

Carers

Headlines

A carer of any age spends a significant proportion of their life providing unpaid support to family or friends. This could be caring for a relative, partner or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or substance misuse problems. Full time caring can lead to breakdown of social networks and isolation.

- 3 in 5 people will be a carer at some point in their life.
- Over 38,000 adults or 1 in 8 (12%) of the adult population in Kirklees were carers. By 2037, the numbers of carers are set to rise by 60%, to 64,000 locally.
- 1 in 7 (14%) 14 year olds reported that they cared for a parent, brother or sister or other relative with an illness or disability.
- Young carers are less likely to be happy at school and more likely to be bullied than young people with no caring responsibilities.
- Carers locally in 2008 were more likely to have poorer health functioning, especially pain and depression. They were less likely to have a job, with less than 1 in 3 of those aged under 65 years employed and many of those were restricted to part time work.
- Only 1 in 8 received a Carer's Allowance.

Why is this group important?

Nationally, carers providing high levels of care were twice as likely to report poor health compared with those who did not have any caring responsibilities¹. Carers UK estimate that currently 3 in 5 people will be a carer at some point in their life². Nationally the number of carers is expected to rise dramatically and at a greater rate than the rise in the overall population, with an estimated 60% rise in the number of carers needed by 2037². This is due to:

- Advances in health care and technology enabling older people and those with disabilities, illnesses and long term conditions to live longer and maintain independence in their own homes.
- An increasingly higher proportion of social care delivered only to those with the highest care needs, increasing the need for unpaid carers to deliver care in the community.
- An increasing number of carers identifying themselves.

Locally in 2008, over 38,000 adults or 1 in 8 (12%) of the adult population were carers³. The estimated rise of 60% will mean an additional 22,000 carers in Kirklees, bringing the projected total number to over 60,000 by 2037.

Carers span geographic localities, ages, gender, ethnicities and social and economic groups. They can be:

- Adult carers.
- Parental carers.
- Young carers.
- Working carers.
- Mutual (co-dependent) carers.
- Distance carers.

In Kirklees 7 in 10 (69%) carers provided between one and 19 hours of care per week, 1 in 10 (11%) provided between 20 and 49 hours per week and 1 in 5 provided 50 hours or more³.

What significant factors are affecting this group?

Carers have widely differing experiences of caring, including:

- Those who care for someone with dementia are often 24/7 carers while those who care for people with mental health problems may provide periods of intensive emotional support on a more irregular basis.
- Carers of people with mental health or substance misuse problems are affected by shame and social stigma.
- Carers of people with dementia may be more tired and become depressed due to night waking and isolation.
- Carers of sons and daughters with learning disability or complex physical disability are more likely to be lifelong carers and therefore employment opportunities and financial stability are more likely to be affected.
- Working carers may experience higher levels of stress as they balance caring and working.
- Carers of people with physical disabilities or older people may experience injury or pain due to moving and handling.

The impacts of caring responsibilities were common to many adult carers:³

Locally, compared to non-carers, in 2008, carers:

- Had poorer emotional and physical wellbeing, with 7 in 10 (68%) carers rating their overall health as excellent or good compared to 8 in 10 (79%) non-carers.
- 1 in 3 carers were disabled vs. 23% overall, while significantly more carers reported suffering from a health condition in the last 12 months, experiencing depression or other mental health problems and experiencing pain.
- Were as likely to be obese, smoke, drink excessively or be physically inactive.

- Were less likely to be in employment. Of those aged under 65 years, 1 in 3 carers were employed versus 71% overall and 1 in 5 (20%) carers gave up their jobs due to caring responsibilities. Many carers were restricted to part-time work only and consequently their pension rights were affected.
- Nearly 1 in 3 woke at night worrying about their caring responsibilities.
- Cited additional costs of disability, the inadequacy of disability benefits and carers' allowance and the charges for services as causes of economic hardship. Carers can face higher bills than the rest of the population (including extra heating, laundry and transport costs).
- 1 in 5 (20%) carers were caring for 50 hours or more each week which, combined with a lack of opportunity for breaks and loss of employment, leads to breakdown of social networks.
- Only 7% felt isolated most of the time, similar to overall.

