Policy Briefing: Census 2021

Purpose of the briefing

This briefing aims to highlight the material makeup of unpaid carers in Wales as discovered by the 2021 Census.

This briefing will discuss:

- Gender
- Age
- Caring intensity
- Deprivation
- Comparisons with England
- Comparisons with the 2011 Census
- Information on a Local Health Board level
- Information on a Local Authority Level

Context

The 2021 National Census was undertaken by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) on 21 March 2021[1] under the unique conditions of the global pandemic that had started almost one year before. The census collects the largest pool of data about the population of the United Kingdom, including Wales, from a single time period. In this case, the 21st March 2021. It should be noted that Scotland chose to delay their census by one calendar year so was undertaken on 20 March 2022[2]. This means that no comparative data between Wales and Scotland can be made. The census in Northern Ireland was undertaken on the same date as in England and Wales but, as in Scotland, is overseen by a different agency (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency) so there may be some small discrepancies in this data.

The census could be completed online and via post and was completed by 1,347,114 households in Wales[3].

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[1] https://census.gov.uk/about-the-census
[2] Ibid
[3] https://www.gov.wales/demography-and-migration-wales-census-2021-html#:~:text=On%20Census%20Day%2C%2021%20March,in%20Wales%20on%20Census%20Day

A question about whether someone is an unpaid carer has been included in the past three censuses[4] (2001, 2011, 2021) with the question substantially changed on each occasion. This will mean that all figures are comparative, but not identical as with other traditional information gathered by the census.

An unpaid carer is defined by Carers Wales as someone who provides unpaid support and care for one or more people because they are ill; have a disability; are vulnerable; have a mental health condition; have an active addiction; or are older. People were asked to identify within the Census with the question "Do you look after, or give any help or support to, anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems related to old age?[5]"

The data collected has been primarily taken from the Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation data set[6] where numbers have been rounded to the closest 5. It should also be noted that some gender data has small discrepancies due to the data being presented as binary information (male/female), so those who fall outside these definitions have been excluded by the Office of National Statistics.

Headline Figures for Wales

Across Wales, there were 310,751[7] people who identified themselves as a unpaid carer in the 2021 census. This equates to nearly 10.5% of the population of Wales[8]. This is higher than in England where 8.9% of the population identified as unpaid carers[9].

Of the 310,740[10] that did identify themselves, 181,330 were female and 129,420 were male. This means that 58% of the caring population in Wales is female, up 1% from 2011[11]. This is still 1% less than in England where 59% of carers are female.

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[4]https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/planningforcensus2021/questiondevelopment/healthandunpaidcarequestiondevelopmentforcensus2021#:~:text=The%20unpaid%20care%20question%20was,aged%205%20to%2017%20years.
[5] Unpaid care, England and Wales: Census 2021
[6]https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/socialcare/datasets/unpaidcarebyagesexanddeprivationwales
[7] Census 2021 - Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, Wales
[8] Ibid
[9] Census 2021 - Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, England
[10] This figure is rounded from census database: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/unpaidcareenglandandwales/census2021
[11] Census 2011 - Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, Wales

The most likely age to be an unpaid carer is between 55 to 59, both as a physical number 41,255 and as a percentage of the overall population at that age (18.5%). This is slightly older than a decade ago when 50 to 54 was the most common age. Nearly half of caring (45%) in Wales is provided by people between the ages of 45 and 64 (139,980 people in total)[12].

One-fifth of women in Wales between 50 and 64 are caring for someone (20% - 50 to 54; 21.9% - 55 to 59; 20.6% - 60 to 64)[13].

There were 8,230 children between 5 and 17 identified as unpaid carers in the census with another 14,325 young adult carers (18 to 24) also highlighted. Considering the comparative population sizes of these two groups (462,525 under 18 compared to 259,545 between 18 and 24)[14], this is likely evidence that a proportion of children are not being identified as unpaid carers

Caring intensity has significantly increased in Wales with nearly half (45%) caring for more than the average work week (35 hours) and more than a third (34%) caring for more than 50 hours per week. This is compared to only 28% caring for more than 50 hours a decade ago[15].

