

DECEMBER 2019

# The 'Third Shift':

Why Feminists Should Care about Caregiving for Older Adults





# Summary

The feminist discourse about the second shift neglects to bring awareness to the experience of working women providing care to older adults in the United States. Women caregivers to older adults (age 65+) are providing more care, may experience more emotional labor through caregiver burden, and are confronted with more financial implications of caregiving in comparison to men.<sup>3, 5, 14</sup> Therefore, feminists should devote greater resources and attention within our advocacy efforts to support women caregivers on the systems level and individual level.

# The Second Shift

In 1989, Arlie Hochschild coined the term “Second Shift” to describe the double burden that women experience being responsible for both paid labor and the large majority of unpaid domestic labor.<sup>1</sup> Arlie Hochschild’s “Second Shift” and subsequent research generated an international conversation within feminist circles about the disproportionate allocation of domestic labor in heterosexual partnerships.<sup>1</sup> Within the discourse of the second shift, domestic labor has been generally defined to include childcare and housework. Through her research, Hochschild found that even within heterosexual couples with more equitable allocation of domestic work, women assume responsibility of consistent household tasks while men choose when they contribute.<sup>1</sup>



“Most women without children spend much more time than men on housework; with children, they devote more time caring for both house and children. Just as there is a wage gap between men and women in the workplace there is a ‘leisure gap’ between them at home. Most women work one shift at the office or factory and a ‘second shift’ at home”<sup>1</sup>  
Arlie Hochschild

**Despite the far-reaching influence of the second shift on feminist ideology, there has been a significant oversight in this discourse.**

***“With the aging of the population and the need of a growing number of elders for family-based care, women are now facing a third shift, the care of elder family members”<sup>2</sup>***

**Dorres-Worthers**

# Dear feminists, It's time for us to start paying attention.



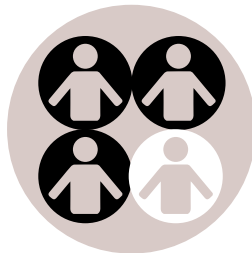
## Picture this:

*A woman comes home from working her full-time job to clean the bathroom, cook dinner, and care for her young children after picking them up from school. The cleaning, cooking, and childcare are representations of the **second shift**.*

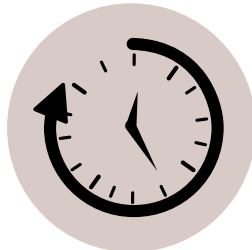
## However, the reality for many women looks more like this.

*A woman comes home from working her part-time job to relieve her Medicare home health aide and provide caregiving to her mother who is living with Alzheimer's disease. At the same time, she has to clean the bathroom, cook dinner, and pick up her kids from school. Informal, unpaid caregiving to older adults is the **third shift**.*

As society progresses, many of the second shift tasks are becoming more equally distributed across genders; however, **caregiving remains a task predominately maintained by women.**<sup>3</sup> The population of older adults in the United States is growing: by 2030, 20% of the U.S. population will be over 65 years old.<sup>4</sup> The disproportionate caregiving duties ('third shift') have negatively affected women financially and emotionally, and will continue to do so into the future.



According to the Institute on Aging report, the percentage of caregivers who identify as a woman is upwards of 75%.<sup>5</sup>



Cumulatively, women spend approximately 50% more time providing care to older adults than men.<sup>5</sup>



