



A Study of Young Carers in the Irish Population

Commissioned by the Office of the Minister for
Children and Youth Affairs

Briefing Note for Young People

What was the aim of the research?

The aim of the research was to:

- Describe young carers in Ireland;
- Find out what effect caring has on their lives;
- Hear how they can be helped and supported.

How was the research carried out?

It was the intention of the researchers to speak with 30 young carers from all over Ireland. However, due to difficulties in identifying young carers, the researchers met 26 young carers from different parts of Ireland. These young carers were aged between 5 and 18. The young people talked to the researchers about their lives, how caring for a family member affects them and what help they receive or would like to receive. The researchers also spoke with 30 professionals working with children and families (for example, social workers, teachers, youth workers and people working in carer organisations).

What did the research find?

☉ *Who are young carers?*

A young carer is under the age of 18 and provides care for a family or household member who has an illness, disability, addiction or other care need. The young carer may be the main carer in the home or else helps the main carer. A young carer may do a lot of things, including household chores, medical care, help with toileting and bathing or emotional support. The need to carry out these tasks may happen regularly or only occasionally. Therefore, no two caring situations are the same. Sometimes caring is a mostly positive experience but in other cases caring can have a negative effect on a young person's health, development and happiness.

☉ *What do young carers do?*

- Household chores, including grocery shopping, cooking and cleaning;
- General care, including help with feeding, walking, moving around and medication;
- Providing emotional support, for example listening and reassuring the person being cared for when they are upset;
- Intimate care, involving help with toileting, washing and dressing;
- Looking after and helping to mind brothers and sisters;
- Other types of care, for example asking for support from professionals, translating and interpreting information, helping with paying bills, helping with post or telephone calls.

Young carers have different levels of responsibility. Some are primary carers and others are secondary carers.

- A primary carer has the main responsibility in the home to provide care
- A secondary carer helps the primary carer to provide care

☉ *What are some of the reasons why people need care?*

- Intellectual disability;
- Both intellectual and physical disability;
- Illness (for example, cancer or multiple sclerosis) and mental illness (for example, depression or schizophrenia);
- Addiction to drugs or alcohol;
- Sensory impairment (for example, deafness or blindness).

☉ *What are the effects of being a young carer?*

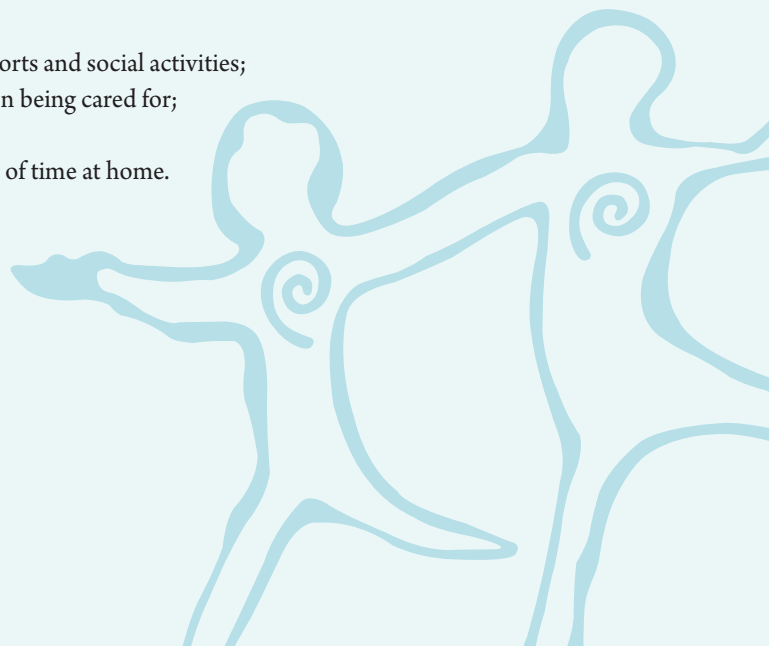
Being a young carer can have positive and negative effects on the lives of young carers.

Negative effects include:

- Missing school or being distracted when at school;
- Feeling lonely because of not having enough time for friends, sports and social activities;
- Physical illness, such as back pain due to helping to lift the person being cared for;
- Being 'on call' all the time;
- Worry and resentment, or boredom due to having to spend a lot of time at home.

Positive effects include:

- Feeling closer to the person cared for;
- Being more mature;
- Greater understanding and compassion.



☉ *What help do young carers get?*

Some of the young carers in this study reported that they and/or their household receive some of the following supports:

- Home help by professionals for the person being cared for;
- Respite care (where someone else takes over the caring for a while) for the person being cared for;
- Advice and information;
- Support from friends and family members;
- Support from teachers and school principals;
- Treatment (for example, physiotherapy) for the person who is cared for;
- Help with transport and making changes to the house (for example, getting a downstairs bathroom for a wheelchair user).

The young carers reported that they wanted and needed more of these supports.

What have the researchers done with the findings?

The researchers have asked the Government and professionals, working in the areas of health care, disability and education, and all organisations working with children, young people and their families to carefully consider the following:

☉ *Better help and support for young carers*

The findings from the research show that young carers need more support in many different ways. Government departments and other organisations need to work together and look at making money available to give young carers the support they need.

Young carers are likely to have needs in the following areas because of their caring role:

- Information about services that can help them and help the person in need of care;
- Help in the home;
- Help with school from teachers;
- Someone to talk to;
- Advice from adults with useful knowledge or skills;
- Time to be with friends;
- Time to take part in sport and other activities or interests.

In the United Kingdom young carers are encouraged to get help through dedicated young carers' organisations and websites. These have been set up to provide support, information and advice to young carers. Similar organisations and websites could be set up in Ireland. Also, where organisations are already helping adult carers, more help could be made available to young carers.

Listening to young carers

Young carers should be encouraged to let someone know about their caring role: a teacher, a friend, a professional helping the person in need of care in the home or someone from a carers organisation or youth organisation. This study also showed that no two caring situations are the same. The help that young carers need will depend on their family situation. When developing help and support for young carers, the views of young carers should be listened to and taken into account.

Knowing more about young carers

The findings from this study show that there is little awareness about the role of young carers. This could be improved through:

- An information campaign in primary and secondary schools, which would let young people and teachers know about young carers and the type of care they provide;
- Professionals also need to know more about young carers' lives so that they can give them the help and support they need;
- It is important to raise awareness about young carers without only drawing attention to the negative impacts of caring. Attention should be given to what is good about caring also.

Greater understanding is also needed about how many young carers there are in Ireland. This could be done through the Census of the Irish population if a question was asked about the presence of a young carer (between the ages of 5-17) in the household. The Census is a detailed survey of every person living in Ireland on a particular day, which happens once every five years.

What are the benefits of this study?

This is the first study of young carers covering all of Ireland. It is particularly important as young carers have taken part in this study by telling their stories. It is a starting point for developing help and support for young carers in Ireland.



For more Information

A more detailed report can be downloaded at www.omc.gov.ie.