Once again, this is higher than in England where only 41% of carers are caring for over 35 hours a week and 30% are caring for over 50 hours per week.

Unpaid carers are nearly twice as likely as the average member of the Welsh population to be in poverty with 20% of carers falling within the most deprived quintile according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation.

This number increases to nearly a quarter (24%) when looking at carers who provide care for more than 50 hours per week. This disproportionately affects women with 3 in 5 (58%) of unpaid carers in the lowest poverty quintile being female.

Comparative data and trends

Overall population

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[12] Ibid
[13] Ibid
[14] Ibid
[15] There is no direct comparison for 35 hours as the 2011 census only included 20 to 49 hours. Even so, caring over 20 hours only totaled 43%

The figure of 310,740 unpaid carers in Wales was down 59,490 from the 2011 census (370,230)[16], a fall of 19% in relative terms. This result is surprising with a considerably smaller decrease in people reporting themselves to have a disability in Wales from 696,000 in 2011[17] (23.4%) to 670,000 in 2021[18] (21.1%). This is only a relative fall of 4%, nearly five times less than the corresponding unpaid carers figure.

The fall in unpaid carer numbers was highlighted as unusual by the ONS on the release of the data. It has been theorised that the fall in numbers may be a result of the pandemic[19], as fewer people were able to go out and provide light touch care or due to the higher morbidity rate during that time period. Alternatively, it was also queried whether the change in question from "Do you look after, or give any help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others?[20]" to "Do you look after, or give any help or support to, anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems related to old age?[21]" may have had an effect because people don't recognise themselves as unpaid carers.

Estimating how many people did not identify is challenging. An appropriate measure would be to take Carers Wales' research which suggests that 39% of unpaid carers in Wales took three years to recognise their caring role as a potential missing margin. This would mean that as many as 121,188 people didn't recognise their caring role so are missing from this census information. Interestingly, this takes the figure close to the previously believed figure[22] for carers in Wales. Therefore, this offset in identification may need to be factored into decision-making when providing provisions for the unpaid carer community.

Gender

It is clear from all the measurable statistics provided by the 2021 Census that women are disproportionately affected by unpaid care. Nearly three-fifths (58%) of people caring in Wales are women and a woman is more likely to be a carer in every age group up to the age of 75.[23]

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[16] Census 2011 - Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, Wales
[17] Census 2011 - Disability by age, sex and deprivation, Wales
[18] Census 2021 - Disability by age, sex and deprivation, Wales
[19] Unpaid care, England and Wales: Census 2021
[20] Ibid
[21] Ibid
[22] Census 2011 - Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, Wales
[23] Census 2011 - Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, Wales

Of the 310,740 that did identify themselves, 181,330 were female and 129,420 were male. This means that 58% of the caring population in Wales is female, up 1% from 2011[24]. This is still 1% less than in England where 59% of carers are female.

The gender disparity across Wales geographically is remarkably consistent with the average degree of difference using the age-standardised percentage being 3% between the two genders. Only Cardiff (2.5%) and Neath Port Talbot (3.7%) have a disparity outside 0.4% of the average.

This strongly indicates that there is a cultural expectation for women to be a carer and this necessitates support to be focused on reaching women.

The gap in care responsibilities really emerges at around 35 years of age when the gap between female and male carers increases to over 5%. This gap keeps increasing to an apex of 6.9% in the age range of 55-59.[25] This is at a time when one-fifth of women in Wales between 50 and 64 are caring for someone (20% - 50 to 54; 21.9 55 to 59; 20.6% 60 to 64).

This only changes beyond the age of 75 when a man becomes more likely to be a carer. Somewhat surprisingly, this trend continues until post-90 when a man becomes four times more likely to be a carer than a woman. This data indicates a possible need to shift towards men when considering provision for older people.

Age

The most likely age to be an unpaid carer in Wales is between 55 to 59, both as a physical number 41,255 and as a percentage of the overall population at that age (18.5%). This is slightly older than a decade ago when 50 to 54 was the most common age. Nearly half of caring (45%) in Wales is provided by people between the ages of 45 and 64 (139,980 people in total).

