temporary relief from caregiving responsibilities.

KEY FINDINGS

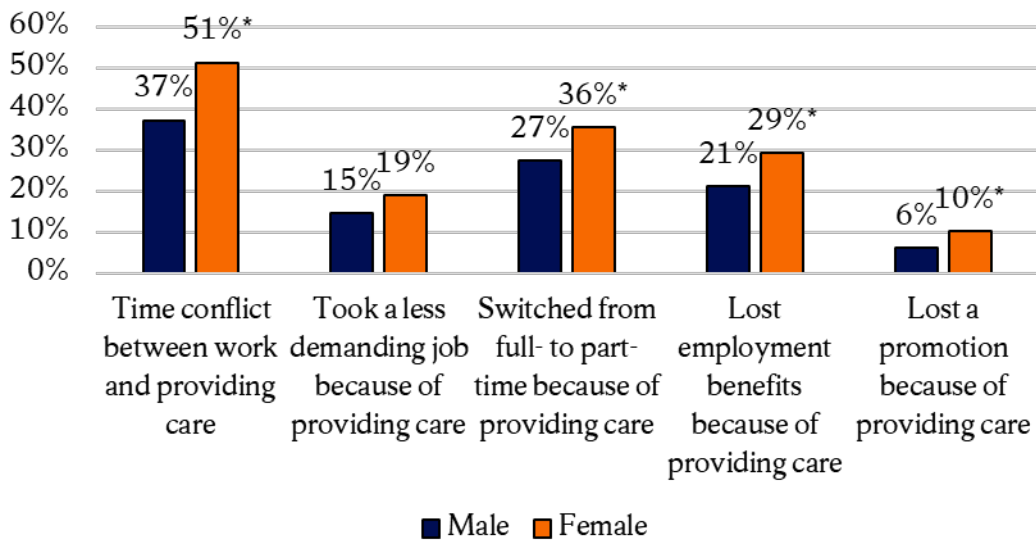
- Women are more likely than men to provide unpaid care to older family members, and 73% of National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) participants are women.
- Women report significantly higher rates of negative employment impacts because of caregiving responsibilities, including time conflicts, lost benefits, and losing out on a promotion.
- Although negative employment impacts are more common among women, men are more likely to report that caregiver support services help them with work-related difficulties.
- Policies are needed to reduce negative employment impacts of unpaid care work for women and to ensure that the National Family Caregiver Support Program addresses the needs of women whose work includes both paid employment and family caregiving.

While NFCSP participants may be better supported in their caregiving role than family caregivers who do not receive services, the stresses of caregiving may still negatively impact their employment opportunities and experiences. Understanding how caregiving-related employment impacts differ between men and women would help inform policy efforts to support caregivers and the family members in their care.

Using a nationally representative sample of family caregivers participating in the National Family Caregiver Support Program from the 2019 National Survey of Older Americans Act Participants (NSOAAP), this brief describes gender differences in how providing care to a family member impacts caregiver employment experiences, and in the effectiveness of support programs for helping with work-related difficulties.

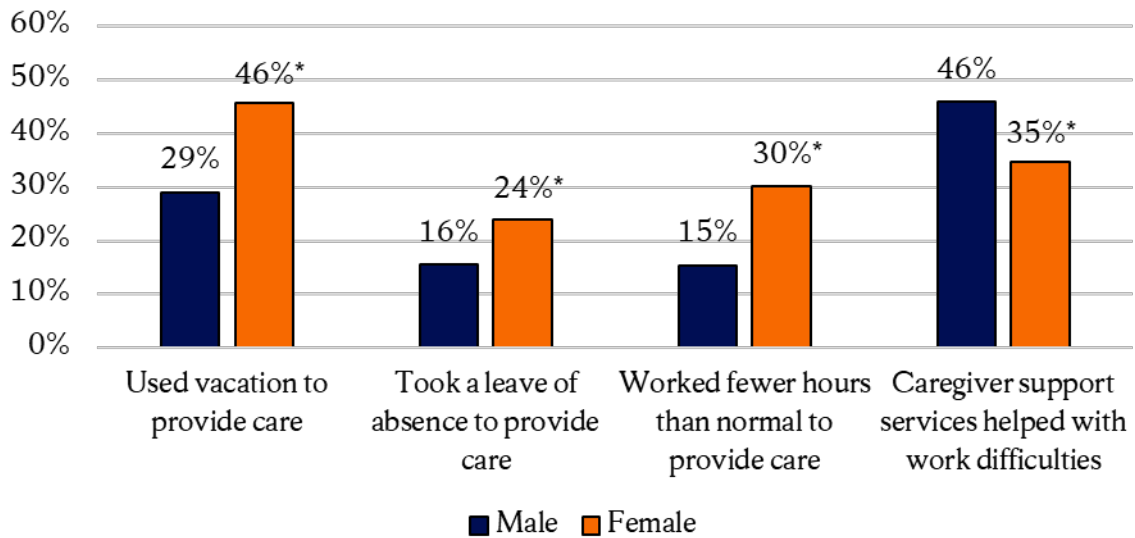
Women Report More Negative Caregiving-Related Employment Impacts, But Less Benefit from Caregiver Supports

