

Informal caregiving and inflammatory and metabolic markers in the UK Household Longitudinal Study

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Background: Providing informal care is known to be associated with poorer psychological health. However less is known about other, more objective health outcomes and particularly inflammatory and metabolic markers implicated in a stress pathway.

Objectives: To investigate associations between being a carer and inflammatory and metabolic markers using a large, representative UK longitudinal study.

Methods: Multiply imputed data from waves 1-3 of the UK Household Longitudinal Study were used, including data on >20,000 men and women aged 16+ years. Outcomes of interest were C-reactive protein, fibrinogen, glycated haemoglobin, cholesterol, body mass index (BMI), waist circumference and blood pressure. Associations between being a carer at waves 1 and 2 and each outcome were assessed using multivariate linear regression. Models included age, partnership status, number of dependent children, smoking status, and prior health status of the carer. We additionally investigated combining caring with paid work, hours of caring and the relationship of the carer to the person being cared for. Analyses were stratified by gender. Modification by socioeconomic position (social class, educational attainment and household income) and age was also assessed.

Results: Preliminary results show that caring is associated with raised CRP, fibrinogen, BMI, waist circumference, and blood pressure. Further analyses will be completed shortly.

Conclusion: Our study suggests that providing informal care might be detrimental for health, and therefore this has important implications for society. Given funding cuts for social care, a greater proportion of the population will be expected to provide informal care for relatives and friends.