The most likely age to be a carer as a woman is 55 to 59 and 55 to 64 as a man.

The largest increase in the likelihood of becoming a carer is between 40 and 50 with a 5% increase in the population being a carer at 50 to 54 than 40 to 44 (16.9% from 11.9% respectively)[26].

The large student population in Wales also hides the true extent of caring in Wales. Looking at people over the age of 25, 12.9% (288,195) are providing unpaid care of some

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[24] Census 2011 - Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, Wales
[25] Census 2011 - Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, Wales
[26] Census 2011 - Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, Wales

sort. As these are more likely to be permanent residents than the younger groups, this could be considered a more accurate sample size of the caring population.

The carer population percentage increases even more when we look at the prime working age of 35 to 64 in Wales. Of this subset, 15.1% are proving some sort of care, 1 in 7 of the total prime working population.

Once again, women are substantially more affected with 14.6% of women over 25 providing some level of care and 18%, nearly 1 in 5 of prime working-age women proving care.

There were 8,230 children between 5 and 17 identified as unpaid carers in the census with another 14,325 young adult carers (18 to 24) also highlighted. Considering the comparative population sizes of these two groups (462,525 under 18 compared to 259,545 between 18 and 24)[27], this is likely evidence that a proportion of children are not being identified as unpaid carers

The census data also give some forewarning of a potentially difficult time for caring in Wales around 20 years from now when the significantly bigger populations of 50 to 64 will need support from the substantially smaller 25 to 40 generation. This will have a knock-on effect on services alongside unpaid care and should be considered in the imminent future as a risk factor.

Caring intensity

Caring intensity has significantly increased in Wales with nearly half (45%) caring for more than the average work week (35 hours) and more than a third (34%) caring for more than 50 hours per week, the equivalent of 107,000 people in Wales. This is compared to only 28% caring for more than 50 hours a decade ago[28].

Once again, this is higher than in England where only 41% of carers are caring for over 35 hours a week and 30% are caring for over 50 hours per week.

Caring intensity would appear to be higher for younger adults and older adults respectively with 48% of carers between 25-39 saying they care for more than 35 hours which declines to 37% of people between 50 and 59 before rising to 61% for people

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[27] Ibid
[28] There is no direct comparison for 35 hours as the 2011 census only included 20 to 49 hours. Even so, caring over 20 hours only totaled 43%

between 70 and 79. This is statistically significant considering the most caring is provided by the 50 to 59 age range[29].

However, it is highly likely that this is not a true indication of the intensity of care but a matter of identification. This would suggest that people who are either younger or older require a more intense caring role before registering their caring responsibilities than those in the middle.

Another statistical surprise is that it would appear that of the men who provide care, far more provide 25 or more hours of care (46%) than women (37%)[30]. This data must be considered carefully before being accepted at face value due to the significant proportion more women that provide care when compared to men.

The most likely theory is that this is a cultural causation with women expected to take on unpaid care but more likely to identify at a lower level of intensity than men. However, this is critical information for the need to shift culturally to see unpaid care as everyone's task as a women's rights issue and as a need to reach more men who are likely not-identifying themselves and going without support.

Combined with the reduction in the overall number of unpaid carers, this strongly suggests that more care is being provided by fewer people with the overall number of 'care hours' provided by unpaid carers in Wales equating to an estimated 9 million hours[31] per week or 450 million hours in a year.[32] This is almost identical to the 2011 census[33]. This equates to each carer in Wales is providing an additional 4 hours per week care per person (29 hours[34] compared to 24.9 in 2011[35]).

Deprivation

Unpaid carers are nearly twice as likely as the average member of the Welsh population to be in poverty with 20% of carers falling within the most deprived quintile according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation.

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[29] People under 25 have been excluded from this analysis due to the high student population.

