

Older Australians Providing Informal Care

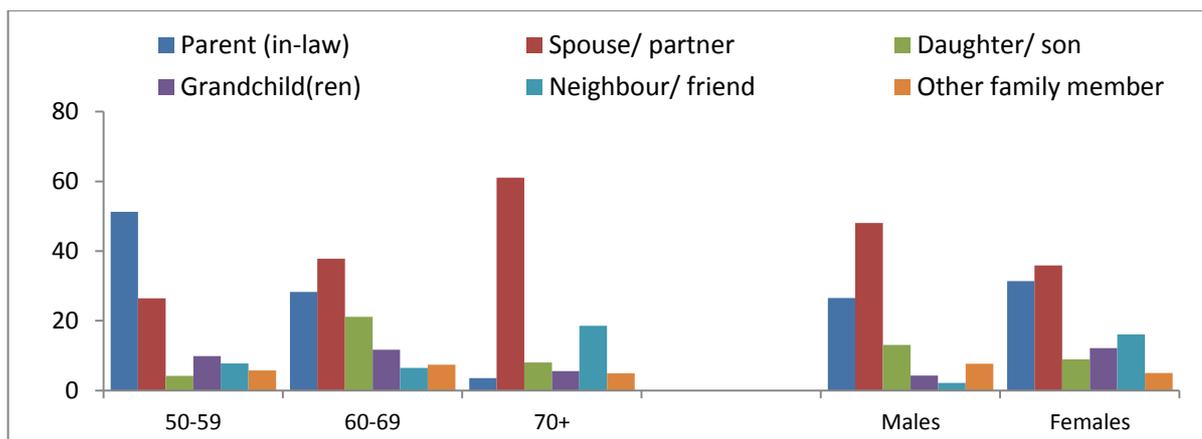
Older Australians make a significant contribution to society through the provision of informal care to family members and friends. A recent survey of NSA members asked about different aspects of caring, including who respondents care for and how many hours are spent providing care. The survey also asked about the limiting effect of care responsibilities on the carer’s social activity.

The survey results show that among Australians aged 50+, 11% identified themselves as being a carer; 9% of males are carers and 13% of females. Of these, 32% have been caring for someone for five years or more, 50% for between one and five years, and 18% for less than one year.

WHOM DO OLDER CARERS PROVIDE CARE FOR?

The likelihood of being a carer does not vary across age, but there are differences in whom the care is being provided for. Figure 1 shows whom carers are caring for, according to age and sex of carer. At age 50-59, half of carers are providing care for their parents or parents-in-law, and a further quarter are caring for their spouse or partner (a few are caring for both a parent and a partner). About 10% of these younger carers are caring for grandchildren. At age 60-69, carers are increasingly likely to provide care for a son or daughter, their partner or grandchildren, and much less likely to provide care for parents (because they are no longer alive). At age 70+, 60% of carers provide care for their partner and 20% provide care for a neighbour or friend. Caring patterns differ by sex. Almost half of male carers provide care for their partner compared with about a third of female carers, but female carers are more likely to provide care for a parent. Female carers are also more likely to provide care for a neighbour or friend.

Figure 1 Whom carers provide care for, by age and sex of carer (percentage of carers)



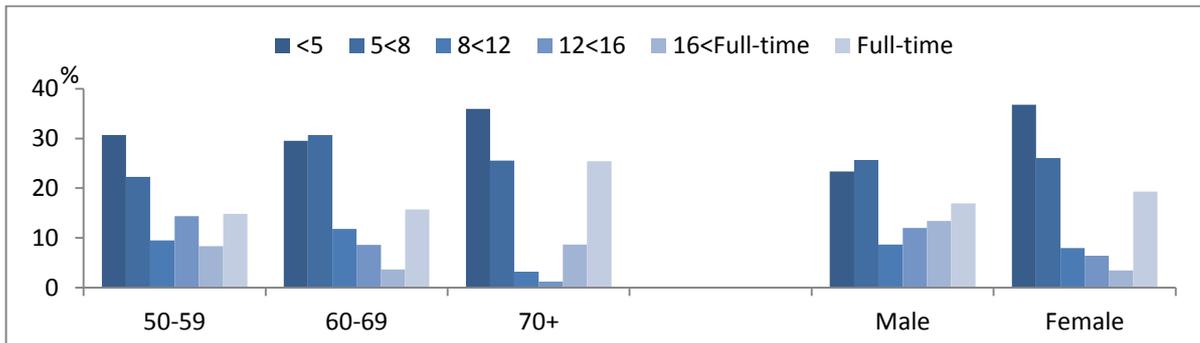
Note: These percentages may sum to more than 100% because of multiple responses.