More than 60% of caregivers are also employed.<sup>6</sup>

## Historical Overview

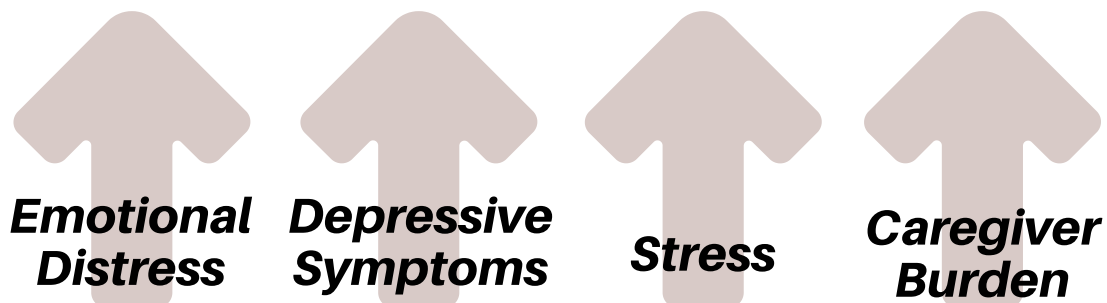
Historically, in many cultures, caregiving for older or ill family members was a part of the **private sphere** where women held sole responsibility. For this reason, women may hold being a caregiver as an **important part of their identities**. Research has found that women may have higher expectations for themselves as caregivers and may be less likely to ask for help, as this would be a threat to their caregiver identity.<sup>7,8</sup> A caregiver identity may also be a **source of resilience** for women. Lin and colleagues found that long hours of caregiving were more stressful for men than for women.<sup>9</sup>

*"In sum, older women provide more care and a greater variety of care than older men, and for reasons which may include attachment, socialized obligation, and economic necessity. Regardless of the reason, caregiving impinges on women's already limited resources, leading to emotional, physical, and economic strain. Social contact and self-care may be reduced, due to task overload".<sup>10</sup>*

Silvia Sara Canetto

# Emotional Labor

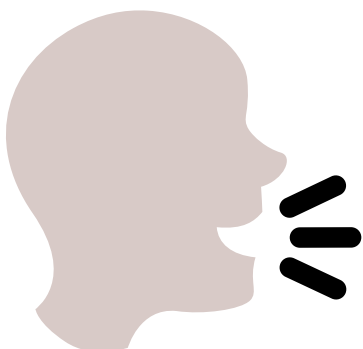
**Across several research studies, caregivers who identify as women reported**



**in comparison to caregivers who identify as men.<sup>3,11</sup>**

Cultural norms and caregiver role perception may influence caregiver outcomes and coping styles. For example, Latinx and Caribbean women caregivers who believed caregiving was a 'family duty' reported more burden and depression than male caregivers.<sup>12</sup> In the same study, women who felt more free to define their caregiver role within their already established personal life (rather than as an obligation) were less vulnerable to emotional and physical health problems.<sup>12</sup>

## The Role of Culture



### When speaking about caregiving

- Women are more likely to report stress or negative experiences. Men are more likely to report positive experiences.<sup>3</sup>
- Women tend to use the pronoun "I", when men tend to use the pronoun "we".<sup>13</sup> This finding demonstrates that when men are involved in caregiving it is more likely to be in a complementary role to his partner, rather than substituting for women caregivers.<sup>3</sup>



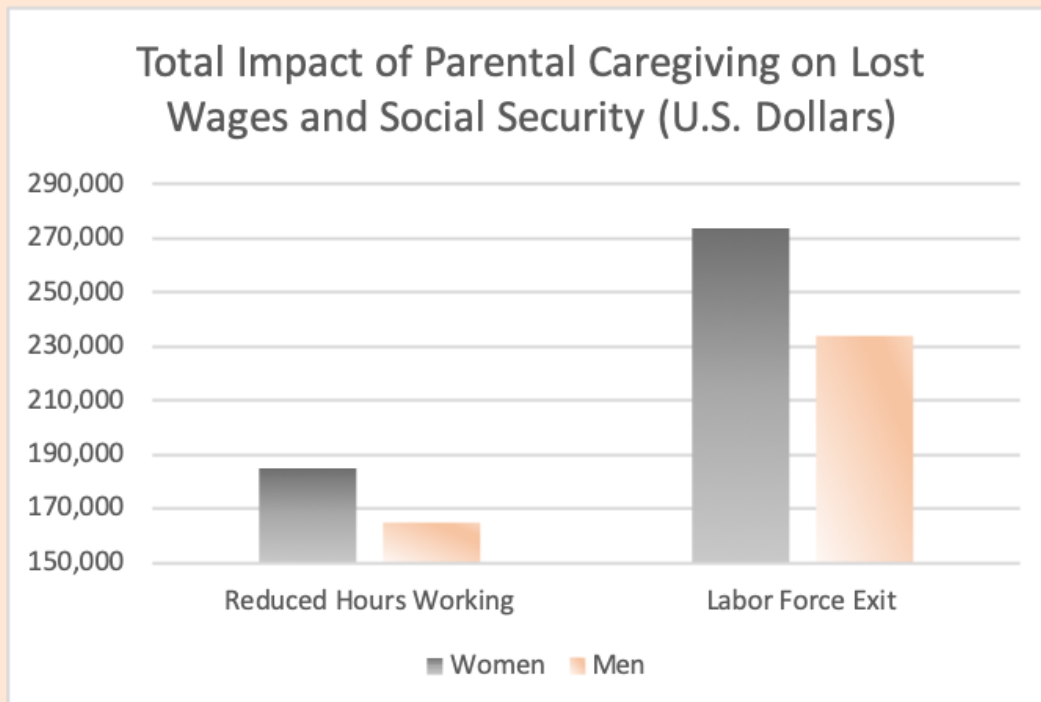
According to a recent New York Times article entitled "Why Aren't More Women Working? They're Caring for Parents", Eduardo Porter reported "economists say the virtual absence of support for eldercare is a prime suspect in explaining why the share of women taking part in the labor force stalled in the late 1990's after rising relentlessly for 50 years".<sup>6</sup>

