

Women face a higher risk of care home admission due to their partner's age

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New research published today in the journal *Age and Aging* has investigated why women are 40% more likely to be admitted in to a care home than men. The study found that women were often married to older partners who cannot provide care for them due to their age-related frailty. The study, entitled 'Gender differences in care home admission risk: Partner's age explains the higher risk for women', used data from the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (NILS) derived from the Northern Ireland Health Card registration system, to which the 2001 Census return is linked. The research focused on NILS members aged 65 or over at the time, and living in a household with two people as a couple.

A total of 20,830 people aged 65 and over were living with a partner in a two person household. This represents 37.8% of all non-institutionalised people at the time of the census. Of this group, 45% (9,367) were female, 31% were aged 75 or over, and 47% of the group reported having limiting long term illness (LLTI). A Cox proportional hazard model was used to investigate the relationship between the risk of admission and the cohort member and partner's characteristics over a period of 6 years.

The data showed that [women](#) do tend to have partners who are on average older than them and the average age difference between male and [female partners](#) is approximately 5 years. The prevalence of ill health increased with age in both sexes but at all ages women had sicker partners, except for the 85 year or older group. In the period studied,

415 people were admitted to care homes. The risk of admission for [married women](#) compared to [married men](#) was assessed controlling for both the age and health status of the individual. After adjusting the results to consider participant's age, there is a 40% excess risk for female admittance to [care home](#). Once the age of their partner is taken into account, women are no more likely than men to be admitted to care homes.

Mark McCann, author of the study, comments that "the higher admission risk for women in comparison to men appears to be due primarily to the differences in the age and frailty of their partners. This research has gone some way to debunking the myth that older men do not want to care for their partners. The findings clearly show that the main reason more women are admitted to care homes is that their partners are unable to provide sufficient support. Age differences between partners are evident in most societies so it is important that issues raised in this paper are considered in future health planning. The projected narrowing of the gap in life expectancy between men and women may mean that there are more men around to provide such support in future years."

Keypoints:

- Women have a higher risk of care home admission
- Analyses suggests that age-related frailty, not unwillingness to undertake a caring role, explains the increased admission risk

Provided by Oxford University

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