[30] Age range between 25 and 79

[31] Estimate calculated by the number of carers caring for 0-19 hours per week multiplied by the midpoint (10), number of carers caring for 20 – 49 hours per week multiplied by the midpoint (35) and number of carers caring for 50 hours per week at the lowest point (50) added together = 9,020,625 hours per week.

[32] Previous estimated equation multiplied by 52 = 469,072,500 hours per year

[33] Using identical metrics from 2021 census, the number of hours of care in Wales was estimated at 9,203,125 hours of care per week and 478,562,500 per year in 2011

[34] Estimated by taking the total number of caring hours (9,020,625) divided by the number of carers in Wales 310,740

[35] Estimated by taking the total number of caring hours (9,203,125) divided by the number of carers in Wales 370,230

This number increases to nearly a quarter (24%) when looking at carers who provide care for more than 50 hours per week. This disproportionately affects women with 3 in 5 (58%) of unpaid carers in the lowest poverty quintile being female

The amount of unpaid care provided can be seen to conflate with the chance of being in the most deprived areas[36]. Conversely, those in the most advantaged areas were likely to be providing the most light-touch caring.

Local Health Board figures

The figures calculated for each health board are based on the counties each board covers as described by the Welsh Government's guidance on NHS Wales health boards and trusts.[37] It should also be noted that percentages are not age-standardised so differ slightly from some local authority figures.

Table 1

Health Board	Number of Carers	Male	Female	Carers percentage of the population[38]
Aneurin Bevan	60,415	25,335	35,090	10.9%
Betsi Cadwaladr	66,655	27,450	39,190	10.8%
Cardiff and Vale	41,935	17,280	24,620	9%
Cwm Taf Morgannwg	46,500	19,520	26,980	11.1%
Hywel Dda	40,520	16,985	23,545	11.1%
Powys	13,465	5,595	7,865	10%
Swansea Bay	41,280	17,215	24,055	11.4%

Distribution of unpaid care is relatively evenly distributed across all seven health boards in Wales with five health boards carer population being within 0.6% of one another.

The two outliers are Cardiff and Vale and Powys.

Cardiff and Vale can be explained by the prevalence of the student population distorting these figures. When considering the population above the age of 25, Cardiff falls within 0.6% of the medium. However, it is important to consider that Aneurin Bevan and

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[36] Figure 6 – Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021
[37] https://www.gov.wales/nhs-wales-health-boards-and-trusts
[38] Percentage not adjusted for age-standardisation

Swansea Bay health boards also have higher than average student population so both of these health boards may also have under-represented carer density.

Powys faces unique challenges due to the region's geology and how spread out the population centres are. It is unknown how these differences may have affected the carer population in this health board region.

There is no notable statistical difference in the disparity of female to male carers across the Welsh health boards which clearly indicates a systemic issue with care being considered a women's issue.

Table 2

Health Board	Number of carers of working age (25-64)	Number of children who are unpaid carers (5-17)	Percentage of carers caring over 50 hours per week[39]
Aneurin Bevan	41,150	1,685	35%
Betsi Cadwaladr	30,595	1,305	35%
Cardiff and Vale	29,125	1,120	30%
Cwm Taf Morgannwg	31,725	1,210	37%
Hywel Dda	26,115	1,100	34%
Powys	8,550	340	30%
Swansea Bay	27,935	990	36%

Local Authority Figures

The figures calculated for each local authority area (county) are based the Census 2021 figures and where percentages have been age-standardised[40] unless otherwise stated.

Table 3

County	Number of Carers	Male	Female	Carers percentage of the population
Blaenau Gwent	7,240	3,080	4,160	11.3%
Bridgend	15,310	6,470	8,845	11%

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[39] Percentage not adjusted for age-standardisation
[40] https://blog.ons.gov.uk/2023/01/19/age-standardising-data-what-does-this-mean-and-why-does-it-matter/