# Economic Impact

## \$3 trillion

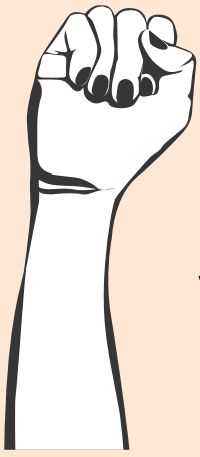
Estimated cost of caregiving for parents in the United States when lost wages, pension, and Social Security benefits are aggregated.<sup>14</sup>

Women caregivers are more likely to make alternate work arrangements like taking a less demanding job (16%) or giving up work entirely (12%). The percentages for men caregivers are 6% and 3% respectively.<sup>15</sup>



The economic impact of caregiving for older adults is approximately \$40,000 more for women than for men.<sup>14</sup>





# Advocacy

**Greater resources and attention within our feminist advocacy efforts should be put toward supporting women caregivers on the systems level and individual level.**

National Alliance for Caregiving

<https://www.caregiving.org/advocacy/>

National Respite Coalition

<https://archrespite.org/national-respite-coalition>

Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities

<http://www.c-c-d.org/>

American Psychological Association Advocacy for Caregivers

<https://www.apa.org/pi/about/publications/caregivers/advocacy>

Alzheimer's Association

<https://www.alz.org/get-involved-now/advocate/improving-care>

One possible way to increase advocacy on the systems level is to write or email a letter to your elected representative (on federal, state, or local levels). Track relevant policies and legislation through the following resources:



*Example email:*

*Dear (insert elected representative name),*

*Please support Senate Bill (insert bill number and name). I am emailing as an ally to women caregivers who are challenged with balancing family, work, and caregiving duties. Access to resources like affordable adult day care within the community will allow women caregivers to get a break from caregiving responsibilities to focus on their health and wellbeing. Please let me know what action you take in support of this important Senate Bill to help caregivers. Thank you.*

**Advocacy could also take the form of supporting caregivers in your own life through providing respite opportunities, or supporting agencies in your community that are already doing this.**

Community Resource Finder from Alzheimer's Association & AARP

<https://www.communityresourcefinder.org/>

Memory Café

<https://www.memorycafedirectory.com/>

Family Caregiver Alliance State-by-State Help for Family Caregivers

<https://www.caregiver.org/family-care-navigator>

Resources listed are not exhaustive. It is important to show support to women caregivers or community organizations in your own life by first asking what they need. Every individual caregiver, family system, or community organization has both unique needs and unique points of resilience.

# ➤ *Call-to-Action* ◀

**Dear feminists, it's time for us  
to start paying attention to  
women caregivers.**

Advocacy efforts could occur on the systems level through tracking policy and engaging with government officials.

Advocacy could also occur on the individual level by supporting caregivers and community organizations in our own lives. No matter how you choose to engage, it will increase the visibility of 2 million women caregivers in the United States who are working an unpaid 'third shift'.





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