

Female caregivers of Alzheimer's patients find comfort in religion, families

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Women who take care of Alzheimer's disease patients are more likely than men to take advantage of some support services including transportation, but not seek in-home help.

Researchers at the University of Michigan and other universities looked at gender differences in how caregivers assisted Alzheimer's patients. They also looked at how religion affected the type of service considered for these patients.

"Given that women are traditionally accustomed to in-home tasks, they may perceive less difficulty in performing such tasks, and thus might be less inclined to seek and receive outside assistance," said Louis Burgio, who co-authored the study. He is the Harold R. Johnson Professor of Social Work and an adjunct research professor at the Institute of Gerontology.

The data sample included responses from 720 caregivers in Birmingham, Ala., Boston, Memphis, Tenn., and Philadelphia. They must have provided at least four hours of care daily to the recipient for at least six months to participate in the study.

Participants answered questions about formal services, which included in-home aid such as receiving visits from a nurse or accepting meals delivered to their residences. Out-of-home services involved transportation, adult day care and support groups.

Women who are caregivers acknowledged that they rely on their families and friends for support, whereas men may have been hesitant to report this type of support.

The researchers believe women may not be comfortable with driving their spouses with dementia, which can prompt them to get transportation services.

A religious assessment tracked the number of times caregivers attended religious services or activities, and how frequently they prayed or meditated. Participants indicated the importance of religious faith or spirituality to them.

Women who prayed and attended services more often were less likely than men to use in-home services. Attending services might link one to a helping community that shares and provides support in the tasks of caregiving, thus reducing the need for formal help, the researchers said.

Prayer might also reduce the stresses of caregiving and thus the need for formal services, Burgio said. Burgio co-authored the study with lead author Fei Sun of Arizona State University, Lucinda Lee Roff, and David Klemmack of the University of Alabama.

The findings appear in the December issue of the *Journal of Aging and Health*.

Provided by University of Michigan

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