

Unpaid informal caregiving

by Nancy Zukewich

Caregiving encompasses a wide range of activities involved in looking after, responding to and supporting others. While some of these activities are done for pay by care providers such as child care workers, nurses, home care workers and physicians, they are also undertaken on an unpaid basis by volunteers, friends or relatives. Family members have traditionally been the main source of unpaid care and support, since caregiving frequently involves an emotional or psychological connection between caregiver and care receiver. And despite the fact that most women work in the labour force, they continue to undertake the majority of unpaid work, including caring for children, elders, people who are ill or those with disabilities.¹

Trends such as the aging of the population and the increased presence of women in the labour force have led to a growing interest in issues related to unpaid caregiving. The Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada states that “Informal caregivers play an essential role in the delivery of home care services and in the health and care of their families and friends.” Thus, it is

1. Statistics Canada. 2000. *Women in Canada 2000: A Gender-based Statistical Report* (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-503-XPE); Coleman, R. 1998. *The Economic Value of Unpaid Housework and Child Care in Nova Scotia*. Module two of *Measuring Sustainable Development: An Application of the Genuine Progress Index to Nova Scotia*. Halifax: GPI Atlantic; Keating, N., J. Fast, J. Frederick, K. Cranswick and C. Perrier. 1999. *Eldercare in Canada: Context, Content and Consequences* (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-570-XPE).

CST What you should know about this study

Data in this article come from the 1998 General Social Survey (GSS) on time use. Although other Statistics Canada surveys collect data on unpaid work,¹ the time use survey is the source of official estimates of the value of unpaid household work in a national accounting framework. The survey uses the diary method, a collection technique widely considered to provide the most accurate and detailed information on daily activities.²

Respondents were asked the start and end time of each of their daily activities, which were assigned to one of 177 activity codes. Interviews were conducted over a 12-month period with more than 10,700 Canadians aged 15 and over living in private households in the 10 provinces. This analysis focuses on the volume and value of labour inputs to unpaid work as measured by time. The value of labour is derived from the Census of Population.³

There is no internationally recognized definition of unpaid work.⁴ In this study, unpaid work includes activities used by Statistics Canada in a national accounting framework.⁵ These include domestic work (such as cooking, housekeeping and household maintenance), shopping, help and care to household members, other help and care provided to people not living in the same household, volunteer work done through organizations and travel related to unpaid work.⁶

Unpaid informal help and caregiving includes activities that entail help and care provided informally to individuals by individuals and, as such, explicitly excludes volunteer work done through organizations. Reported differences in the mean time devoted to activities per participant are significant at the 95% level.

1. Macredie, I. and D. Sewell. 1999. *Statistics Canada's Measurement and Valuation of Unpaid Work* (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 71F0023XIE).

2. Paillé, B. 1994. *Estimating the volume of unpaid work in Canada, 1992: An evaluation of data from the General Social Survey*. General Social Survey working paper.

3. Hamdad, M. 2003. *Valuing Households' Unpaid Work: Comparisons between 1992 and 1998*. Technical working paper. Income and Expenditure Accounts Division, Statistics Canada.

4. Statistics Canada. 1995. *Households' Unpaid Work: Measurement and Valuation* (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 13-603-MPE1995003).

5. This group of activity codes is more restrictive than the definition of unpaid work suggested in *General Social Survey, Cycle 12: Time Use (1998) - Public Use Microdata File Documentation and User's Guide* (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 12M0012GPE).