Caerphilly	19,065	8,150	10,935	11.4%
Cardiff	28,995	12,080	16,900	9.4%
Carmarthenshire	20,385	8,595	11,800	11.1%
Ceredigion	7,250	3,100	4,155	10.5%
Conwy	11,630	4,790	6,840	10.1%
Denbighshire	10,160	4,250	5,920	10.9%
Flintshire	15,265	6,270	8,980	10.1%
Gwynedd	9,990	4,065	5,920	8.9%
Isle of Anglesey	6,745	2,830	3,920	9.9%
Merthyr Tydfil	6,205	2,535	3,665	11.2%
Monmouthshire	9,205	3,765	5,440	9.7%
Neath Port Talbot	16,560	6,865	9,695	12.3%
Newport	14,970	6,150	8,825	10.3%
Pembrokeshire	12,885	5,290	7,590	10.6%
Powys	13,465	5,595	7,865	10%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	24,985	10,515	14,470	11.2%
Swansea	24,720	10,350	14,360	11.1%
Torfaen	9,935	4,190	5,730	11.4%
Vale of Glamorgan	12,940	5,200	7,720	10.2%
Wrexham	12,865	5,245	7,610	10%

Neath Port Talbot is the only county in England or Wales with a carers population percentage of over 12% (12.3%[41]) with Wales having more than half of the counties (9 of 17) where at least 11% of the population provides unpaid care[42]. Only one county is Wales (Gwynedd) is in the bottom 50% of counties across England and Wales' carers population percentage[43].

This highlights that Wales as a whole has a bigger carer population than England in both on a micro and macro level.

Blaenau Gwent has the highest number of carers within the region caring for more than 50 hours a week (39%)[44] but Neath Port Talbot had the largest proportion of people

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[41] Table 3

[42]

https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/unpaidcareenglandandwales/census2021#unpaid-care-in-england-and-wales

[43] Ibid

[44] Table 4

providing 50 or more hours of unpaid care a week on a population basis (4.5%)[45]. The smallest proportion lived in Monmouthshire (29% or 2.7%)[46].

There is no notable statistical difference in the disparity of female to male carers across county lines which clearly indicates a systemic issue with care being considered a women's issue.

Table 4

County	Number of carers of working age (25-64)	Number of children who are unpaid carers (5-17)	Percentage of carers caring over 50 hours per week[47]
Blaenau Gwent	4,975	210	39%
Bridgend	10,395	415	36%
Caerphilly	12,955	480	37%
Cardiff	20,465	775	30%
Carmarthenshire	13,295	555	36%
Ceredigion	4,530	165	32%
Conwy	2,810	115	36%
Denbighshire	6,570	340	37%
Flintshire	10,350	435	32%
Gwynedd	6,525	240	35%
Isle of Anglesey	4,340	175	35%
Merthyr Tydfil	4,330	190	38%
Monmouthshire	5,990	255	29%
Neath Port Talbot	11,200	455	38%
Newport	10,505	430	33%
Pembrokeshire	8,290	380	34%
Powys	8,550	340	30%
Rhondda Cynon Taf	17,000	615	37%
Swansea	16,735	535	34%
Torfaen	6,725	310	35%
Vale of Glamorgan	8,660	345	31%
Wrexham	8,820	310	34%

[45]
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/unpaidcareenglandandwales/census2021#unpaid-care-in-england-and-wales
[46] Ibid
[47] Percentage not adjusted for age-standardisation

Conclusion

The challenges Wales faces in supporting unpaid carers who support 100,000s of people who are older, ill or have a disability is clearly more widespread and complex than across the border in England.

In every definable and comparable metric, Wales has more carers per head who provide more intense caring and are more likely to be under the poverty line. This will inevitably mean a higher level of demand for services and the need to attribute more resources towards supporting them.

When considering how to tackle carer support, there should be a focus on the demographic and economic impact unpaid care has on Wales.

Caring consistently impacts women more than men therefore providing the right support is a clear equality issue. This is something that can be considered on national, regional and local levels and across all educational and working age groups as the divide between male and female is so consistent across all fronts.

Finding solutions will also have a positive economic impact as 1 in 7 of the entire prime age working population provide some level of unpaid care which increases to 1 in 5 when looking at women between 50 and 64. This creates a financial benefit to the nation alongside a moral imperative to support the people providing for the most vulnerable.

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