

ARE ELDERLY FAMILY MEMBERS A BURDEN ON YOUR FAMILY?



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Background

Even though elderly people are a valued part of society, they are usually not part of the working population; hence they may require financial, physical and medical support. That support often stems from the immediate family, pension funds, personal savings and health insurance. The aim of this study is to assess the financial and emotional implications of caring for an elderly family member on the rest of the family and whether or not it is a burden.

Material & Methods

For this study an online survey was constructed with 20 questions regarding the presence of and solutions for the potential burden that comes with supporting an elderly family member. The survey was distributed through social media platforms and snowball sampling was used to reach more working people (parents, superiors, professors and friends). The country of residence of the elderly person was required to complete the survey. The questions were related to the following: living with or financially supporting an elderly person, assessment of mental faculty and mental and physical ability, emotional impact on the caretaker, health care access and coverage of the elderly person and opinion on who should carry the burden of the ageing population.

Results

A total of 137 people from 20 different countries participated in the survey. The majority of responses came from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Croatia and Germany. Two participants had to be excluded from the study because they did not specify their elderly family member's country of residence. Overall, 42 participants (31.1%) considered taking care of an elderly family member a burden. A fifth are financially supporting an elderly person. A physical disability in an elderly family member was reported by 45 participants (33.3%); the majority (55.6%) did not find this burdensome. However, 18 participants (13.5%) considered it somewhat of a burden, 9 (6.8%) a considerable burden and 1 person even categorized it as an unbearable burden. Similarly, 46 participants (34.1%) reported memory impairment in their elderly, but again the majority (68.7%) did not consider this to be a strain on their family. Only 20 participants (15.6%) believe that their elderly's forgetfulness poses a danger to themselves or others (children). The participants did not reach a consensus where emotional stress involved in taking care of an elderly family member is concerned, resulting in a variety of responses (none: 29.6%; a little: 37%; somewhat: 20%; a lot: 11.1%; unbearable: 2.2%). Only 11 (8.1%) participants (from countries including Ukraine, United States, Serbia, Sudan and Costa Rica) claim their elderly do not have basic health insurance. The results are divided regarding the health insurance coverage of home visits and nursing care; 42% of participants confirm the coverage and 58% deny it. The majority of participants claim their elderly's health insurance covers either all (20.6%) or most (45.8%) of the cost of their medication. More than half the participants (64.7%) think the cost of caring for their elders can mostly be attributed to daily living (food, rent, bills), followed by medications and health care (21.8%). Lastly, 56.7% of participants believe that it is ethical for society to spend more money on elderly than on children.

Table 1 Age distribution of participants

Age Group	n= 135	Percentage (%)
Adult in retirement	6	4.4
Working adult	78	57.8
Student	46	34.1
Child (<18 years)	5	3.7

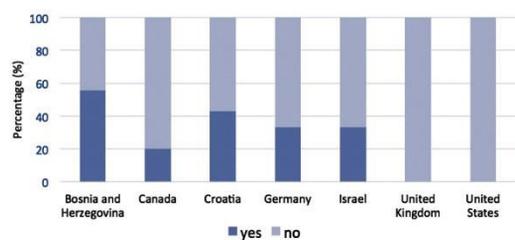


Figure 1 Opinion on whether or not taking care of an elderly family member is a burden on the participant and his/her family

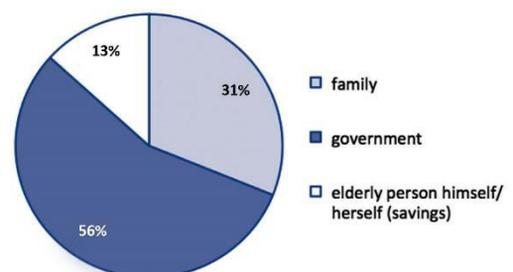


Figure 2 Opinion on who should carry the burden of the ageing population

Conclusion

Opinions on whether or not caring for an elderly family member is burdensome are divided and differ between countries. However, many participants agree that the government should take responsibility for their elderly. In some countries, family members cannot rely on basic health insurance to care of their elderly. Due to that, there are participants that consider the financial aspect of caring for an elderly person significant. Even more find it stressful caring for their elderly. One of the limitations of this study is that by using personal connections and snowball sampling, there is selection bias (e.g. different social classes may not be adequately represented). Another limitation is that the countries are not all represented to the same degree in this study. In addition, this is an opinion based study, meaning that the results are subjective and depend on the participants' perception of their elderly family member's situation (financial, physical and mental). Finally, the responses were also limited by the participants' knowledge of their country's health care system.