6. Statistics Canada. 1995.

important to differentiate caregiving from the broader category of unpaid work because caregiving has a value to society in addition to its personal value to caregivers and care receivers.² For instance, if care is not provided informally by family and friends, in many instances society takes over the provision of these services. Measuring and assigning value to unpaid informal caregiving is a key step in the creation of tools to better understand how the social and economic costs of sustaining ourselves and our dependents, and of maintaining our capacity to engage in productive activities, are shared among individuals, family households, communities, the market and government.³

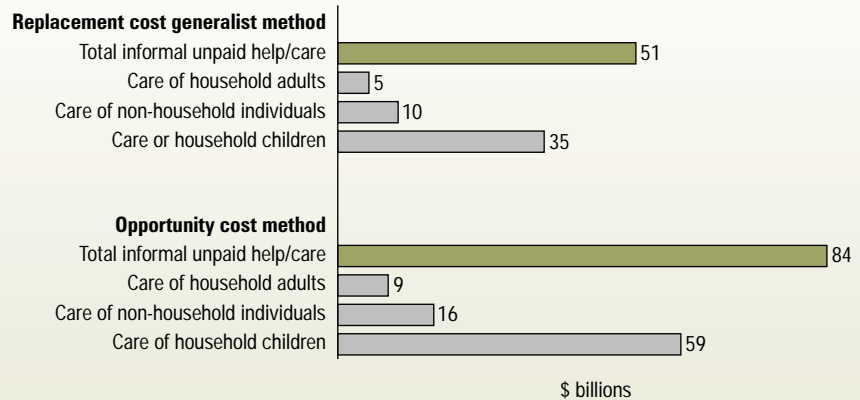
Using data from the 1998 General Social Survey (GSS), this study examines the time devoted to unpaid informal care, the sex and age of caregivers, their relationship to care receivers, and the market value of this form of unpaid work. For the purposes of this article, informal unpaid caregiving is defined as help and care provided by individuals to members of their household and to people who reside in other households as well as travel related to the provision of this help and care. It excludes time spent helping others through volunteer organizations.

Most informal care goes to household members

Unpaid informal help and care accounts for a considerable share of all time devoted to unpaid work. In 1998, Canadians aged 15 and over performed a total of 30 billion hours⁴ of unpaid work, of which 5 billion hours (18%) consisted of informal help and care. In total, 8 in 10 hours of unpaid help were provided by and for someone in the household (mostly a family member), with 70% going to the care of children⁵ and 10% to the care of adults, including adolescents aged 15 and over.⁶

In 1998, more than 6 in 10 (64%) hours of informal caregiving were carried out by women, due largely

CST Child care accounts for over half the value of unpaid informal help and care



Sources: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1998 and wage estimates, Income and Expenditures Accounts Division.

to their disproportionate share of responsibility for unpaid child care work. The most common form of child care is physical, personal care (44% of hours). Women's shares of time devoted to routine daily education and physical personal care activities (helping, teaching, reprimanding, etc.) were especially high.

Driving people to various activities and appointments, which includes waiting time related to travel, accounted for a large proportion of time (55% of hours) spent helping household adults. In contrast, medical care made up just 10% of adult care time. About one-third (35%) of all hours, was accounted for by "other help and care," which encompasses a wide variety of routine non-medical activities, such as washing a disabled spouse's hair, helping a spouse grade his students' exam papers or talking with the educator of a handicapped 17-year-old son.

Babysitting most common way of helping other household members

Overall, about 20% of hours devoted to informal caregiving benefited someone who did not reside in the household. In 1998, Canadians spent about three times as many hours providing informal care to people in

other households (1 billion hours) as they did on formal volunteer work done through organizations (300 million hours), as measured by the GSS.

- Vincent, C. and F. Woolley. 2000. "Taxing Canadian families: What's fair, what's not." *Choices* 6, 5; Eichler, M. 1985. "And the work never ends: Feminist contributions." *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 22: 619-644.
- Cheal, D., F. Woolley and M. Luxton. 1998. "How families cope and why policy-makers need to know." *Canadian Policy Research Networks* study no. F02.
- To obtain the annual volume of unpaid work, the sum of hours per day was multiplied by 365.
- The time use survey measures only primary activities, that is, the main activity of the respondent. Thus, this figure includes only time when caring for children was the respondent's main activity, and therefore underestimates total time spent caring for children. Primary-activity child care represents about one-quarter of total time spent caring for children (including time when the respondent was doing other things in addition to child care) as estimated from the supplementary child care diary, variable C6DUR.
- In 1998 nearly 3 in 10 (29%) individuals who provided informal care to an adult household member had at least one child between the ages of 15 and 18 living at home.

