



The College of Psychiatry of Ireland  
*Coláiste Síciatrachta na hÉireann*



# Carers of Ireland *Who Cares?*

*A survey carried out by the College of Psychiatry of Ireland  
in association with the Carers Association of Ireland*

## *Carers of Ireland: Who Cares?*

### Background

The *Carers of Ireland: Who Cares?* survey is one of the most comprehensive and major studies carried out in Europe on the lives and attitudes of voluntary carers in the Republic of Ireland. The project was born out of the need to evaluate the experience of the carer in an Irish context and examine the wide range of physical and/or mental health problems potentially suffered by the carer and the person being cared for. Up to that point no such Irish study existed.

The study was undertaken jointly by the College of Psychiatry of Ireland and the Carers Association of Ireland to ascertain the mental & physical wellbeing of carers as well as their attitude to specific aspects of caring - financial status, relief and respite opportunities, illnesses of the cared for person, conditions in which they care, and caring related training received or required. *The final analysis gives a detailed picture of the effect caring has on their quality of life.*

This document outlines some of the key findings of the survey which have been extracted from the full study which includes 1,990 responses from 10,000 surveys distributed to carers on the Carers Association of Ireland database representing a 20% response rate.

The full analysis and survey distributed is available on [www.irishpsychiatry.ie](http://www.irishpsychiatry.ie) or by contacting The College of Psychiatry of Ireland on 01 661 8450.

## The Person being Cared for - Key Findings:-

- Slightly more likely to be **female**
- Average age **62 years**
- Most likely to be a parent of Carer(35%,696) and living in Carer's home(26% spouse & 23%child)
- Most have a medical illness requiring need for caring, but mental illness also very prevalent.
- **More than half** of those being cared-for had **no-one else living with them** (other than their carer). Of those who had someone else living with them, most (65%) did not/were not able to provide care to them. Of those living with them who could help, males were more likely to (be able to) help out.

## The Carer - key findings

- Vast majority of carers are **female and married/cohabiting**
- Over half of carers are between **45-64 years** of age; **One fifth** are over **65 years**.
- **Most** of the carers are **retired** and **over one fifth** are **unemployed**.
- Almost **40%** of all Carers have carried out

More than **20%** of carers are **over 65** years old

Over **12%** have cared for longer than **20** years

the caring role for between **1 and 5 years**; **57%** for over **6 years**. **12.4%** for over **20 years**

- The vast majority (**80%**) of Carers spend more than **35 hours per week** caring.

- The vast majority of those carers (20%) who do not live with person being cared for visit them daily

## The Carer's role and health - key findings

**60%** carried out physical tasks on a regular basis while caring, of which **31%** said those tasks caused ill health

- Most Carers (71%) reported their health as “quite-good” or “very-good”, but well over 50% experienced being mentally & physically “drained” by their role.
- Regular carer tasks most reported to cause ill-health reported as:
  - dealing with verbal/emotional abuse
  - coping with bizarre/inconsistent behaviour
  - getting up in the night
  - dealing with physical aggression
- Over half (>1,000) of Carers had a medical problem (most frequent being back injury)
- Physical medical problems most reported to be worsened by caring reported as:
  - backache
  - bruising/cuts
  - peptic ulcer disease
  - high blood pressure
- Medical mental health problems - Over half of Carers reported having been diagnosed with a significant mental health problem,

Of the **31%** who reported being diagnosed with an **anxiety disorder** **69%** said it was caused or made worse by their caring role.

- The most frequent mental health problem is anxiety disorder.
- Both anxiety and depressive disorder were reported to be the medical conditions most highly associated with their caring role.
- Most carers worried how the person being cared-for would cope if they could not care any longer due to illness/death
- Most carers reported that they had no time for themselves due to caring.

## The Carer's experience of services - Key findings

- Carers reported that the services which provided most ongoing support to them are:-
  - G.P.,
  - Care workers,
  - Carer/charity organisations
  - Community PHNs/religious groups.
- Vast majority (74%) of respondents reported that services made available to them for their role as carer are inadequate.
- 12% of carers reported that they could not access services.
- Respite services for the cared for :

Just over half (>1,000) of Carers knew whether the person cared-for has opportunities for respite care. The availability of respite was variable.

## The Carer's experience of services - Key findings (cont'd)

Over one in five respondents reported that the person cared for refuses to go into respite care.

- **Weekly Help to Carer:**

→at least half of Carers(1,000) reported not receiving any extra help with caring

→the average amount of weekly help received by Carers is:-

- 4.1 (SD 11.3) hours is paid-for by Carer or person cared-for (median 0 hours)
- 6.8 (SD 10.0) hours is free or provided by others (median 4 hours).

57% of carers are physically drained

59% have no time for personal hobbies or social life

## What Carers say would help them carry out their role

- At least 9.6 extra hours per-week to improve their own health
- Better and more flexible back-up support services, especially home-help & respite care, to allow them to have a break.
- More financial support

63.4% mentally / emotionally drained

- More understanding and “joined-up thinking” between agencies relating to caring
- Psychological support
- Training to aid them in their caring role

55% experienced sleep deprivation/disturbance

→The vast majority of carers had never received training to help them carry out their role and would like training made available to them.

- Lack of Understanding about caring.

→Most carers believe that people do not understand what is involved in caring and that there **should be more publicity about caring.**

## In Summary

- This is the first study in Ireland and UK to examine the impact of lay-caring on the mental & physical health of Carers, using a random sampling method. It is also the largest study of its kind to be carried out in Ireland & UK on Carer experience
- The study highlights the real challenges faced by Carers in their role and the effects these have on their mental and physical health
- It provides insights into what changes Carers would like to see addressed in present & future planning of services

## Recommendations

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