

## Nearby daughter most likely to be mom's caregiver

August 8 2013, by Susan S. Lang

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Among adult siblings, who is the most likely to become the caregiver when their mother experiences health problems? The daughter who lives closest, reports Cornell's Karl Pillemer, who has co-authored the first longitudinal study to predict which sibling will become mom's caregiver.

"What's interesting here is that despite recent changes in [gender roles](#) and in the ability to stay in touch these days with cellphones and email, being the nearest daughter is still, to a great extent, 'destiny,'" said Pillemer, professor of human development in the College of Human Ecology and of [gerontology](#) at the Weill Cornell Medical College; his co-author is [sociologist](#) J. Jill Suitor of Purdue University.

Furthermore, the researchers found "that the child a mother expected would care for her before she needed care was most often the one who actually did it," Pillemer said. "So mothers' expectations are typically met. This is especially striking because we asked mothers about who they expected would care for them about five to seven years before they needed help."

The researchers report that [adult children](#) living within a two-hour drive of their mother are six times more likely to provide care later than siblings living farther away, and that daughters are more than twice as likely as sons to become caregivers. Also, children who shared their mother's values had an increased likelihood of becoming caregivers.

The study is posted online and will be published in a forthcoming issue

of the journal *The Gerontologist*.

Unlike previous studies, which have been cross-sectional (analyzed data from one point in time), this study was prospective and took a within-family approach, which allowed the researchers to predict who would become a [caregiver](#) over time. The researchers interviewed 537 adults in 139 families prior to any need for care for their mothers; then, seven years later, they followed up with the families to see who had actually had become the caregiver. The researchers assessed whether or not the adult child had provided previous care, his/her gender, employment status, proximity, similarity of opinions to the mom, emotional closeness and whether they had provided advice, comfort or help with household chores.

"The results pose an interesting question regarding the future of informal support for frail or disabled older persons," Pillemer said. "The cultural and structural factors that lead care to be expected from the nearest daughter may not apply in a society with full employment and high geographic mobility for women." These factors, he noted, may create added tension for women and their families.

The study, "Who Provides Care? A Prospective Study of Caregiving among Adult Siblings," was supported by the National Institute of Aging.

Provided by Cornell University

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