Unpaid babysitting accounted for the greatest share of time spent on informal help and care provided to individuals not living in the same household. Looking after children made up 32% of care time in this category. Time spent helping others with transportation needs, such as driving a neighbour to the airport, made up 26%. Assistance with house maintenance and repair and other kinds of unpaid help (not classified elsewhere) accounted for 15% and 14%, respectively, and the remaining time was spent providing housework and cooking assistance (5%), care for disabled or ill people (4%) and travel related to the provision of help and care activities, such as driving to a relative's home to help with housework (4%).

Some of the informal help and care activities that are provided to non-household members are not counted as care when done for someone in the household. For example, cleaning the house, cooking a meal or fixing a broken appliance are categorised as "help" if done for individuals in other households, but not when performed in one's own home.

More informal caregiving carried out by women

Both the share of the population that engages in an activity (participation rate) and the time that participants spend on it affect the total hours spent on the activity.

While almost everyone does some unpaid work on a typical day, unpaid informal caregiving is a much less common activity. Overall, 9 out of 10 people performed some form of unpaid work on a given day in 1998, but only 1 in 3 provided informal help or care. Women were somewhat more likely than men to undertake unpaid work and its informal caregiving component, and when they did, they spent more time on these activities.

For example, 34% of women participated in some form of informal help or caregiving on an average day, compared

with 25% of men, and these female caregivers devoted 2.1 hours per day to care activities, compared with 1.8 hours for their male counterparts. These differences were largely related to the fact that a significantly higher proportion of women provided unpaid informal child care: 24% versus 16% of men. In addition, female child care providers devoted over half an hour more per day to these activities than male caregivers.

Mothers more likely to provide physical care for children

Mothers are more likely than fathers to provide routine daily care and physical care. For example, mothers were twice as likely as fathers to take care of children's physical care, to transport them from place to place, and to help with their educational activities. However, fathers and mothers were equally likely to engage in play and "other" types of help and child care.

Mothers also spent at least as much time as fathers on all forms of child care. For example, women who provided physical care to children spent nearly half an hour more a day on this task than men (1.4 hours versus 1.0 hour). While women who administered medical care to their child did so for an average 1.4 hours a day, the number of men involved in this task was not large enough to produce a statistically reliable estimate. The average times spent on educational activities, child-related travel, and other help and care to children were not significantly different for male and female caregivers.

Fewer Canadians provide informal care to adults

The proportion of Canadians who provide assistance to adults (regardless of whether they lived in the household or not) is much lower than the proportion that takes care of children. On a typical day in 1998, only 6% of men and 6% of women provided care for

adults in their household, while 8% of women and 6% of men helped adults who did not live with them. In contrast, 24% of women and 16% of men provided unpaid care to children.

Travel related to helping either household or non-household adults was the most common activity, engaging 4% of Canadians. On an average day, just 2% of people helped with personal care and only 1% provided medical assistance for a household adult. Men and women caregivers spent about the same number of hours each day on these activities.

However, men spent more time on "male-dominated" activities and women, on "female-dominated" ones. For example, men who carried out household maintenance tasks for adults outside the household spent 3.0 hours per day on these tasks, compared with 2.0 hours spent by women.

With respect to "female-dominated" activities, women who did housework or cooking for non-household individuals spent 1.6 hours on these activities, while those who cared for disabled or ill people devoted 1.3 hours to the task. Too few men participated in these activities to produce statistically reliable estimates of average time per participant. Finally, although it is overwhelmingly women who babysit for free in other households, the amount of time spent by women and men who do babysit was not significantly different: 3.0 hours and 2.7 hours, respectively.

Four in 10 informal caregivers are women aged 25 to 44

The responsibility of informal caregiving falls heavily on people aged 25 to 44, women in particular, at an age when people are most likely to be in the labour force. Women in this age group accounted for nearly 40% of informal help and care providers; men in this age group made up about 25%.

