

Informal Caregiving and Illicit Drug Use in England and Wales

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Objectives

Background

Long-term informal caregiving to a family or friend can become an adversity to carers by shocking their study, work or social activities. For this adversity, some carers may seek a solution from using illicit drugs.

This study examines

- Whether informal caregiving increases the risk of illicit drug use for carers in England and Wales.
- Whether receiving Carer's Allowance reduces the risk of illicit drug use for informal carers.

Data

Datasets

- Crime Survey for England and Wales 2013-2020

Sample

- 5725 observations
- Aged 16 and over

UK illicit drug use

- The use of class A, B or C drugs, temporary class drugs or psychoactive substances

Informal caring

- Unpaid
- Usually to a relative, friend or neighbour

Methods

Probit models

The effect of informal caregiving

$$P(druguse) = \beta_0 + \beta_1care + \sum \beta_2X + \varepsilon$$

$P(druguse)$: the probability of illicit drug use
 $care$: informal caregiving
 β_1 : the effect of informal care on illicit drug use
 X : covariates
 $\sum \beta_2$: coefficients of covariates
 β_0 : constant term
 ε : error term

The effect of state benefit

$$P(druguse) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1care * benefit + \sum \alpha_2X + \mu$$

$benefit$: the receipt of Care's Allowance
 α_1 : the effect of informal care with the allowance provision
 $\sum \alpha_2$: coefficients of covariates
 α_0 : constant term
 μ : error term

Statistics

Table 1 Statistical description

Variable	Mean
Drug use	0.07 (0.25)
Informal caregiving	0.29 (0.29)
Benefit receipt	0.13 (0.33)
Deprived	0.54 (0.29)
Not in employment	0.14 (0.35)
Not in education	0.70 (0.46)
Not in training	0.94 (0.04)
White	0.80 (0.40)
In London	0.12 (0.32)
Middle age	0.66 (0.47)

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

- Nearly 30% of the sample provides informal caring, but only half of them receive the benefit of Care's Allowance.
- More than half of the sample is from deprived households. More than 60% of the sample is between 40 and 60 years old.

Subgroup analysis

- Carers who are in low-income households
- Carers who are young people (aged 16 to 24) not in education, employment or training

Results

Results 1

Table 1 Impacts of informal caring

Variables	(1) Total sample	(2) Low-income	(3) Young people not in education, employment or training
Informal care provision	0.14*** (0.0131)	0.16* (0.0230)	0.23*** (0.0175)
R-squared	0.010	0.021	0.011

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ***, ** and *: p<0.01, p<0.05 and p<0.1 respectively.

- Informal carers are likely to use drugs by 14%.
- Low-income carers are more into drugs by 16%.
- Young carers not in education, employment or training are possible to use substances by 23%.

Results 2

Table 2 Impacts of informal caring with Carer's Allowance provision

Variables	(1) Total sample	(2) Low-income	(3) Young people not in education, employment or training
Informal care provision * Carer's Allowance receipt	0.09*** (0.1194)	0.12** (0.1782)	0.12** (0.1679)
R-squared	0.013	0.020	0.018

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ***, ** and *: p<0.01, p<0.05 and p<0.1 respectively.

- After Carer's Allowance receipt, the likelihood of illicit drug use drops to 9% for informal carers.
- With the allowance, the likelihood of substance use declines to 12% for low-income carers.
- The probability of drug use decreases to 12% for young carers not in education, employment or training, when they receive the allowance.

Conclusions

- Informal caregiving increases the risk of illicit drug use in England and Wales.
- Informal carers may use illicit drugs to solve negative emotions or escape from adversities during caregiving to a family or friend.
- This study urges more external support on emotions and mental health for informal carers.
- External financial support can reduce the risk of illicit drug use for carers, especially for young carers not in education, employment or training.