Young carers

Young carers are children and young people under 18 years who provide, or intend to provide, care, assistance or support to another family member. They carry out, often on a regular basis, significant or substantial caring tasks and assume a level of responsibility that would usually be associated with an adult. A young carer becomes vulnerable when the level of care giving and responsibility to the person in need of care becomes excessive or inappropriate for that child. This risks his or her physical and mental wellbeing or educational achievement and life chances.

Locally, in 2009⁴

- 1 in 7 (14%) 14 year olds reported that they cared for a parent, brother or sister or other relative with an illness or disability.
- Half of such carers said they are sometimes or never happy at school compared with 1 in 3 (33%) non-carers.
- Half of such carers reported being bullied compared to 1 in 3 (33%) non-carers.
- 1 in 5 such carers said they experience sleep problems weekly or more due to being anxious or worried compared to 1 in 6 (17%) non-carers.

The following are examples of the effects on children and young people of providing care^{5,6}:

- Problems at school, with completing homework and in gaining qualifications.
- Isolation from other children of the same age and from other family members.
- Lack of time for play, sport or leisure activities.
- Conflict between the needs of the person they are helping and their own needs leading to feelings of guilt and resentment.

- Feeling that there is nobody there for them, that professionals do not listen to them and are working only with the adult.
- Lack of recognition, praise or respect for their contribution.
- Feeling that no-one else understands their experience.
- Problems moving into adulthood, especially with finding work, their own home and establishing relationships.
- Some young carers experience being stigmatised or bullied.
- Some may have behavioural difficulties.

Which specific groups are affected most?

Locally³:

- 1 in 6 (17%) of those aged 45-64 were carers, compared with 1 in 8 (13%) of those aged over 65 years and 1 in 12 (8%) of those aged 18-44. This reflects national findings that the peak age for caring is between 50 and 59.
- Women carers are more likely to be younger, i.e. 2 in 3 carers aged 18-44 were more women, whereas aged over 65 carers were more likely to be men, 2 in 3.
- Carers reflected the ethnic diversity of Kirklees with nearly (86%) being white.
- 1 in 3 of 14-year old carers were of south Asian origin compared to 1 in 5 of the overall population.
- 2 in 3 people being cared for were aged over 65 years, 9% aged under 17 years (and tended to be learning disabled).

Where is this causing greatest concern?

There is no significant association between locality and being a carer although Mirfield had the highest proportion of carers at 3 in 20 (15%) compared with just over 1 in 8 (12%) in Kirklees overall.

However for 14 year olds:

- 1 in 5 (22%) in Dewsbury cared for a sibling, parent or another relative who has an illness or disability.
- 1 in 14 (7%) in Huddersfield North cared for a parent who has an illness or disability, compared with 1 in 20 (5%) in Kirklees overall.

Views of local people

Both locally and nationally, carers experience disadvantage and lack of equality. Some of the challenges they face can be addressed at a local level while some are national issues. For example, carers locally cite inflexible and unresponsive support and services for the cared for person, which leads to a lack of opportunity for employment, poverty, stress and isolation⁷. Nationally there is a call for the review of the carers' allowance, which at £53.10 is the lowest benefit of its kind and can be claimed by only 6,600 carers in Kirklees⁸, 1 in 8 of those surveyed³.

What could commissioners and service planners consider?

The introduction of self directed support and individual budgets may enable cared for people and carers to exercise more choice about the way in which they organise their support. This should lead to increased opportunities for carers to work, take breaks and prioritise their own health and wellbeing.

Commissioners could also consider a local comprehensive needs assessment in relation to young carers to fully understand the needs, incidence and long term effects of being a young carer.

References

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