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Challenges facing young carers

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Introduction

This report provides information regarding the issues and challenges facing young carers, focusing on recent research and reports from the UK. Due to the volume of research, the research included is mostly from reviews / systematic reviews.

The results include research that was indexed in the database Scopus, using the following search strategy.

"young carer" OR "child caregiver*" OR "adolescent caregiver*" OR "youth caregiver*" OR "young adult carer*" OR "sibling carer*" AND "systematic review" OR review (Abstract) Limit: 2020-2025*

Disclaimer: This summary includes any relevant literature that was identified from the above search, it is not an exhaustive list, it presents key finding and not recommendations for practice.

Summary

Challenges faced by young carers

Young carers can face many challenges these may include:

- Poor mental health [1–10]
- Increased risk of suicide [3]
- Feeling stressed [11]
- Physical health symptoms [2,3,10]
- Fewer hours of sleep / trouble sleeping [2,3,7]
- Reduced opportunities for social interaction / friends [1,3,7,8,10]
- Reduced opportunities for leisure activities [1,7,10,11]
- Feeling lonely / isolated [1,3,7,12]
- Worry / concern for the person they are caring for [1,3,7,8]
- Not wanting to burden the person they care for with how they feel [7]
- Juggling multiple responsibilities [3,10,12]
- More likely to miss school and / or be persistently absent [3,7,8,10,12,13]
- More likely to be suspended from school [12]
- Impacting educational performance [3,5,9,10,12,13]
- Lack of support from school / college / university [11]
- Bullying [3,9,10]
- Impact of finances / cost of living [3,5,8,11,12]
- Risk of homelessness [3]
- Lack of access to support [3,13]
- Less likely to be in education or employment [3,10]
- Fewer suitable employment opportunities [3]
- More likely to be absent from work [3]
- Barriers to accessing support (costs, competing priorities, fear, embarrassment, pride) [14]
- Worrying about their futures [13]
- Feeling guilty for wanting their own life [8,13]
- Not pursuing opportunities such as not moving out / staying close to home / not going to university / not taking jobs far from home [7,8,10,13]
- Feeling embarrassed [8]

Positive outcomes of being a young carer

It isn't all doom and gloom for young carers, some young carers report positive outcomes of being a young carer, these may include:

- Strong family bonds [1,8,10,13]
- Resilience / coping skills [1,7,10,13]
- Increased maturity [1,13]
- Increased empathy, compassion and desire to help others [1,8,10,13]
- Greater social awareness and acceptance of disability [10,13]
- Developing skills / personal growth [8,10,13]
- Organising their lives [7]
- Feelings of satisfaction [8]

Further points that may be of interest

It can be difficult to identify young carers, they themselves may not see themselves as carers, and it can take many years before young carers are identified as such.[3,10] Even when a young person is identified as being a carer they may still struggle to access support due to variation in the support available, waiting lists, and overstretched services.[3]

Caring intensity can be associated with worse outcomes, with those caring for someone within their own home or for higher intensity being more likely to experience difficulties.[2,6] A 2023 survey from Carers Trust found that for young carers in Wales, time spent caring has increased for 56% of young carers, and 47% now care for more people.[11]

There is a gap in the research, with a lack of longitudinal research looking at the effects of being a young carer over time, and there is limited research looking at gender differences, and ethnic minorities.[2]

Differences in the impact of caring

Certain characteristics of young carers can influence the impact that caring has on them, some of these groups are listed below:

- Caring for a parent with mental illness / substance abuse - Young carers of a parent with mental illness showed an increased risk of negative impacts and particular needs[4]

- Gender - Some studies found female young carers reported worse mental health outcomes[5,6]
- Ethnicity - Black young carers suffered reduced life satisfaction compared with non-carers[6]

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