



Young Carers Too



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Introduction

Much media attention on young people focuses on individualistic or negative activities, ranging from excessive use of social networking sites and ignoring the outside world, to antisocial behaviour and binge drinking. However, this is not a reflection of life for many young people. Previous research based on data from the 2007 Young Life and Times (YLT) Survey found that many young people in Northern Ireland had caring responsibilities (Devine and Lloyd, 2008). More detailed questions on the level and type of care provided by young people were included in the 2010 **Young Life and Times Survey**. This Research Update uses these data to provide a picture of the caring responsibilities of 16 year olds, and the impact that these have on their lives.



Who cares?

The 2010 YLT Survey asked 16 year olds living across Northern Ireland questions about their caring responsibilities. Within the survey, a young carer was defined as a 16 year old whose life is significantly affected by caring for a family member who has an illness or disability or has a problematic use of drugs or alcohol. Caring means carrying out everyday tasks such as helping with washing or dressing, cooking and cleaning as well as watching over someone so that they don't hurt themselves. Importantly, caring can mean carrying out just one, or a combination, of these tasks.

Among the 786 young people who took part in the survey, 10 percent indicated that they provided care for someone. A slightly higher proportion of females than males had caring responsibilities at the time of the survey (11% and 8%

respectively), although this difference is not statistically significant. We also asked if young people had had caring responsibilities in the past but don't have them now, and this was the case for one in ten young people. In summary, this means that approximately one in five 16 year olds taking part in the survey have had caring responsibilities at some time in their lives.

In 2007, there appeared to be an association between caring responsibilities and income, in that young carers were more likely to come from less well off families. In addition, young carers were more likely to attend secondary, rather than grammar schools. This is still the case in 2010. Thus, among young carers, 51 percent attend secondary schools and 39 percent attend grammar schools. However, among those YLT respondents who have never had a caring responsibility the figures are reversed: 34 percent attend a secondary school, and 53 percent attend a grammar

school. Furthermore, 17 percent of YLT respondents who say that their family is not at all well off have a caring role, compared with 5 percent of respondents from very well off families.

Who cares for whom?

Around one half of YLT respondents with a caring role said that they cared for someone living with them, and a similar proportion were providing care for someone not living with them. Table 1 shows that the person most frequently identified is a grandmother, and around one third of young carers (35%) say that they provide care for them. A slightly lower proportion (30%) is providing care for their mother, whilst 17 percent provide care for their father. Respondents were not necessarily caring for just one person: for example, seven

young people provided care for both their grandmother and their grandfather, and six young people provided care for both of their parents. As well as the close relatives outlined in Table 1, other people mentioned included a cousin, an elderly relative and a daughter with Spina Bifida.

Table 1: Who is being cared for*

	%
Grandmother	35
Mother	30
Brother	22
Father	17
Grandfather	17
Sister	11
Somebody else	18

* Respondents could identify more than one person

Extent of caring

Caring is not a one-off activity, and the young carers identified within YLT are giving support over extensive amounts of time. Approximately half of these young people are providing care on five or more days per week (see Table 2).

