



*Assessing Older Carers' Needs for Support:
Changing Policy and Continuing Themes in
England*

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Care and Caring: Future Proofing the New Demographics



🌿 Why focus on older carers?

- Numbers:

In England and Wales 1,277,693 carers over 65 and rising. Particularly sharp rise in over 75s

Since 2001, the total number of carers has risen by 11% the number of carers 65+rose by 35%.

- Policy legacy

Most policy research has focused on relationship between care and work.

This paper is focused on older carers caring for a partner.



🌟 How different?

- Health status: 65% carers aged 60-94 have long term health problems. Higher rates of dementia
- Gender: among over 75s more men than women are carers
- Intensity of caring: more likely to be round-the clock carers
- Differences *within* the age group (including age!)
 - Ethnic background
 - Sexual orientation
 - Trajectories of caring



🌟 Partner care in later life

- Typically, long-term relationships in which need for care arises
- Effect of illness and caring role on intimacy and emotional life
- Safeguarding: potential for abuse either way – possibly long term legacy
- Loss, anticipatory grief and bereavement
- Looking forward to one's own need for care
- Fear of being a burden on others
- Relationships with formal services



✦ Assessing the need for support

- Whose needs - carer or cared for?
- How assessed?
- By whom?

At any time, older carers might be perceived by professionals as '*co-clients*'/'*co-workers*'/'*background resources*' or a combination of these (Twigg and Atkin 1995)



✦ Changing policy context: 2014 Care Act

- Equalises statutory rights to support for carer and person cared for
- Enhances carers' rights to information
- Promised a more generous 'cap' on care costs
- Emphasises preventive work and the 'wellbeing' agenda
- Reinforces personalisation agenda cash in lieu of services
- Introduced stronger measures on safeguarding



🌟 Opportunities arising from the new legislation

- Greater clarity about carers' rights to information and advice
- Clarity about carers' rights to 'eligible' needs
- Focus on the sustainability of the caring role

'the impact of caring responsibilities on a carer's desire and ability to work and to partake in education, training or recreational activities, such as having time to themselves'



🔥 The devil is in the detail

Translating policies from paper to practice

- Guidance for local authorities to iron out geographical inequalities
- ‘Normal practice’ – often hard to shift
- Perpetual focus on gatekeeping and concern about raising expectations
- What happens at interface of practitioners and carers? Do practitioners regard older carers as partners?



✦ Assessing needs of carers and service users

- Cost containment through contracting out assessments to non-professional workers
- Encouraging self-assessment through on-line forms
- Conditions on eligibility:



Do the needs arise because the carer is providing necessary care and support?

Is the carer's physical or mental health affected or at risk of deteriorating, or is the carer unable to achieve any of the listed outcomes?

Is there consequently a significant impact on the carer's wellbeing?

✦ Equal statutory rights?

- Carer's willingness to care - often assumed in old age.
- And what are the alternatives?
- Distinguishing the effects of caring on carer's health more difficult in old age

Do equal rights for individuals address satisfactorily the interrelationship of needs and outcomes?



✦ Opportunities and challenges ahead

- Ironing out geographical inequalities can lead to formulaic assessments
- What services available to support older people and carers? Good for both?
- Historical legacy of separate developments for services to older people and carers
- How will assessors integrate support plans Or deal with conflicts of interest?
- What about integration with health service initiatives?



✦ Status of support for older people and older carers

- Often not regarded as high skilled work.
- Potential for this to continue with new legislation
- Highly skilled interventions needed to understand the range of challenges faced by older carers and the people they care for.



🌟 References

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