Family Caregiver Support Program participants are 73% female and 27% male. Of female participants, 47% are daughters and 36% are wives of the family member in their care. For male participants, 66% are husbands and 23% are sons of the family member in their care. Women are significantly more likely to report having time conflicts between working and caregiving (51.3% vs 37.3%), changing from a full-time to a part-time job because of providing care (35.6% vs 27.4%), losing employment benefits because of providing care (29.4% vs 21.2%) and losing a promotion because of providing care (10.3% vs 6.3%). While women are also more likely to report taking a less demanding job because of providing care (19.0% vs 14.8%), this difference is not statistically significant (Figure 1).



Data Source: 2019 National Survey of Older American Act Participants, Family Caregiver Module
 N=1,846. Respondents are a nationally representative sample of family caregivers receiving services through the National Family Caregiver Support Program. *Indicates statistically significant difference between males and females ($p < 0.05$)

Males and females also differed in their strategies for balancing employment with caregiving responsibilities (Figure 2). Women are significantly more likely to use vacation time to provide care (45.9% vs. 29.1%), take a leave of absence to provide care (24.1% vs 15.5%), and report working fewer hours than normal in the last month because of providing care (30.1% vs 15.4%). However, in spite of reporting a disproportionate number of work difficulties, women are significantly less likely to report that caregiver support services helped them deal with work difficulties (34.8% vs 46.0%).



Data Source: 2019 National Survey of Older American Act Participants, Family Caregiver Module N=1,846. Respondents are a nationally representative sample of family caregivers receiving services through the National Family Caregiver Support Program. *Indicates statistically significant difference between males and females ($p < 0.05$)

Policy Action is Needed to Support Women Providing Care for Family Members

Women are experiencing negative employment impacts because of their work caring for a family member. Impacts such as losing out on promotions and losing employment benefits because they are providing care for a family member have real economic implications for women, and the higher rates of time conflicts between paid work and caregiving and of sacrificing vacation time to provide care have implications for women’s physical and mental health and wellbeing. These striking gender differences between male and female family caregivers are even more concerning in light of the reality that women are also far more likely than men to be providing care to family members.²

Women’s disproportionate participation in and greater susceptibility to negative employment impacts due to unpaid care work reflect long-standing social norms, economic trends, and policy choices. Gendered social norms have long represented women’s unpaid care work for children and older adults as the preferred approach to addressing care needs.⁵ However, the lack of economic value placed on women’s care work contributes to a lifetime of gendered economic inequality. While women’s participation in the labor market has increased dramatically due to both preference and economic necessity, women continue to do a disproportionate share of unpaid family caregiving. Gendered differences in earnings due to historical and ongoing barriers women face in the labor market means women are often the ones to scale back or abandon careers when family care needs increase,⁶ as the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated. The U.S.’s striking lack of family-friendly social policy is a clear driver of unequal labor market opportunities for women.³

Women are less likely to report that NFCSP services helped with caregiving-related work difficulties, suggesting that further policy action is needed to address gender inequality in the employment impacts of family caregiving. This finding may indicate that for male family caregivers, conflicts between work and caregiving are less severe, and therefore more amenable to relatively low-intensity and low-cost interventions such as those offered through NFCSP. Women may benefit less from NFCSP services because they may work lower paying jobs with fewer workplace supports such as flexible schedules or paid time off, limiting their capacity to make use of NFCSP services. Women may also have greater family caregiving responsibilities than men, for example by providing care to a child and older adult simultaneously. Intensive caregiving may result in work-related stresses that low-intensity caregiver supports are

not equipped to address. NFCSP services not designed to address the root causes of the challenges family caregivers face in balancing paid work and caregiving responsibilities. More structural approaches are likely needed to meaningfully improve employment experiences for all family caregivers, but especially women. These include policies being currently debated on the federal level, such as universal paid family and medical leave and a \$400 billion investment in home- and community-based services. While discussion of the cost of these family-friendly social policies is hotly debated, the systematic devaluing of women's unpaid care work is clearly unsustainable. In 2017, the economic value of family caregivers' unpaid care work totaled approximately \$470 billion.⁷ U.S. social policy must acknowledge the true value of care work and invest in the robust supports needed to meaningfully reduce the challenges family caregivers—especially women—face in balancing providing care with paid employment.

Data and Methods

Data on employment impacts for Family Caregiver Support Program participants were retrieved from the Administration for Community Living's AGID Program Data Portal (<https://agid.acl.gov/datafiles/NPS/>). I conducted my analyses using data from the 2019 National Survey of Older Americans Act Participants (NSOAAP) family caregiver module. Participants self reported employment impacts of providing care for an older family member by responding to a series of "yes/no" questions. Survey participants who did not have experience providing care to a family member and having paid employment were coded as "does not apply" and were not included in analyses.

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