

# Today's generation shocked they might have to care for their parents

August 19 2019, by Nancy Bazilchuk And Siw Ellen

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Scandinavia has long promoted the ideal of gender equality, leading to a new kind of masculinity where caring for children is part of being a man. But when it comes to caring for parents, it is different, even though equality remains the ideal for most people, a Swedish researcher says. Credit: Colourbox

The Western world is aging, and someone is going to have to care for all

those old folks. But who?

Swedish [gender](#) research Sofia Björk recently completed her doctorate at the University of Gothenburg where she has interviewed 21 [middle-aged men](#) and women who have parents who need care.

Both the men and women in the interviews were surprised that their aging parents suddenly needed them, Björk said.

"It was quite a shock to many when they realized that they actually had help their parents. They felt it was unfair, in a way," she said.

"It may be because they have grown accustomed to having healthy, independent parents and have believed that they will always be that way. But it may also be that they have been confident that this is something the [welfare state](#) will fix for them," she said.

## **Proud dads**

The researcher also interviewed 31 parents who have children under the age of 12. The interviews showed that the men were proud to be a father who is equally involved in their children's lives.

Today's fathers can be seen pushing a stroller in one hand with a cafe latte in the other, they blog about being a dad, and meet in paternity groups. Taking [paternity leave](#) is seen as natural and trendy among many of today's fathers, especially the middle class.

Björk believes that the ideal of equality has created a new masculinity, where caring for children is part of being a man.

But when it comes to caring for their parents, it is different, although equality remains the ideal for most people.

## Daughters' responsibility

Björk said one person in all of the families was mainly responsible for caring for elderly parents. Where the family included daughters, the responsibility fell on them, she says.

She has only interviewed people who are caring for their parents. But in larger quantitative studies, it is primarily women who take the main responsibility for their elderly parents, she says.

"My study found that gender is used as an argument for taking responsibility or not," she said. "A woman might say, 'Since I'm a daughter, it's my responsibility.'"

Björk found that women took more of the workload than men in caring for elderly [parents](#), and that they felt very alone in this responsibility. Several people felt that the responsibility could affect their health and work life.

## A woman with a daughter gets less help

A 2014 study from Norway shows that a child's gender plays a central role in how much public help the elderly receive.

When researchers compared an elderly woman with a daughter and needed aid to an elderly woman with a son and needed aid, they found that the woman with the son would receive 25 percent more [home care](#) than if she had a daughter. This translates to an increase of 120 minutes more services per week.

The researchers from this study said this shows that the family situation of an elderly person in need of help is taken into consideration when

home services are allocated. This is in stark contrast to the Norwegian goal of universal welfare arrangements, which are supposed to be distributed according to the user's needs, and not based on gender.

## **Relatives have been given greater responsibility**

Both Norway and Sweden have good welfare programs for the elderly compared to many other countries.

But there have been changes in elder care. Politicians in both Norway and Sweden have decided that institutional care should be reduced and that the elderly should live longer at home.

Although the elderly continue to receive home services, this means the demands on relatives are greater. Among other things, they will need to help coordinate services, says Björk.

"Expanding public elder care was a major gender equality program because it freed women from having sole responsibility for that care. When this approach is cut back, it's also a setback for gender equality," she said.

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