

# In Focus

## Experiences of being an older carer

- Approximately one in five (19%) older people are carers.
- 15% provide care for up to 34 hours a week (part-time carers) – 1.5m in England.
- 4% provide care for at least 35 hours a week (full-time carers) – 400,000 in England.

This briefing summarises findings from a project undertaken by Independent Age to explore the experiences of specific groups of older people.

This is one of a series of six briefings based on findings from 45 interviews with older people in 2019 and analysis of data from the *Understanding Society* survey. It focuses on England only.

This briefing focuses on older people who provide informal care for someone else inside or outside their household. In our quantitative work, we defined this group as older people who care for someone else inside or outside their household.

### Health and wellbeing

#### Putting their own needs aside

- Our interviews highlighted that the responsibilities of caring can dominate an older person's life, placing a huge strain on both their physical and mental health (Figure 1).
- Typically, the older carers interviewed were female and cared for a partner who was in poor health due to an age-related illness.
- Many of those interviewed were caring for more than one person, including older parents or adult children. Their wellbeing was affected because they were not prioritising their own health and emotional needs.

#### Links can be made to physical and mental health problems

- Full-time carers are at increased risk of low mental wellbeing compared to non-carers and be limited in what they can accomplish as a result of their poor mental health (Figure 2).
- Older carers are more likely to suffer from poor physical health and are less likely to have had more than 10 visits to the GP in the past 12 months than non-carers.

### Financial security

#### Caring can be linked to lower incomes and difficulty meeting unexpected costs

- Full-time carers are more likely to be in the lowest income quintile after housing costs than part-time carers, and be unable to cover unexpected costs.
- Full-time carers are more likely to live in social rented housing than non-carers, and to claim Pension Credit and non-means tested benefits associated with being a carer, such as Carer's Allowance and Attendance Allowance (Figure 3).
- Full-time carers are less likely to have an annual holiday away from home than non-carers.

Figure 1: Health limits activities

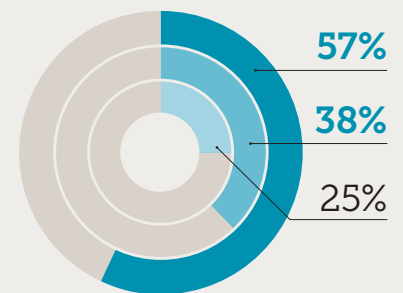
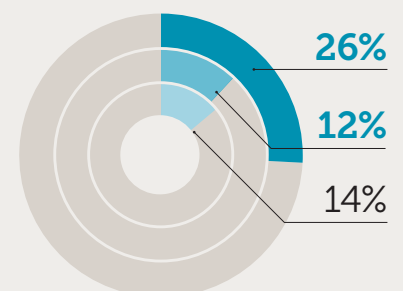


Figure 2: At risk of psychiatric disorder



- Full-time carers
- Part-time carers
- Non-carers

“

*I was thrown in the deep end... you do what you have to do. If something needs doing, you just do it.*

**Jeffrey, 77**

### Confusion over Carer's Allowance

- Although older carers appear to be, in part, claiming what they are entitled to, the interviews highlighted that there were still instances of informal carers not claiming Carer's Allowance.

### Social connectedness

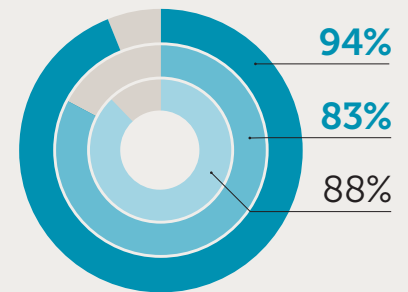
#### Not living alone, but isolated

- Full- and part-time carers are less likely to live alone than non-carers. This is likely to be a reflection of the number of people who are caring for someone they live with.
- Despite support from family – where available – our interviews showed that their freedom was often limited and carers felt they could not go too far from home for long.

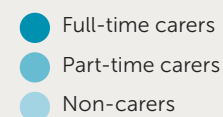
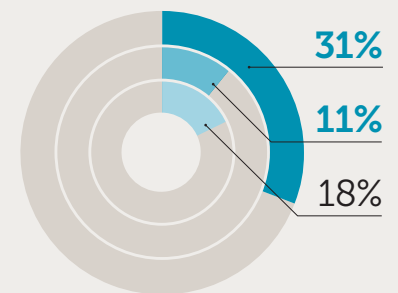
#### Social lives can be limited

- Full-time carers are more likely to miss out on some social activities, including volunteering and seeing friends, than part-time carers (Figure 3).
- Part-time carers tend to use or have access to technology to connect socially, go out socially and participate more frequently than full-time carers (Figure 4).
- Our interviews showed that the relationship between carer and cared-for person is often emotionally complex and can be fraught.

**Figure 3: Do not volunteer or do so irregularly**



**Figure 4: Carers who miss out on going out socially and seeing friends**



*I feel sad, I look after him, I get scared and worry about him, but he doesn't even want to do anything with me.*

**Mary, 72**



### How to find out more

You can read our in-depth report and other briefings on physical health, mental health, low income, black, Asian and minority ethnic older people, and older people without children at [independentage.org/in-focus](https://independentage.org/in-focus)