

More than one in five children in England care for sick and disabled family members

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New figures from BBC News and the University of Nottingham reveal that the extent of caring by children is much higher than had been thought, with 22% of children, who responded to a questionnaire,

admitting to being young carers.

The secondary school pupils, who responded, lived with a family member who had an illness or disability and carried out caring duties. Nearly a third (32%) of those [children](#) are responsible for a high level caring.

If the results reflect the country as a whole, it would mean that over 800,000 secondary school children (aged 11-16 years) in England are having to care for someone at home...with nearly 260,000 regularly doing domestic work, household management and emotional care.

The 2011 census – which is completed by the adults in the household—only identified 166,000 young carers in England and Wales between the age of 5-17 years.

Professor Stephen Joseph, from the School of Education at the University of Nottingham, conducted the research. He said: "Our research suggests that approximately 7% of young people have a significant caring role in the home for an ill or disabled relative.

"Most frequently caring by a young person is for a mother or a sibling, with a physical disability. Caring activity consisted mostly of domestic activities, household management, and emotional care. Being a young carer can affect attendance and performance at school

"It is important that young carers are given the support they need so that their lives are not adversely affected by these experiences. Educators and all those who work with young people need to be aware of the difficulties faced by young carers."

The new findings are the clearest and most current picture we have of the number of children who have to care for someone at home, in

England.

Emma James, Senior Policy and Research Officer, Barnardo's said: "We know that the census statistics were massively under representative of the number of children and young people in this country undertaking caring roles in their homes, and it is a travesty in the 21st century that there are children and young people that are the main carers for their parents."

925 children, in Years 7 and 10 from schools who take part in BBC School Report completed the University of Nottingham questionnaire. It assessed the level and amount of caring, carried out. Each child answered 18 questions about their role at home, ranging from washing up and cooking to managing household finances and the washing and dressing of a family member. Points were based on how often the tasks were completed.

Of the 200 young carers, 177 responded fully about the level of care they give. The scores from 56 (32%) children showed them to be carrying out a high level of caring, with 16 (9%) children doing a very high level of caring.

Children's experts and charities have long campaigned to highlight the effects of care-giving have on children:

Emma James adds: "These children are incredibly vulnerable, they're losing their childhoods and they're jeopardising their futures because of the roles they have to undertake."

The Government acknowledged in their recent Carers Action Plan that young carers can suffer with poorer health and wellbeing and often miss out on education and training opportunities.

When questioned about who the young carers looked after, the most frequent answers were their mother 46% (91 children) and siblings 40% (46 children). Children cited physical illness most frequently, as their reason for caring 35% (70 children), followed by long term illness 24% (48 children). Mental health was also given as a reason for caring 24% (47 children) with 6% (ten children) highlighting drug or alcohol problems as the reason for giving care.

The questionnaire found that girls were more likely to be carers than boys. Of the 200 young carers who responded 191 gave their gender: female 59% (117 children); and male 37% (74 children).

Jameal's mother Terri suffers from chronic back pain, tinnitus, underactive thyroid, constant headaches, depression and anxiety.

Jameal is one of around ten per cent of young carers who are carrying out the highest level of support. As well as having had to dress and wash his Mum on bad days, he takes his brother and sister to school, cooks, cleans, does the washing and shopping, help pays the bills and offers emotional support and care.

Something Terri is very grateful for, she said: "I am immensely proud. Immensely, massively proud of him – of them all. He's saved my life in more ways that he will every know... He's absolutely fantastic."

Jameal is like many young carers. He struggles to keep on top of homework:

"My main worry in school, though, is homework, because for young carers like me, it's hard to get your homework done on top of everything else." "It makes me feel sad because now....I have got so much homework building up, building up, building up, and I can't really do anything about it."

Jameal does get respite. He spends each weekend with his Grandad, where he gets chance to relax and play on his computer games.

In June the Government's 2-year [Carers Action Plan](#) was launched.

It included details of increased support in education and health services for young carers and funding for an identification project involving the Carers Trust.

It highlighted that The Children and Families Act 2014 extended the right to a needs assessment for all young carers.

Improved identification of young carers, to enable assessments that identify support needs alongside flexible educational opportunities are vital to providing support so that young carers are able to access opportunities and have the same life chances as other [young people](#) without caring responsibilities.

Carers Action Plan 2018-2020

Campaigners and charities raise the issue that while Local Authorities have a duty to assess young carers, following up help is often lacking:

Emma James said: "We're seeing an increase in identification in some areas but then a decrease in support that's being provided because the funds aren't there or being invested in the right places.

"We do welcome the actions within the Action Plan...but what we're not seeing is that preventative work. Children shouldn't be undertaking these caring roles in the first place so why are these families not getting the support they need?

"There's a problem there, it's scandalous and the government needs to be

looking more into the social care that's been provided to these families."

Provided by University of Nottingham

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