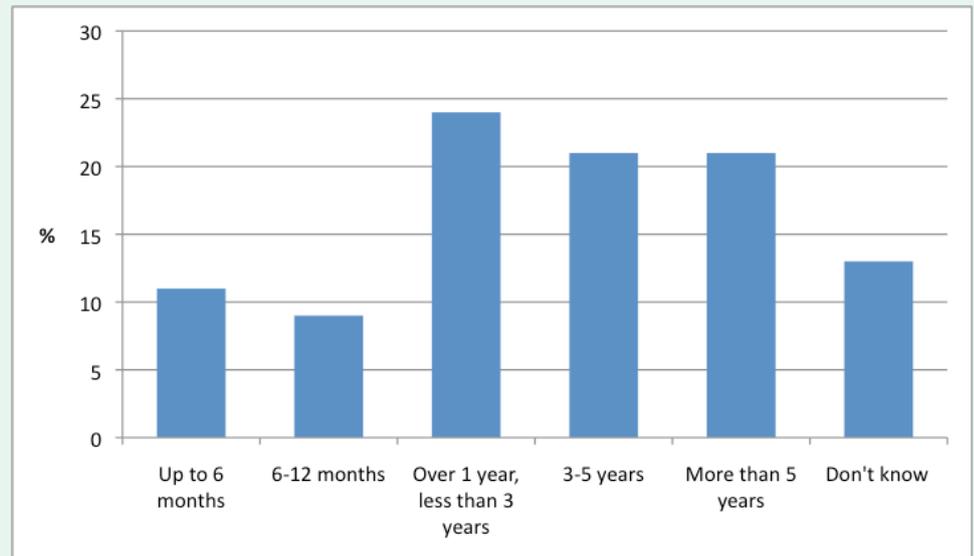
Table 2: Days of care %

Days of care	%
1/2 days	32
3/4 days	16
5/6/7 days	52

Six out of ten young people with a caring role (59%) spend less than 10 hours per week providing care. In contrast, one in ten is spending 30 hours or more doing this. It needs to be acknowledged that the caring role is undertaken at the same time as other roles - three quarters of young carers in the YLT Survey are at school or college full time, and a further one in ten is at school/college part time and working part time. Therefore, the impact of caring responsibilities is likely to be great, and this is something that we look at later in this Research Update.

Caring is often a long-term commitment, and Figure 1 shows that nearly three quarters of young people providing care have been doing so for over one year, with one in five doing so for over five years.

Figure 1: How long carer has been providing care



What kind of tasks?

Young carers carry out a variety of tasks. As seen in Figure 2, around two thirds (64%) say that they watch over someone, whilst 49 per cent clean, and a slightly lower proportion (43%) say that they cook. However, other tasks are of a more personal nature, including washing or dressing someone, as well as helping someone get to and use the toilet. There is a distinct gender difference in the type of caring tasks undertaken, with the more personal tasks much more likely to be undertaken by females. For example, no male carer said he helped to get someone to the toilet, although 22 percent of female carers did. Young female carers

were also much more likely to help with the washing and dressing of the person they cared for.

Earlier in this Research Update, we highlighted that young carers can undertake just one task, or a variety of tasks. Among the carers identified within YLT, whilst one third of them undertake just one activity, others do a number of things. In fact, eleven young people are carrying out five or more activities for the person that they have caring responsibility for, which gives some evidence of the complexity and demands of their role.

Figure 2: Tasks undertaken by carer



Other support

So far, we have identified how the caring role can be time-demanding and often long-term. For many carers, and young carers in particular, they may be the only source of support for the person that they care for, and this was the situation for six respondents. Other YLT carers identified a range of sources of support that was received by the person they cared for, mostly from family members such as mother (50%) or father (40%). Support was also received from outside the family, especially GPs (26%) and district nurses (13%). However, only two young carers said voluntary organisations were a source of support for them.

Table 3: Sources of support*

	% identifying each source
Your mother	60
Your father	40
Your sister	36
Another relative	32
A GP	26
Your brother	24
Your grandparents	18
A district nurse	15
A social worker	13
Home help	13
A teacher	10
A counsellor	4
A voluntary organisation (e.g. Barnardos or Crossroads)	3
Other	6

* Respondents could identify more than one source

Keeping it quiet

The general lack of contact with outside sources of support, such as GPs and social workers, means that young carers and their families may not be referred to other relevant agencies and organisations. However, it may reflect the unwillingness of young people to discuss their family life, or their caring role, with others.

Nearly two thirds of young carers (66%) agreed that they don't mind other people knowing that they are a young carer. Indeed, a slightly lower proportion (61%) said that they had told someone outside their family about their caring role, and just under half of this group had told their friends. Conversely, this means that 40 percent of carers had kept it a secret. Around one quarter of young carers feel that the caring that they do is private and should not be spoken about outside the family, although a sizeable number (12 out of 70) did not know how they felt about disclosing their caring role. A similar pattern was found in relation to the views of the respondents' family in relation to keeping a caring role private.

Feelings and attitudes of carers

As well as recording factual information about the prevalence and extent of care, YLT also asked how young carers felt about their role and responsibilities, as

well as the impact that these have had on their lives. On a positive note, seven out of ten carers (71%) say that they enjoy caring to some degree.

