

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Types of Family Caregiving and Daily Experiences in Midlife and Late Adulthood: The Moderating Influences of Marital Status and Age

Wong, J. D., & Shobo, Y. (2017). Types of family caregiving and daily experiences in midlife and late adulthood: The moderating influences of marital status and age. *Research on Aging*, 39(6), 719-740. doi:10.1177/0164027516681050

SUMMARY: Providing care to a family member with health conditions may lead to stress and re-adjustment of daily time use. To examine caregivers' daily time use and stress exposure, a sample of 162 caregivers of children with developmental disabilities, spouses with health conditions, or parents with health conditions participated in the study. Results revealed that the three types of caregivers had similar patterns of time use, and caregivers of children with developmental disabilities reported more stress than the other two types of caregivers.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The three types of caregivers spent similar amount of time sleeping, watching television, and engaging in physical activities and household chores.
- Compared to other types of caregivers, unmarried caregivers of children with developmental disabilities spent the most amount time on daily leisure activities but reported the highest levels of stress.
- Older caregivers spent more time on leisure activities than younger caregivers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Participate in professional training to learn how to improve the well-being of Service members and military spouses who need to take care of a family member
- Help caregivers within military families learn coping skills to better manage stress associated with taking care of a family member

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support groups for Service members and military spouses who take care of family members with health conditions
- Develop classes and workshops for caregivers on methods of decreasing daily stress

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage training for professionals who work with caregivers in military families on how to lower caregivers' daily stress and increase the overall family well-being
- Support the development of programs that promote mental health of caregivers in military families

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METHODS

- The study was part of the second wave of the National Survey of Midlife in the United States; data were collected between 2004 and 2006.
- Participants completed questionnaires. In addition, they also completed the Daily Diary Study which consisted of eight 15-20 minutes phone interviews over eight evenings regarding their daily time use and stressors.
- Data were analyzed to examine the effects of caregiver types, marital status, and age on caregivers' daily experiences.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 23 caregivers of a son or daughter with developmental disabilities, 93 caregivers of a parent with health conditions, and 46 caregivers of a spouse with health conditions.
- The average ages of the caregivers of children, parent, and spouses were 55.91 years (SD = 14.30, 26% male, 74% married), 53.20 years (SD = 8.62, 29% male, 58% married), and 67.89 years (SD = 9.02, 30% male, 80% married).
- The race/ethnicity of participants was not reported.

LIMITATIONS

- Dividing participants into "married" and "unmarried" subgroups did not take the complexity of relationships into consideration, as nine unmarried participants reported taking care of their former spouses, therefore the nine participants may have different behaviors patterns from other single participants.
- Only self-report data from caregivers were used in the study, therefore the results were subjective and may not fully represent the real caregiving process.
- The study did not take the severity of health conditions into consideration, therefore it is unclear whether the caregiving experiences differed because of severity level differences of health conditions.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Include responses from different sources (e.g., healthcare providers, care recipients, other family members) in order to get a comprehensive assessment of caregiving process
- Recruit participants from diverse cultural backgrounds to examine the potential cultural differences in caregiving
- Investigate how severity of health conditions influences caregivers' daily experiences

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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