In fact, women aged 25 to 44 made up the largest share of providers of most

		Number of hours/year (millions)	Distribution of hours by sex (%)	Participation rate (%)	Mean hours/day ¹ per participant	
Help and care for household children	Both sexes	3,870	100	20	2.2	
	Women	2,630	68	24	2.4	
	Men	1,240	32	16	1.8*	
	Physical care	Both sexes	1,750	100	16	1.3
		Women	1,280	73	21	1.4
	Education	Men	470	27	11	1.0*
		Both sexes	540	100	7	0.9
	Medical care	Women	400	75	10	1.0
		Men	130	25	4	0.8*
	Play and other help and care	Both sexes	60	100	1	1.4
Women		50	77	1	1.4	
Men		10	23	F	F	
Related travel	Both sexes	1,060	100	8	1.4	
	Women	600	57	10	1.4	
	Men	450	43	7	1.4	
Help and care for household adults	Both sexes	460	100	8	0.7	
	Women	300	65	10	0.6	
	Men	160	35	5	0.7	
Help and care for non-household individuals	Both sexes	540	100	5.7	1.1	
	Women	280	52	5.7	1.1	
	Men	260	48	5.8	1.0	
	Personal and other care	Both sexes	190	100	2.1	1.0
		Women	120	65	2.6	1.1
		Men	70	35	1.7	0.9
	Medical care	Both sexes	60	100	0.5	1.2
		Women	30	57	0.6	1.2
		Men	20	43	0.4	1.3
	Related travel	Both sexes	300	100	4.0	0.8
Women		130	42	3.6	0.8	
Men		170	58	4.4	0.9	
Help and care for non-household individuals	Both sexes	1,050	100	7.0	1.7	
	Women	580	56	7.8	1.7	
	Men	470	44	6.2	1.7	
	Housework/cooking	Both sexes	60	100	0.3	2.0
		Women	30	57	0.5	1.6
		Men	30	43	F	F
	House maintenance	Both sexes	170	100	0.7	2.6
		Women	50	32	0.6	2.0
		Men	110	68	0.9	3.0*
	Transportation assistance	Both sexes	280	100	4.3	0.8
Women		20	51	4.3	0.7	
Men		140	49	4.0	0.8	
Care for disabled/ill	Both sexes	40	100	0.4	1.5	
	Women	20	63	0.4	1.3	
	Men	10	37	F	F	
Unpaid babysitting	Both sexes	340	100	1.9	2.9	
	Women	260	76	1.9	3.0	
	Men	80	24	0.7	2.7	
Other unpaid help	Both sexes	60	100	1.5	1.3	
	Women	30	43	1.5	1.0	
	Men	20	57	1.2	1.7	

* Significantly different from women (p<0.05).

F Amount too small to produce a reliable estimate.

¹ Averaged over a seven-day week.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1998.

types of care, including all forms of child care, personal care to household adults, as well as transportation assistance, housework and cooking, and other unpaid help to adults in other households. While many of these are typically “female” forms of work, just as many women this age as men aged 25 to 44 and 45 to 64 provided transportation for household adults and household maintenance for non-household individuals (both traditionally “male” activities). Unpaid babysitting and care for ill or disabled people in other households was mainly done by women aged 45 to 64.

Most care recipients in other households are family members

Not surprisingly, family members are the beneficiaries of most of the help and care extended to members of other households. Overall, 60% of all time devoted to helping and caring for persons in other households was directed at family members. This holds true for all types of help and care. For example, 80% of time spent babysitting and 73% of time spent on caring for ill and disabled people was done for family, reflecting the personal, physical and emotional nature of these forms of care. However, the difference in time devoted to family and non-family members is less dramatic for the other activities.

