

## News Release

**Faye Malek, Family Living Educator  
Manitowoc County UW-Extension  
P.O. Box 1150, 4319 Expo Drive  
Manitowoc, WI 54221-1150**

**October 23, 2005**

---

### **Children play a role in family caregiving**

---

Although we commonly think of adults in the role of a family caregiver, it's important to realize that caregiving involves the whole family, and children have always helped care for ill or disabled family members.

A recent government-funded study of young caregivers reveals that nationwide, there are approximately 1.3 to 1.4 million caregivers who are children between the ages of 8 and 18. The study by the National Alliance for Caregiving and the United Hospital Fund, financed by the U.S. Administration on Aging, provides the first national data about child caregivers in the U.S.

Of the 28.4 million households that have a child between 8 to 18 years of age, 3.2 percent or 906,000 households include a child caregiver. A caregiver is defined as one who provides unpaid help or care to a relative or household member. This may include help with personal needs, meals, household chores, shopping, paperwork, medication, getting around, and visiting regularly.

According to the study, children between the ages of 8 and 11 make up 31 percent of the child caregivers; 38 percent are between 12 and 15; and 31 percent are between 16 and 18. There are nearly equal numbers of girls and boys (male: 49 percent, female: 51 percent). Seven in ten child caregivers are caring for a parent or grandparent (72 percent) and one in ten is helping a sibling. Children in caregiving roles are more likely to come from single-parent households and poor and minority families.

The study found that over half (58 percent) of young caregivers help with activities of daily living, such as bathing, dressing, getting in and out of beds and chairs, and eating. Nearly all help with things like shopping, household tasks and preparing meals. The two most common responsibilities are keeping the care recipient company (96 percent) and helping with chores (85 percent). One in six (17 percent) also helps the care recipient communicate with doctors or nurses, sometimes acting as an interpreter.

Children engaged in caregiving are not usually doing so alone. At least three-quarters of the child caregivers say that someone else also helps. However, children in minority households with lower incomes are under particular stress as they report having less help from others.

The study found that child caregivers tend to be anxious or depressed more often than non-caregivers, according to parents' reports of their child's behavior. Some child caregivers have behavioral and school problems. They may feel isolated or sad. Boys seem to have these difficulties more often than girls. Teen caregivers between the ages of 12 and 18 have more trouble getting along with teachers, and behave antisocially more often than non-caregivers their age.

This study shows that a significant number of children are providing more complex and personal help in a caregiving role that we realized. These children need the chance to express both the positive and negative impacts of their caregiving role.

Young caregivers identified a number of positive effects of caregiving, including the tendency to feel appreciated for the help they give. They are also less likely to feel that people expect too much from them or to feel angry about all they have to do. They also continue to participate in the same school and social activities as other kids their age.

Nevertheless, some young caregivers report that their responsibilities have affected their school work or activities. One in 5 (20 percent) has missed a school activity or after-school activity due to their role as a caregiver. Another 15 percent say it has kept them from doing school work, and 8 percent say it has made them miss homework.

As we learn more about the contributions of family caregivers, we must focus some attention on the needs of child caregivers and work to ensure that they are not overburdened by these responsibilities.

---

An EEO/Affirmative Action employer, University of Wisconsin-Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming, including Title IX and ADA requirements. Please make requests for reasonable accommodations to ensure equal access to educational programs as early as possible preceding the scheduled program, service or activity.

- END -