

The Dynamic Effects of Informal Caregiving on Caregivers' Health

“High-intensity caregivers experience a substantial and persistent impact on their mental health”

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Ageing populations in developed economies pose a challenge to healthcare systems. Informal care provided by relatives or friends could help meet the growing demand for long-term care (LTC) while keeping LTC costs low. However, data from the United Kingdom, where informal care is a fundamental pillar of the long-term care sector, reveal that high-intensity caregivers experience long-term and substantial negative effects on their mental health. This burden on informal care providers merits careful consideration in LTC policy.

Principal Findings

- Low- and medium-intensity caregivers experience few mental health effects.
- Female high-intensity caregivers (>20 hours of informal care per week) experience substantial negative effects on their mental health. For male caregivers, the effects are smaller but still substantial.
- The initial mental health issues experienced diminish but persist for 4 to 5 years, indicating that individuals might slowly adapt to or recover from intensive caregiving tasks.
- These negative effects are related to the strain of caring for someone and not concerns for the health or well-being of the family member cared for.

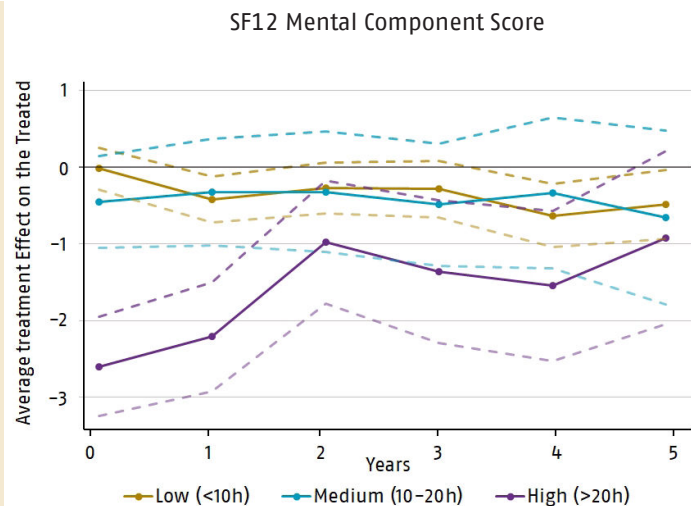


Figure: The effect of informal care provision on mental health by weekly hours of care provided. It shows the initial effects of starting care provision (Year=0) and follows individuals up to five years after (Year=5).

Key Takeaways for the Industry

- Policymakers should strike a careful balance between the benefits of informal care for public healthcare systems and care recipients and its impact on individual caregivers.
- High-intensity informal caregivers (>20 hours per week) are at particular risk and require targeted support.



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