



Researching the characteristics of informal carers in England and Wales

Introduction

Informal care provision by family, friends or neighbours is a crucial component in understanding how social care is currently organised and how it could be organised in the future. Aiming to contribute to a better understanding of informal care, we have been analysing the 2001 and 2011 England and Wales Censuses, which included questions on the provision of informal care, defined as “unpaid care to a family member, friend or neighbour because of long-term physical or mental ill-health / disability or problems related to old age”. Data from the 2011 Census has been included in the Office for National Statistics Longitudinal Study (ONS LS), enabling the study of taking up or stopping informal care provision between 2001 and 2011. The ONS LS is a 1% sample of 2011 England and Wales Census records linked to earlier census responses, providing invaluable information on the life course of study members.

The aims of this project

The overall aim of the project has been to examine the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of informal carers, as informal carers continue to make a major contribution to the supply of social care, and changes in the composition of the carers' population will have a direct impact on the future design of social care and the distribution of its financial cost. Demographic changes may also affect the supply of, and demand for, social care. For example, improving life expectancy for men at older ages may increase the amount of spousal care provided by men, while population ageing is projected to place greater pressure on local governments to provide social care for older people. This project focuses on two aspects of informal caring, (i) comparing the profile of carers in 2011 with those providing care in 2001, and (ii) studying in 2011 the characteristics of individuals who were providing care in 2001.

Characteristics of informal carers

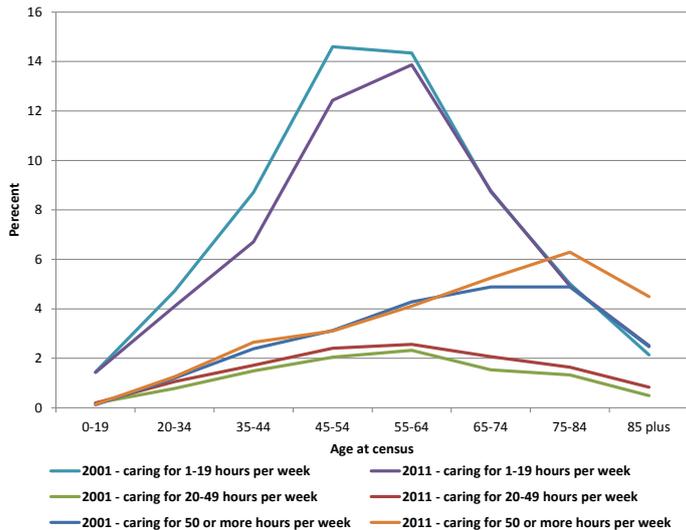
The first step in the analyses has been to identify the overall prevalence of informal caring at 2011

Key Points

- Informal caring is a key social policy issue and changes in the composition of the carers' population will have a direct impact on the future design of social care.
- Informal caring increased in prevalence between 2001 and 2011, particularly for those providing more than 20 hours of care per week.
- At both 2001 and 2011, women were more likely than men to be providing care, while older individuals were most likely to be providing 50 hours or more informal care per week, with an increase at 2011.
- Among all carers in 2001, individuals providing the highest intensity of care in 2001 (50 hours or more per week) were most likely to be caring at 2011.

compared to 2001 and to compare the characteristics of those providing care. In 2011, the provision of 50 hours or more informal care per week was higher at the oldest ages compared to 2001, particularly among men. This is likely to be related to increasing life expectancy which can increase the duration and likelihood of caring for one's spouse.

Figure 1: Percentage caring at each caring intensity at 2001 and 2011 by age at census



Authors' own analysis of ONS LS.

Consistent with results from the 2001 Census we find that being female, aged 55-64 years, married, living in the north or Wales, employed part-time or 'looking after the home' and renting from a local authority/council increase one's likelihood of being a carer in 2011.

What became of the carers in 2001?

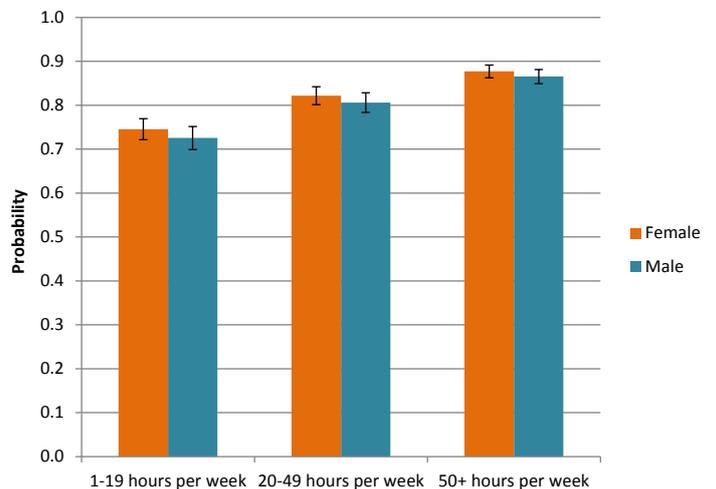
Selecting individuals who were present at both 2001 and 2011, the results show that over one third of those caring at the 2001 Census were also caring ten years later. Of all informal carers at both 2001 and 2011, 16.8% were providing 50 hours or more care per week at both dates. Multivariate analyses have identified the main characteristics associated with caring in 2001 and again in 2011.

Among carers in 2001, characteristics of also caring in 2011 (measured at 2011)

- Female
- Aged 45-54 years
- Owning one's home outright (housing tenure)
- White British or Irish origin
- Married
- Looking after the home (economic activity status)
- Reporting fairly good health
- Providing 50 hours or more care per week (in 2001)

The graph below shows the probability of providing any level of informal care at the 2011 Census, for those providing care at the 2001 Census, by the intensity of care provided in 2001.

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of any level informal caring at 2011 by caring intensity at 2001 and gender



Authors' own analysis of ONS LS.

The figure shows that individuals providing the highest number of hours of care in 2001 were the most likely to be carers again in 2011.

Future research

Further work is focussing on the health status of informal carers at the two Census points. Please contact us if you would like further information on the Care Life Cycle project, via email to clcproj@soton.ac.uk or telephone 023 8059 8981.

Authors

James Robards, Maria Evandrou, Jane Falkingham, Athina Vlachantoni

Editor

Yvonne Richardson

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