

Family conflict, patient ailments increase caregiver stress

July 4 2012, by Jared Wadley



(Medical Xpress) -- Patients' mental and physical challenges, as well as family conflict, heighten caregivers' stress when they assist their ailing parents, a new University of Michigan study found.

In addition, sons experience greater family conflict when taking care of the elder parent than daughters, U-M researchers said.

More [adults](#) these days are assuming the demanding role of [caregiver](#) to ensure their [parents](#) receive the proper care. When the family does not support or share in some of the care responsibilities, the situation becomes stressful.

U-M researchers examined how the care recipients' impairment—both mental and physical ailments—and family conflict affect caregivers' [stress](#). They also looked at what role gender played in the equation.

The study, which sampled 861 adult caregivers, measured impairments in categories involving disruptive behaviors in 15 situations, such as repeating questions, dressing inappropriately and becoming suspicious. Caregivers were asked how often these behaviors happen.

Lead author Min Young Kwak, a doctoral candidate in sociology, said these impairments led to greater family conflict and higher levels of stress for caregivers.

Regarding gender differences, when elderly parents became more dependent requiring additional care, there is a sharper increase in [family conflict](#) for sons than for daughters, Kwak said.

Daughters are more likely than sons to respond to their parents' needs by extending their caregiving work hours, the study showed. Sons are more likely to ask for help from other family members than daughters, which may result in more possibilities for the sons to experience conflict over the distribution of care.

Kwak wrote the study with Berit Ingersoll-Dayton, a social work professor, and Jeungkun Kim, research fellow at Samsung Economic Research Institute.

The findings appear in the recent issue of the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*.

Provided by University of Michigan

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