Older adults with no kids take on bulk of caregiving, study shows

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Older adults who do not have children provided significantly caregiving support to their elderly parents, compared to their siblings who have children, a local study has found.

Regardless of gender and birth order, this group of adults aged 50 and above contributed more in taking care of their parents.

Researchers from the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Singapore Management University that involved 491 Singaporeans aged 50 and above with at least one living parent. Of the group, 298 had children and 193 did not have children.

They studied adults at four stages of support for aging parents. Adults with physical support needs included physical help with daily tasks, frequency of performing activities that require time, such as household chores and caregiving.

It also studied the frequency of physical meetings and non-physical contact between child and parent in the past year, and the geographical proximity between child and parent.

Adults without children were found to give significantly higher levels of support across all areas of support, compared to their siblings with children, according to the research paper published in January 2024 in an academic journal, Journal of Marriage And Family.

The findings are contrary to the belief that children should take a break from traditional family norms and weakening familial ties, said one of the researchers, Associate Professor Behmanee Feenstondekkhan, co-director of the Centre for Family and Population Research at NUS.

While many children are more likely to engage in leisure activities, the findings of the study held that children who contribute more to supporting their parents may be weakening.

“Gender and sibling position don’t apply to children individually,” she said. For example, birth order does not determine who contributes more support among children, individual differences do.

As children Singaporeans above 50 years old are found to take on the main responsibility of taking care of their parents, they also help to maintain values of that path, she said.

A 40-year-old housewife, who was the only child to raise her father, which included beingocolate.

But he said that his children, some of whom who lived within his contribution financially, were helping to raise the burden of caregiving, “It will continue to affect us because our relationship is strong.

He hopes that his children would contribute in the future as well.

Single first-born daughter Ms Lee, who decided to give her full name, provides the most financially for her eight-year-old daughter.

Ms Lee, 43, lives with her sister, who is also married, and their six-year-old daughter. While her children are still under her care financially to their father, it and her other siblings are divided in the task of the caregiving responsibilities.

It was a natural progression. The single woman came together to meet a need and my dad comes to live with us,” she said, adding that she did her sister find companionship in each other.

Her mother, who is 75, lives in Penang with has her had more freedom compared with her siblings, who have taken on caring for their children, she also spent more time at work.

While their daily fertility rate and having fewer siblings into place a burden for future adult children, future elderly Singaporeans are likely to have fewer siblings, greater wealth and a greater demand for care, said Prof Feenstondekkhan.

Ms Lee said her group of single friends her age have tried with the idea of living close together in the future to give another support after retirement.

For her, being independent in her old age is important, she said, along with being mutually, physically, emotionally and financially.

“When I retire, I will pursue my hobbies and spend time on what I focused on when I was working.”

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