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Coverage

Great Britain

Theme

Health and Care

Carers in Britain

Two survey reports* from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), published today to coincide with National Carers Week, present a picture of caring in Britain today. About 7 million adults in 5 million households in Great Britain were providing care for sick, disabled or elderly relatives and friends in 2000. Female carers reported higher levels of neurotic symptoms, such as anxiety and depression, than women of the same age in the general population.

Carers 2000 gives the latest national estimates of the number of carers in Great Britain and looks at variations between men and women in the extent to which they look after sick, disabled or elderly relatives and friends. *Mental Health of Carers* focuses on the impact of caring on the health and well-being of the carer. Both reports were commissioned by the Department of Health.

Key findings from *Carers 2000* are:

- In 2000, one in six people aged 16 or over (16 per cent) was caring for a sick, disabled or elderly person and one in five households (21 per cent) contained a carer. These figures represent around 6.8 million adult carers in 5 million households.
- About a third of carers (5 per cent of adults) were looking after someone living with them and two-thirds (11 per cent of adults) were caring for someone living elsewhere.
- Nearly one in ten adults (9 per cent) were the main support for the person they were looking after and nearly one in twenty (4 per cent) were spending 20 or more hours per week on caring tasks.

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www.statistics.gov.uk/releases

* *Carers 2000*. (Internet only)

***Mental Health of Carers*. TSO £37.50 ISBN 0 11 621554 2**

Both reports are available on the National Statistics website.

Carers 2000 at:

www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=5756

Mental Health of Carers at:

www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=9211

- Women were more likely to be carers than men, 18 per cent compared with 14 per cent. There were no gender differences in the proportion caring for someone in the same household but women were more likely than men to look after someone outside the household, 12 per cent compared with 9 per cent.
- Women also predominated in the sub-groups with the heaviest commitments: 11 per cent of women compared with 7 per cent of men were main carers and 5 per cent of women compared with 3 per cent of men spent 20 hours a week or more on caring tasks.
- There has been little change in the prevalence of caring over the last decade.

Some key findings from *Mental Health of Carers* are:

- Women providing care were more likely than men to report mental health problems: 21 per cent of the women in the sample had a score on or above the threshold of 12 on the CIS-R (the questionnaire used to assess neurotic symptoms, see note 3) compared with only 12 per cent of the men.
- Taking account of age, female carers were found to be more likely to have high levels of neurotic symptoms than women in the general population but for men no significant difference was found.
- People who spent 20 or more hours per week caring had worse mental health than those spending less time providing care; the former group were about twice as likely to have scores of 12 or more.
- Carers looking after someone living in the same household had worse mental health than those looking after someone who did not live with them – 25 per cent had scores on or above the threshold compared with 15 per cent of those who cared for someone living elsewhere.

- Just under half of the carers providing care for over 20 hours per week said they needed someone else to look after the person they cared for if they were to take a break. Of these, about half had not been able to take such a break since becoming a carer and these people were twice as likely to report significant levels of neurotic symptoms as those who had not had a break.
- About a third of carers felt that caring had had a moderate or extreme adverse effect on their relationships with friends, social life or leisure activities. Just under a third (30 per cent) of these carers had CIS-R scores on or above the threshold compared with 12 per cent of those carers who said that their relationships with friends or social life had not been affected.
- Among those carers who were in employment, those who reported that caring had had an impact on their jobs were more likely to have mental health problems. Over half (52 per cent) of those reporting that caring had a considerable impact on their job had a score on or above the threshold compared with 32 per cent of those reporting a little impact and 12 per cent of those reporting no impact.

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. 'Carers' were defined as people who were looking after, or providing some regular service for, a sick, disabled or elderly person living in their own or another household. All types of caring tasks for any number of hours were included.
2. Information on the extent and nature of caring in Britain has been collected by the General Household Survey (GHS) at five-yearly intervals since 1985. *Carers 2000* is based on information collected from a nationally representative sample of about 14,000 adults interviewed in the 2000 GHS. *Carers 2000* is published today on the internet only. A paper version of the report will be available at the end of June. *Mental Health of Carers* is based on interviews with 1,350 adults in England who were identified as carers on the 2000 GHS and followed up between March and July 2001, i.e. about 3 months to 1 year after their GHS interview.

3. The mental disorders considered in *Mental Health of Carers* are neurotic disorders, sometimes known as common mental disorders, such as depression, generalised anxiety disorder and phobias. These are characterised by a variety of symptoms such as fatigue and sleep problems, forgetfulness and concentration difficulties, irritability, worry, panic, hopelessness, and obsessions and compulsions, which are present to such a degree that they cause problems with daily activities and distress. The prevalence of neurotic symptoms and disorders in the week prior to interview was assessed using the revised version of the Clinical Interview Schedule (CIS-R). A score of 12 or more indicates the presence of significant neurotic symptoms and this was the threshold used in this report.
4. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
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