

Geographic Proximity of Family Members and the Provision of Unpaid and Paid Care for Older Adults Not Living With a Spouse: A Cross-Sectional Study

By Joanne Spetz, Lei Chen, Leslie Ross, Donovan T. Maust

University of California, San Francisco, Health Workforce Research Center on Long-Term Care

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Context

In the United States, for the 70% of individuals 65 years or older who develop significant functional needs before they die, nearly three-quarters of care is “informally” provided by family, friends, and neighbors. However, when family members are not available, unpaid friends and neighbors, and paid workers can provide support.

Objectives

This study examines the association of family geographic proximity with the probabilities of older adults who do not live with a spouse receiving family, unpaid non-family, and paid care.

Methods

The data came from the restricted geographic sample person and other person files from Round 5 of the National Health and Aging Trends Study (NHATS). We calculated descriptive statistics and estimated multivariate logistic regressions with the primary outcome of whether a respondent who did not live with a spouse received help from a family member and secondary outcomes of receiving help from an unpaid non-family member or paid worker ($n = 2084$). Geographic proximity of family members was defined by family living in the same urban area or, for those not in urban areas, the same county.

Results

86.4% of the study sample had family in the same geographic area. Those with a family helper were more likely to have family living in the same geographic area compared to those without a family helper (88.7% vs. 73.3%, $p < 0.001$). In adjusted models, respondents with at least one family member in the same geographic area had significantly higher odds of receiving help from family (OR = 2.03, $p = 0.006$) but no difference in receipt of unpaid non-family help (OR = 1.12, $p = 0.682$) or paid help (OR = 0.73, $p = 0.257$).

Conclusions

When family members live nearby, older adults who do not live with a spouse have a higher probability of receiving support from family members; however, if they do not have family nearby, there is no greater likelihood that they will have unpaid non-family or paid support. Older adults who do not live with a spouse need more program and policy support, especially if they do not have family nearby.

Full Report

<https://healthworkforce.ucsf.edu/bibcite/reference/2091>

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