What is it worth?⁷

One of the methods of measuring the value of unpaid work is the replacement cost generalist valuation

7. Due to the level of aggregation at which valuation rates are applied, value estimates cited in this study differ slightly from those included in Hamdad, M. 2003. *Valuing Households' Unpaid Work: Comparisons between 1992 and 1998*. Technical working paper. Income and Expenditure Accounts Division, Statistics Canada.

method,⁸ which refers to the hourly earnings of domestic workers employed full-time, full-year. Using this method, the value of unpaid informal caregiving was \$50.9 billion in 1998. This is more than the labour income⁹ generated by the health care and social assistance industry (\$42.1 billion), education services (\$40.1 billion) or the finance, insurance and real estate industry (\$43.4 billion). The child care component of unpaid informal caregiving work was worth \$35.3 billion, just slightly less than the labour income of public administration (\$36.3 billion), the retail trade industry (\$36.7 billion) or the construction industry (\$36.8 billion). Help and care to non-household members was valued at \$10.3 billion, just slightly more than the labour income generated by agriculture (\$9.3 billion) or mining industries (\$9.5 billion). Help and care to household adults was worth \$5.3 billion, close to the value of labour income of the arts, entertainment and recreation industry (\$5.8 billion).

Since there are only 24 hours in a day, time spent on unpaid informal caregiving is time that cannot be spent on paid work or other activities. Thus, another way to measure unpaid work is the opportunity cost valuation method, which values a caregiver's time at the hourly wage the individual could earn in the labour market. Because women earn less on average

than men, the opportunity cost method assigns a lower monetary value to the same activity when it is done by a woman, effectively "reproducing the difference in women's and men's earnings in the valuation of unpaid work."¹⁰ Using this method, in 1998, an hour of women's time was worth \$13.88 compared with \$17.96 for men.¹¹

Informal help and care is worth more when valued by the opportunity cost method than the replacement cost generalist method. According to the opportunity cost method, in 1998, informal care was worth \$83.7 billion, close to the value of labour income in the manufacturing industry (\$84.9 billion). The value of help and care for household children was estimated at \$58.7 billion, help and care for adult household members was \$8.6 billion and help and care provided to other households was \$16.4 billion.

Regardless of the valuation method used, many hours are devoted annually to unpaid informal caregiving. If even a small portion of these hours of informal care were shifted from the non-market to the market sector — for example, the 156 million annual hours devoted to medical care¹² — this would be equivalent to approximately 77,000 full-time jobs.¹³

Summary

In 1998, Canadians performed an estimated 5.5 million hours of unpaid

informal caregiving for household members and individuals not residing with them. This caregiving work accounted for 18% of total unpaid work (30.3 million hours). Not only are women more likely to perform unpaid caregiving, but they also spend more time doing so. Furthermore, female caregivers are more likely than their male counterparts to provide routine, personal types of care.

The vast majority of time devoted to unpaid informal help and care is done for family members. However, informal help and care provided to other households represents a substantial share of unpaid work; nearly three times as many hours are devoted to providing informal care to people in other households than to volunteer work through organizations. Nor is care provided to non-relatives inconsequential, as about 40% of all hours devoted to helping an individual in another household benefited a friend, neighbour, co-worker or other acquaintance.

Finally, if parallel services were purchased on the market, informal caregiving work would be worth approximately \$50.9 billion in 1998 based on the generalist replacement cost valuation method, slightly more than the value of labour income generated by the health care and social assistance industry. Using the currency of time and money clearly demonstrates the magnitude of unpaid informal caregiving, but still provides only a partial picture of the socio-economic costs and benefits to caregivers, care receivers and society as a whole.



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8. Statistics Canada features the replacement cost generalist method for valuing households' unpaid work because it is most consistent with national accounts principles of economic value. For more information on the pros and cons of this and alternative valuation methods, see Statistics Canada. 1995. *Households' Unpaid Work: Measurement and Valuation* (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 13-603-MPE1995003).

9. See CANSIM II Table 383-0009, available at www.statcan.ca.

10. Statistics Canada. 1995. p. 49.

11. Hamdad, M. 2003. *Valuation of Households' Unpaid Work Using the Time-use Microdata Base*. Unpublished working paper. Income and Expenditure Accounts Division, Statistics Canada.

12. Includes medical care of household members and care for disabled or ill non-household members.

13. Based on 40 hours of paid work per week, 52 weeks per year.