

Unpaid Caregiving and Its Impact on New Yorkers' Paid Employment

Worker Institute Policy Brief September 2025

Zoë West, Ph.D. and Michael Lenmark, Ph.D.¹

The national care crisis is sharply visible in New York: those providing care for family and loved ones are straining under the weight of unpaid caregiving, while support for care remains unaffordable and difficult to access; at the same time, there is a shortage of paid care workers, who endure jobs that are devalued and underpaid. This crisis—which came under the spotlight during the Covid-19 pandemic, as it illuminated and exacerbated longstanding systemic gaps—extends across multiple areas, including [child care](#) and [long-term care](#) for older adults and people with disabilities.

This brief presents analysis of data on unpaid caregiving and its impact on New Yorkers' paid employment from the 2024 statewide Empire State Poll (ESP).² