

Closing the educational engagement gap for young carers

Fangzhou Huang¹, Yuzhi Cai¹, David Florentin², Jiao Song², Alisha R. Davies²

1 School of Management, Swansea University

2 Research and Evaluation Division, Public Health Wales



This research briefing reports on the detrimental impact caring responsibilities have on young people's education and the relationship this has with deprivation.

Issue

Education is key to young people's future success and life chances. Ensuring equality of educational opportunity to all young people is a longstanding goal of the **Welsh and UK Governments**. However, the responsibility of providing care for a family member, friend or neighbour can limit young people's opportunities to participate in education, preventing them from fulfilling their potential.

In Wales, **approximately 30,000 under 25 year olds are unpaid carers**. Welsh Government has identified supporting young carers' education as a priority in **Strategy for Unpaid Carers** and commits to consider young carers' needs in all policies and strategies.



30,000
under 25 year olds
are unpaid carers

This briefing presents data on the negative impact that caring responsibilities have on educational participation and how this has greatest impact on those in the most deprived areas. This new data can support the Welsh Government's **Strategy for Unpaid Carers** by informing interventions to support young carers' access to education and reduce the economic inequalities that caring responsibilities create. The **Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014** puts a duty on local authorities to support carers' wellbeing, including educational outcomes. This briefing highlights unmet needs and inequalities in this area.

Our Approach

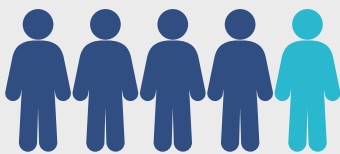
The findings in this briefing are based on a sample of 1,550 people aged 16-22 years old in Wales, derived from the latest available population representative **National Survey for Wales (NSW) data for three years** (2016/17, 2017/18 and 2019/20) capturing both caring and education status.

A carer was defined as someone who looks after, or gives any help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others. The analysis looked at two age groups, based on education provision: school aged (16-18 year olds) and young adults (19-22 year olds).

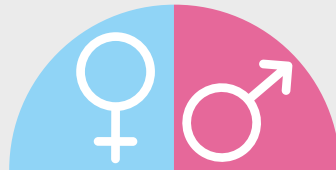
The adjusted proportion of young adults who reported their caring and education status was determined using logistic regression models to calculate estimated marginal means, controlling for demographics (i.e. gender, age group and deprivation) and survey year. A p-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Details of survey methods can be found [here](#).

Who cares? – Young carers in Wales aged 16-22 years old



1 in 5
16–22 year olds
are carers



Males and females
equally likely to be
young carers

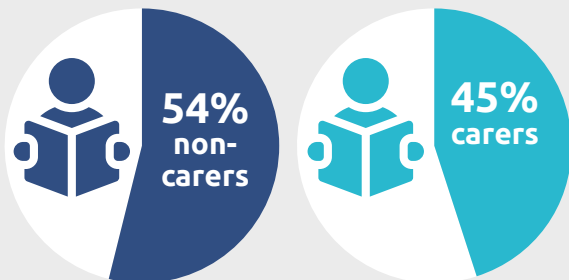
Young carers
more likely to
live in most
deprived areas:



young carers: 25%
non-carers: 20%

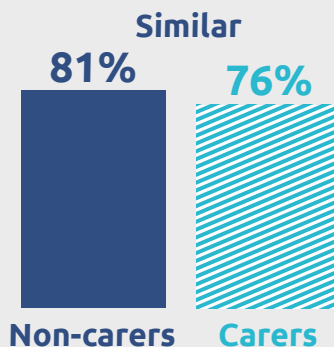
Young carers in education changes with age

Young carers (aged 16-22)
less likely to be in
full time education:

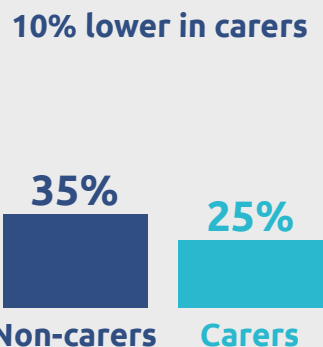


But this differs by age group

Secondary school
education (aged 16-18):



