

Abused caregivers have double chance of poor health

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Women who become caregivers after experiencing intimate partner violence face a double-whammy hit to their health, University of Queensland research shows.

UQ School of Public Health's Associate Professor Leigh Tooth said [women](#) with both [life experiences](#) had twice the normal odds of experiencing depressive symptoms and stress – and they also had worse physical [health](#) than other women.

Nearly one in 20 middle-aged women in the study was in this position.

"We know the experience of suffering [violence](#) at the hands of an intimate partner is linked to long-term health problems, and that caregivers also tend to have poorer mental and physical health," Associate Professor Tooth said.

"When we compared these two very different, very stressful, life events, we found the impact on the women's health was almost the same, even though one was perpetrated against the individual (violence) and one was undertaken with a degree of personal control (caregiving).

"Research on the impact of caregiving usually focuses on current relationship dynamics rather than looking at how past [experiences](#) affect a woman's capacity to provide care and remain healthy.

"No research had been undertaken previously on how a history of

intimate partner violence impacts on the health of women who take on caregiving roles."

The researchers followed 8453 women aged between 45 and 65 participating in the Women's Health Australia study (also known as the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health).

Thirteen per cent of the women had a history of intimate partner violence and 32 per cent of the women identified as caregivers.

The researchers found the association between poor health, caregiving and the experience of [intimate partner violence](#) was reduced when women had better personal resources like resilience and social support to draw on for support.

"Intimate [partner](#) violence is associated with poor personal resources in women – things like financial stress, lower education levels and poor social support – and this lack of resources remains a factor for women years after the violence stops Associate Professor Tooth said.

"Our findings highlight the importance of clinicians understanding the long-term, cumulative health impacts of their patients' stressful life experiences.

"To understand the drivers of poor health, they need to ask about their patients' life circumstances.

"To better support women with complex histories, we need to provide better referral pathways and services to help augment their personal resources."

The research is published in *Maturitas*: An international journal of midlife health and beyond.

More information: Pablo Ferreira et al. Intimate personal violence and caregiving: Influences on physical and mental health in middle-aged women, *Maturitas* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.maturitas.2017.05.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2017.05.001)

Provided by University of Queensland

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