

## Summary

### Women, men and help for parents(-in-law)

A great deal is set to change in the way care and support are given to people needing help in the Netherlands. One of the principles of government policy is that people will increasingly be expected to call on their own networks for help and support. For older people – a group who relatively often need help and whose number is set to rise substantially in the coming years – this often means receiving help from their children. What help are those children willing to give, and what help do they actually give?

This report describes differences between adult women and men and the help they are willing to give and actually give to their parents and parents-in-law. Having more information on differences can contribute to the public debate, in which the question is regularly raised of whether women will not be put under too much pressure if the emphasis in government policy is focused on encouraging women both to work more and to provide more care. Are women more often prepared to care for their parents and parents-in-law, or do they more often provide help because they have (or make) more time available?

In this publication we focus mainly on people aged 18-64 years, the age group where the bulk of people caring for parents/parents-in-law are found.

We address the following four research questions:

- 1 What are the differences between women and men in the amount and kind of help they provide to parents/parents-in-law?
- 2 To what extent do women and men differ in their willingness to provide help to parents?
- 3 To what extent do women and men who help their parents/parents-in-law have paid jobs?
- 4 What differences are there between women and men in the way they feel about providing help to their parents/parents-in-law?

Our study is concerned with specific help given to parents or parents-in-law due to health problems or other impairments. This ‘informal care’ can vary from household help or personal care to help with administrative tasks, accompanying to appointments or helping with transport. The duration can also vary, from a few weeks to several years, and from an average of a few hours per week to very intensive help. Help is mostly provided in the recipient’s home setting, but may also be given to a parent/parent-in-law living in a residential care facility.

### Women help parents/parents-in-law more often than men, but there are also men who help

In 2008, 820,000 women and around 460,000 men in the Netherlands were providing help to parents or parents-in-law. Women thus provide this help substantially more often than men: almost two-thirds of all informal carers of parents/parents-in-law are women. If we look at long-term and intensive help, the numbers reduce, but the ratio between women and men is still roughly 70:30; in absolute terms, the numbers are 260,000 women and 110,000 men. The highest proportion of informal carers of parents/parents-in-law are found in the 45-54 age group, though there are also sizeable numbers of carers in the 35-44 and 55-64 age groups. For example, in the 35-44 age group, 16% of women and 8% of men provide care.

### Women more often help in the household and with personal care, men more often with administrative tasks

Broadly speaking, there is little difference between the help that women and men give to their parents. Both daughters and sons frequently provide emotional support as well as supervision and accompanying on out-of-home visits. There are however differences of emphasis: men more often help their parents with administrative tasks and form-filling, while daughters more often help in the household and with personal care.

### Little divergence in views on helping parents; wider difference in willingness to help

Roughly a quarter of both men and women in the Netherlands believe that children have a duty to look after their elderly parents. Two-thirds think that caring for parents who need help is mainly (or slightly more) a task for the government. Men think this more often than women, but the differences are not great. Women are however more often willing than men to provide help to their parents, for several months, for a longer period or with personal care.

### Women give different reasons from men for helping parents and more often feel drawn to care

More than 80% of informal carers, both male and female, help their parents/parents-in-law because they see it as the natural thing to do. Daughters more often refer to love and affection in this connection, while sons talk about duty. Daughters also appear to feel more drawn to providing care, because they feel their parents/parents-in-law would rather receive help from them or because there is no one else to provide help.

### Wide gender differences in combining care for parents/parents-in-law with paid work

Some 600,000 women and almost 400,000 men combine helping their parents/parents-in-law with having a paid job. 85% of male helpers have a job and 72% of female carers. 75% of men who combine paid work with helping parents/parents-in-law are in full-time work, compared with 20% of female helpers (approximately 290,000 men and

120,000 women). This is because men (including those who do not provide informal care) work full-time much more often than women.

4% of all women aged 18-64 years combine looking after young children with providing informal care to parents/parents-in-law. More women than men combine these tasks. In 2008, 195,000 women were combining their role as a mother of young children with providing informal care to their parents/parents-in-law, and a majority of them also had paid jobs. There were half as many men in this situation as women, and the majority of them, too, had jobs.

### Men experience combining full-time work and care as a burden; women mainly have difficulty letting go

Men more often find combining a full-time job with caring for parents/parents-in-law to be a strain, and more often report conflicts at home and at work. This may be because men work more hours per week. They may have a different type of work or work in an environment where providing informal care is less accepted. Women do not experience a high burden more often than men, but do have difficulty letting go of the care for their parents/parents-in-law. Women mention positive experiences slightly more often than men, such as deriving pleasure from providing help.