

## Care Work After COVID-19: Men Help More, but Women Still Carry the Load

Women are significantly more likely than men to spend at least 30 minutes a day providing unpaid care for children or older adults, but the gender gap has decreased since the pandemic. In 2023, 36.3 percent of women spent at least 30 minutes in the reference day on providing care, compared to 29.4 percent of men—a gender care gap of 81.0 percent, according to IWPR’s analysis of American Time Use Survey data. In 2018, 40.8 percent of women and 31.6 percent of men were unpaid caregivers—a gender care gap of 77.5 percent. The gender care gap was largest for Asian women and men (63.7 percent) and smallest for Latinas/os (97.8 percent).

Between 2018 and 2023, only Asian women and Latino men saw an increase in the proportion of caregivers. The likelihood of caregiving declined for other groups, most strongly for Black women (Figure 1). This decline is likely due to fewer households with young children.

**Figure 1. The Changing Proportion of Active Caregivers Before and After the COVID-19 Pandemic, by Gender and Race/Ethnicity, 2018 and 2023**



**Source:** IWPR analysis of 2018 and 2023 American Time Use Survey—Microdata Files as provided by US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2024 at <https://www.bls.gov/tus/data/datafiles-2023.htm>.

**Notes:** Individuals aged 15 years and older. Racial categories are non-Hispanic, Latinas/os can be of any race. Sample sizes are too small to report results for Native Americans. Numbers represent percentage of population who spent at least 30 minutes on child or older adult care on reference day. Child care is for children aged 12 or younger and includes primary as well as secondary care (combined with, e.g., personal care, work-related activities, studying, cleaning, cooking, or eating). Total unpaid care work includes care work as primary as well as secondary activities. Eldercare is for person(s) aged 65 years and older. Arrows indicate whether proportion of caregivers rose or fell since 2018.

**Women are not only more likely to be unpaid caregivers but also spend more hours doing so than men.**

In 2023, women caregivers spent an average of 6.7 hours providing care for children or older adults, while men spent an average of 5.6 hours. Caregiving includes time looking after children or older adults as the primary activity, as well as time supervising children while doing something else, such as working, cleaning, or cooking. The gender gap in hours spent on caregiving was 83.6 percent in 2023, an improvement from 76.5 percent in 2018 (Table 1). On average, time spent by men caregivers increased from 5.2 hours, while women's declined marginally from 6.8 hours in 2018. Gender gaps in hours improved for Asian, Latina, and White women but declined for Black women.

**Table 1: Average Hours Spent and Gender Gap for Caregivers Who Spent at Least 30 Minutes per Day on Child or Eldercare by Gender and Race/Ethnicity, 2018 and 2023**

	2018			2023		
	Average hours		Gender gap	Average hours		Gender gap
	Women	Men		Women	Men	
All	6.8	5.2	76.5%	6.7	5.6	83.6%
Asian	7.6	5.1	67.1%	6.7	6.6	98.5%
Black	6.2	5.1	82.3%	6.5	4.9	75.4%
Latinas	8.2	5.3	64.6%	7.9	5.5	69.6%
White	6.4	5.2	81.3%	6.2	5.8	93.5%

**Source:** IWPR analysis of 2018 and 2023 American Time Use Survey—Microdata Files as provided by US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2024 at <https://www.bls.gov/tus/data/datafiles-2023.htm>.

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The COVID-19 pandemic and the related closure of many schools and child and eldercare facilities highlighted the unequal distribution of family care work between women and men. IWPR's analysis of the 2018 and 2023 American Time Use Survey shows that while gender gaps have fallen, they remain very substantial, both in the likelihood of providing unpaid care and in the hours spent doing so. Providing care takes time, and such time often comes at the cost of paid employment, contributing to women's lower lifetime earnings and the gender wage gap. Women and their families need policy changes<sup>1</sup> that ensure access to quality care and paid leave for everyone while promoting a more equal distribution of unpaid caregiving work between the genders.

***This Quick Figure was prepared by Ariane Hegewisch and Tanim Ahmed and is part of IWPR's Policies for Action Research Hub, supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Policies for Action program. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Foundation.***

<sup>1</sup> To learn about IWPR's federal policy recommendations on Promoting Access to Care and Paid Leave, visit <https://iwpr.org/federalpolicyagenda/>.