

Gender disparities in informal social care and how it affects women in the UK

MODULE: LCHS7008 Practice-Based Research
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PREVALENCE



The rapidly ageing population presents major challenges for health and social care systems. Despite continued investment and reform, public healthcare services are struggling to keep pace with rising demand, resulting in an increasing dependence on informal care. Across Europe, the overall burden of informal care is projected to grow by 49.7% by 2050 (Cattaneo et al., 2025). One of the defining characteristics of informal care is the unequal burden it places on women compared to men (Peterie et al., 2024 & Zygouri et al., 2021).

In the UK, women provide the majority of informal care. In 2023/24 8% of the UK population (5.4 million) provided informal care. Every year since 2009/10, women represented around 60% of these informal carers (Harker et al., 2025).

Research shows that these gendered differences in informal care are a product of traditional gender norms, women traditionally identify with caregiving roles (Cohen et al., 2019). This has wide implications (Fleitas Alfonzo et al., 2023): women are more likely to reduce working hours and leave employment (Josten et al., 2024), experience financial struggles (Koomson et al., 2024), and suffer physical and mental health complications (Lacey et al., 2019).

With an ageing population (Barton et al., 2024) and shrinking formal social care funding in the UK (Stacey, 2025), the reliance on unpaid carers is growing. For women this means informal care contributions are increasingly critical but undervalued.

Researching this issue shows how gender, health, work, and social policy are connected, and it can help guide changes to reduce the unfair impact on women.

Rationale

1. Understanding gender disparities in informal social care in the UK is essential for addressing the unique challenges faced by women who provide unpaid care.
2. Women often assume the majority of informal care due to traditional gender norms, which influences their working hours, financial stability, and physical and mental health.
3. With an ageing population and reduced formal social care funding, reliance on informal carers is increasing, making women's contributions more critical and this topic more relevant than ever.
4. This research will synthesise existing data and literature to highlight the intersection of gender, health, and social policy, contributing to a deeper understanding of a topic that is still overlooked but that is socially urgent.



Research Question

"How does the difference in burden of informal caregiving affect women's access to paid work, health, and wellbeing in the UK?"





RESEARCH AIMS & OBJECTIVES

AIM: To explore gender disparities in informal social care in the UK and understand how these impact women in different aspects of their lives.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To examine the extent of differences in informal caregiving responsibilities between men and women in the UK.
2. To understand how providing this informal care affects women in different aspects of their lives, including: employment and finances, mental and physical health.
3. To evaluate policy and service gaps in supporting female carers and reducing gender disparities in care.

Research Impact

1. This research will provide valuable insights into the gendered nature of informal care and the wider implications it has for women in the UK.
2. This research can inform the development of social care and employment policies that better support informal carers.
3. This research can help public health and social care professionals understand the pressures faced by women carers, guiding the creation of targeted interventions.
4. Finally, this research, above all, aims to raise awareness and contribute to a fairer and more sustainable social care system that recognises and values women's unpaid care contributions.



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