

Health of Aging Family Caregivers in Illinois

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Although the health status of these caregivers could impact their current and future capacity to support their family members with I/DD, this health status is largely unknown.

It is estimated that 1.7 million adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) in the nation are supported by older and middle-aged family caregivers, with 25% of caregivers aged 65 years and older, and an additional 35% aged between 40 and 64 years¹. Individuals in these middle and older age groups are frequently confronted with challenges of maintaining their own health, including increased susceptibility to chronic conditions such as arthritis, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, hypertension, and hearing impairment. Many older and middle-aged adults report difficulty in daily activities such as walking, pushing and pulling large objects, and shopping. Although the health status of these caregivers could impact their current and future capacity to support their family members with I/DD, this health status is largely unknown.

This research compared the health status of 206 female caregivers, ages 40 years and over, who resided with their adult family members with I/DD in Illinois. This information was compared with Illinois general population data to examine whether there were any health disparities for these caregivers. Data were collected as part of a statewide health survey of adults with I/DD living with their family members and their primary family caregivers.

Health status of caregivers was examined using the prevalence of the following 10 common chronic health conditions, along with information on their activity limitations:

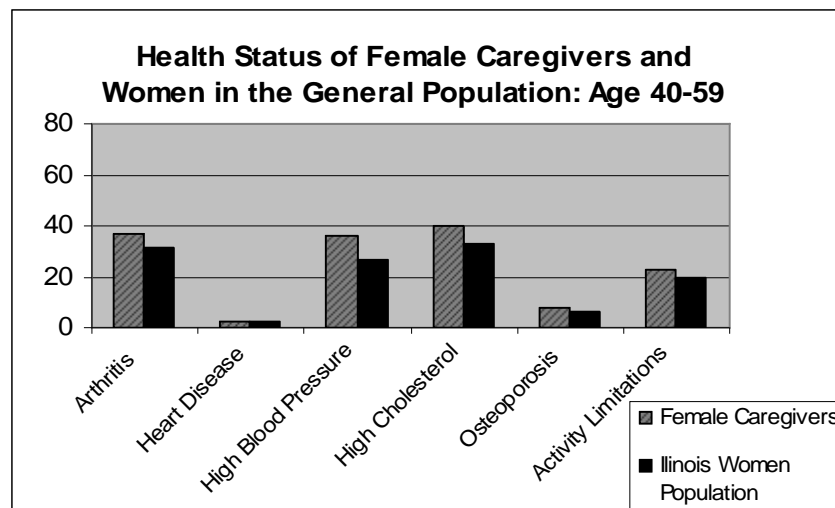
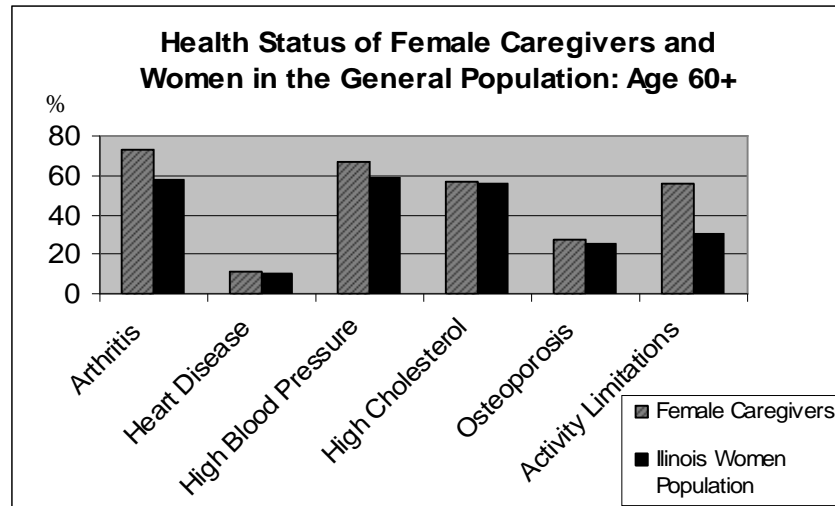
- Arthritis
- Asthma
- Angina or Coronary Heart Disease
- Diabetes
- Heart Attack
- High Blood cholesterol
- High Blood Pressure
- Osteoporosis
- Obesity
- Stroke

¹Braddock, D., Hemp, R., & Rizzolo, M. (2008). *The state of the states in developmental disabilities*. Boulder: Department of Psychiatry and Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities, University of Colorado.

For more details on the health status of aging family caregivers, see Yamaki, K., Hsieh, K., & Heller, T. (2009). Health profile of aging family caregivers supporting adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities at home. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 47*(6), 425–435.

Presence of chronic health conditions limits caregivers' capacity to provide care for their family members, and when their health begins to interfere with their ability to care, family caregivers often have few other family members to whom they can shift their caring responsibility.

Figures 1 and 2 graphically simulate the prevalence of chronic health conditions between family caregivers and women in the general population across the following two age groups: 40-59 and 60+. Caregivers reported a significantly higher prevalence of arthritis, high blood pressure, obesity, and activity limitations across the two age groups than women in the general population. For instance, 39% of the middle-aged caregivers and 39.4% of older age caregivers reported that they were obese, compared to 28.5% and 25.3%, respectively, in the general population. Prevalence of asthma and cardiovascular diseases for the caregivers was generally comparable with that of Illinois women.



These research findings reveal that aging female caregivers are providing support and care to adults with I/DD while dealing with their own age-related health challenges. The presence of chronic health conditions likely limits caregivers' capacity to provide care for their family members, and when their health begins to interfere with their ability to care, family caregivers often have few other family members to whom they can shift their caring responsibility. The health status of caregivers and its implications to their caregiving activities should be a concern for Illinois state policy planners and service providers in the field of I/DD.

The Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) on Aging with Developmental Disabilities: Lifespan Health and Function is funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (Grant # H133B080009). The content of this article does not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education and does not imply endorsement by the U.S. Federal Government.