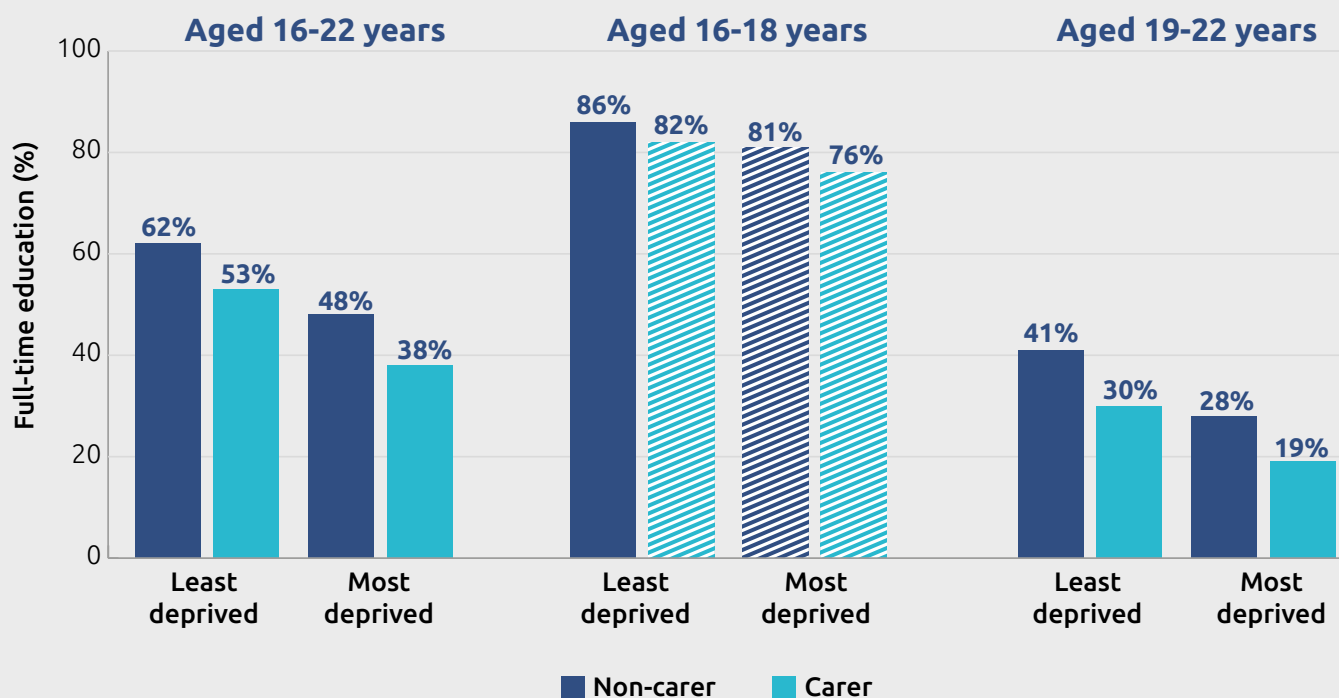
Tertiary education
(aged 19-22):



Solid bars represent a statistically significant difference to the reference category (non-carers); patterned bars represent a non-significant difference.



Education participation by deprivation



Solid bars represent a statistically significant difference to the reference category (non-carers in least deprived areas); patterned bars represent a non-significant difference. Deprivation is defined as least and most deprived 20% of areas by Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Implications

These findings show that young carers are more likely than non-carers to live in deprived areas, so have the greatest need for education to improve their life chances. However, the data also shows that caring responsibilities reduce young carers' participation in full-time education. This varied by age and deprivation. Among school-aged carers, participation in education was lower in the most deprived areas compared to the least deprived areas. Despite not reaching statistical significance, it suggests that school-aged carers living in these areas may need more support. Significantly reduced participation in tertiary education was found for carers compared to non-carers and this was similar across all deprivation groups. This finding suggests that the combination of caring and area level deprivation can have a detrimental impact on participation in school and tertiary education, potentially harming young carers' future economic prospects.

Other studies have shown that not only is low educational attainment and deprivation linked with poor mental wellbeing, but that **poor mental wellbeing can cause poverty**. This can lead to an inter-generational cycle of deprivation and ill health, requiring further unpaid care, which in turn leads to poor educational outcomes and further deprivation.

The **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** requires public bodies to consider policies' long-term impacts on poverty, health and inequalities. Addressing the educational disadvantages young carers face is needed to prevent widening inequalities in future.

Considerations for action

- **Identifying young carers, to enable early support where needed**

Identifying young carers is essential to provide support and is a priority in Welsh Government's Strategy for Unpaid Carers and local authorities have a duty to publicise the support available. However, many carers do not identify as carers or realise the support available until they reach crisis. 35% of school aged carers have not told their school of their situation and 22% get a local authority assessment. Schools and universities need to raise staff awareness of young carers' needs. Education providers could proactively identify carers and publicise the support available. Interactions with other services could routinely check to identify carers and signpost support.

- **Support for young carers in particular within educational settings**

Young carers miss or cut short an average of 48 school days per year due to caring responsibilities and are four times more likely to drop out of further education. Supporting carers' education is another priority in the Strategy for Unpaid Carers. Carer assessments should provide advice on the support available. Schools and universities should offer social and academic support and have named staff to provide this. Flexible admissions and deadlines would improve access and accommodate the demands on young carers. Future research to better understand the combined impact of unpaid caring, living in an area of high deprivation and academic attainment should be prioritised.

Acknowledgement

We express our gratitude to Richard Kyle (Deputy Head of Research & Evaluation, Public Health Wales), Kate Cabbage (Head of External Affairs, Carers Trust Wales) and Tim Banks (Research and Engagement Manager, Carers Trust Wales) who provided valuable comments and insights on an earlier draft, as well as our colleagues: Laura Bentley, Laura Cowley, Elizabeth Hughes and Chiara Tuveri for their help in production. We would like to thank Welsh Government who make anonymised National Survey for Wales data available for research through the UK Data Service (project ID: 180690).

Funded by Public Health Wales

As the national public health institute, Public Health Wales (PHW) is a systems leader in population health research and evaluation. Working to achieve a healthier future for Wales through unique access to data and expertise in systematic and rigorous research methods that enable credible insights.

© 2021 Public Health Wales. Material contained in this document may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Government Licence (OGL) www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/ provided it is done so accurately and is not used in a misleading context.

© 2021 Swansea University. Material contained in this document may be reproduced provided it is done so accurately and is not used in a misleading context.

Acknowledgement to Public Health Wales to be stated.

Copyright in the typographical arrangement, design and layout belongs to Public Health Wales.

ISBN 978-1-78986-154-451

Research and Evaluation Division
Knowledge Directorate
Public Health Wales
Number 2 Capital Quarter
Tyndall Street, Cardiff CF10 4BZ

Tel: +44 (0)29 2022 7744

Email: PHW.Research@wales.nhs.uk

 @PublicHealthW @PHREWales

 /PublicHealthWales

phw.nhs.wales