HOW MUCH TIME DO OLDER CARERS SPEND PROVIDING CARE?

Older carers spend significant amounts of time providing care for others. Overall, about a third of carers spend up to 5 hours a week providing care and an additional third spend between 5 and 12 hours a week. Almost 20 per cent of carers describe their caring role as full-time. Again the patterns of care differ by age and by sex. Carers aged 50-59 are least likely to be full-time carers – probably because they are more likely to be working – but about a third spend 8 or more

hours a week providing care. Carers aged 60-69 and 70+ are more likely to spend fewer hours (up to 8 hours a week) providing care, but those aged 70+ are also the most likely to be full-time carers (25%). The male pattern is most similar to patterns for the younger age groups, whereas the female pattern most resembles the pattern for carers aged 70+. Male carers are slightly less likely to be full-time carers, but they are more likely than females to spend longer hours providing part-time care.

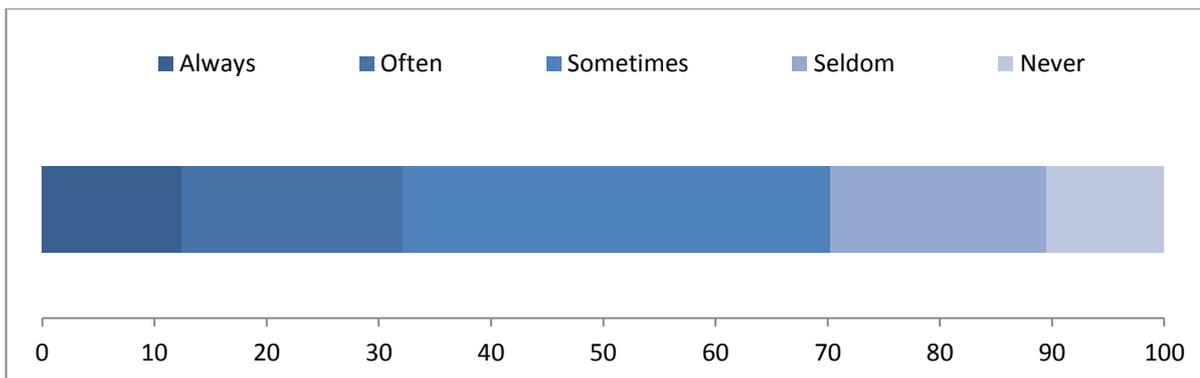
Figure 2 Hours spent per week providing care, by age and sex of carer



HOW OFTEN DO CARING RESPONSIBILITIES LIMIT THE CARER'S SOCIAL ACTIVITIES?

The hours spent in providing care are reported in many cases to significantly limit the carer's social activities. Figure 3 shows that for about a third of carers their social activities with family or friends are limited often or always by their caring responsibilities, and that for the majority (70%) of carers their social activities are limited at least sometimes. Only 10% of carers report that their social activities are never limited by their caring responsibilities. There is no significant variation by sex or by age group in the pattern of response.

Figure 3 How often carer's social activity with friends or family is limited by their caring responsibilities



This issue of 'Facts and Figures' includes data from the 2010/11 *Social Activity and Wellbeing of Older Australians* survey which is part of the *Social Networks and Ageing Project (SNAP)* at the Australian National University. This study is funded by an ARC Linkage grant -LP0990974 "The role of online social networks in successful ageing: benefiting from 'who you know' at older ages" (H. Booth, R. Ackland and T. Windsor; 2009-2012) - in collaboration with National Seniors Australia Productive Ageing Centre. The results in this factsheet are based on weighted data representing the age-sex structure and urban-rural residence of the older Australian population in 2011. This 'Facts and Figures' has been created by Heather Booth and Pilar Rioseco from SNAP.