

# Impact of caring for adult child with disability studied

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(Medical Xpress)—Caring for an adult child with developmental disabilities or mental illness increased by 38 percent the chances that an aging parent would develop disabilities of their own, according to findings of a new study led by Dr. Subharati Ghosh, a post-doctoral research fellow at the Lurie Institute for Disability Policy in the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University.

The study, published in [Psychiatric Services](#), highlights economic and psycho-[social challenges](#) faced by parents of adult children with disabilities, compared with parents of children without disabilities.

When either parent becomes disabled, the study found, families' report lower financial well-being. This being especially true when an aging parent must contend with both the needs of an adult child with mental illness and a spouse who develops an age-related disability.

Not surprisingly, parents are themselves susceptible to developing disabilities and chronic conditions as they age. "By age 60, parents caring for adult children with mental illness were more likely to have a spouse with a disability, than parents of children with developmental disabilities or than those with whose children had no disabilities," Ghosh said.

When one parent of an [adult child](#) with mental illness became disabled, the family reported lower financial well-being than a comparison group that did not have a child with disabilities, she said. Parents of [adult](#)

[children](#) with disabilities often bear the costs of care, as many expenses they incur are not fully covered by insurance.

The findings suggest that targeted policy measures may be needed to better support aging parents of adult [children with disabilities](#). These families are highly vulnerable during retirement not only to the onset of their own disabilities, but also to dire [financial consequences](#).

Ghosh's co-authors are Dr. Jan Greenberg and Dr. Marsha Seltzer of the Waisman Center and School of Social Work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The study drew its data from the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study, which has followed over 10,000 high school graduates and their families since 1957.

The study is available at *Psychiatry Online*.

**More information:** [journals.psychiatryonline.org/ ...  
px?articleid=1356528](https://journals.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/j.psychmed.12.12.1356528)

Provided by Brandeis University

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