

Exploring the Carer Gender Support Gap: Results from Freedom of Information Requests to Adult Social Services in England

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Abstract : Our understanding of gender inequality has advanced in recent years. Differences in pay and societal gendered behaviour expectations have been emphasized. It is acknowledged globally that gender shapes everyone's experiences of health and social care, including access to care, use of services and products, and the interaction with care providers. NHS Digital in England collects data from local authorities on the number of carers and people with support needs and the services they access. This data does not provide a gender breakdown. Caring can have many positive and negative impacts on carers' health and wellbeing. For example, caring can improve physical health, provide a sense of pride and purpose, and reduced stress levels for those who undertake a caring role by choice. Negatives of caring include financial concerns, social isolation, a reduction in earnings, and not being recognized as a carer or involved and consulted by health and social care professionals. Treating male and female carers differently is by definition unequitable and precludes one gender from receiving the benefits of caring whilst potentially overburdening the other with the negatives of caring. In order to explore the issue on a preliminary basis, five local authorities who provide statutory adult social care services in England were sent Freedom of Information requests in 2019. The authorities were selected to include county councils and London boroughs. The authorities were asked to provide data on the amount of money spent on care at home packages to people over 65 years, broken down by gender and carer gender for each financial year between 2013 and 2019. Results indicated that in each financial year, female carers supporting someone over 65 years received less financial support for care at home support packages than male carers. Over the six-year period, this difference equated to a £9.5k deficit in financial support received on average per female carer when compared to male carers. An example of a London borough with the highest disparity presented an average weekly spend on care at home for people over 65 with a carer of £261.35 for male carers and £165.46 for female carers. Consequently, female carers in this borough received on average £95.89 less per week in care at home support than male carers. This highlights a real and potentially detrimental disparity in the care support received to female carers in order to support them to continue to care in parts of England. More research should be undertaken in this area to better explore this issue and to understand if these findings are unique to these social care providers or part of a wider phenomenon. NHS Digital should request local authorities collect data on gender in the same way that large employers in the United Kingdom are required by law to provide data on staff salaries by gender. People who allocate social care packages of support should consider the impact of gender when allocating support packages to people with support needs and who have carers to reduce any potential impact of gender bias on their decision-making.

Keywords : caregivers, carers, gender equality, social care

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