Having caring responsibilities can potentially have a negative effect on other activities, although this does not seem to be the case among YLT respondents. In relation to school, the vast majority of young carers (80%) say that they never miss school because of their caring role, whilst 70% say that caring does not affect their school work. In addition, few of these young carers say that they are unable to attend out of school activities due to their caring responsibilities, and the majority feel that caring does not stop them going out and doing things with their friends. As part of a module on leisure time activities and facilities in the 2010 YLT Survey, young people were asked how much not having enough free time restricts them from taking part in playing and leisure time activities. The vast majority (85%) of those who

Table 4: Impact of caring

	%			
	Agree/strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree/strongly disagree	Don't know
I enjoy caring.	71	18	8	3
I am unable to attend out-of-school activities due to my caring responsibilities.	7	14	76	1
I never miss school because of my caring role.	80	8	9	3
I worry all the time about the person I care for when I'm not with them.	39	30	30	1
Caring does not stop me going out and doing things with my friends.	66	11	18	4
I often get stressed out due to my caring role.	34	13	49	4
Caring doesn't affect my schoolwork.	70	6	23	1
I'm always fully involved in decisions made about the care of the person I care for.	34	24	37	6
I don't mind other people knowing that I am a young carer.	66	16	13	6
I feel guilty about going out, socialising and leaving the person I care for.	21	36	39	4
I know as a young carer I can get help from Social Services.	50	16	11	23
I have been excluded or bullied because I care for someone.	0	6	89	9

currently have caring responsibilities say that lack of free time is an issue. A smaller proportion (75%) who have never had caring responsibilities say this, although the proportion in this group saying 'a lot' is slightly higher than those with current caring responsibilities.

On an emotional level, however, things are not quite as clear cut. Four out of ten respondents (39%) say that they worry all the time about the person they care for when they are not with them, and one in five (22%) say that they feel guilty about going out, socialising and leaving the person they care for. Nevertheless, one half of respondents disagree that they get stressed out due to their caring role.

In terms of involvement with the person they care for, one third of respondents feel that they are always fully involved in decisions made about the care of the person they care for, although a similar proportion disagree that this happens. Around one half of young carers agreed that they can get help from Social Services. Nevertheless, around one quarter of young carers (23%) do not know how they feel about this statement, which may suggest a lack of knowledge about the resources available by Social Services, or else an unwillingness to engage with them.

Conclusion

The data from the 2010 YLT survey provide an extensive snapshot of the lives of young carers in Northern Ireland. Like their adult counterparts, these young people provide support, on an unpaid basis, for their elderly and disabled relatives carrying out tasks that would otherwise have to be provided by outside agencies and perhaps paid for from tax revenue. Whilst there are many aspects of the data which are positive, for example many young carers say that they enjoy caring to some degree, nevertheless they do suggest that young carers should be viewed as people who may need support, rather than a resource to fill gaps in services. The data suggest that other sources of help are family-based, and contact with external organisations is low. This may reflect the need to keep their caring role a secret, or lack of knowledge

about what type of help outside agencies and organisations can provide.

While cross-sectional data on young carers from surveys such as YLT are informative and useful, they cannot tell us anything about the longer term consequences of caring. Some of these young people are caring for long periods of time and it is only through longitudinal research that the implications of taking on this role at such a young age will be identified.

References

Devine, Paula and Lloyd, Katrina, 2008, 'Young Carers', ARK Research Update 56, Belfast: ARK www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update56.pdf

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Key points

- One in ten YLT respondents has a caring role, most frequently for their grandmother or their mother.
- One half of young carers provide care at least five days a week, and one in ten provide at least 30 hours of care per week.
- One in five young carers has provided care for at least five years.
- Most young carers have told someone outside their family about their caring responsibilities, although one quarter felt it should be kept quiet.
- Seven out of ten young carers enjoy caring, and say that their role does not seem to impact greatly on their school and social lives.
- However, four out of ten young carers say that they worry all the time about the person they care for when they are not with them.
- One third of respondents feel that they are always fully involved in decisions made about the care of the person they care for, although a similar proportion feel the opposite.
- The vast majority (85%) of young people who currently have caring responsibilities say that lack of free time is an issue.

The questions on caring were funded by the Patient and Client Council.

The photograph is used with the permission of the Ferris family

The Young Life and Times survey is carried out annually and records the attitudes and experiences of 16 year olds in Northern Ireland.

The Young Life and Times survey is a joint project of the two Northern Ireland universities and aims to provide an independent source of information on what the young people think about the social issues of the day. Check the web site for more information on the survey findings (www.ark.ac.uk/ylt) or call the survey director on 028 9097 3947 with any queries.

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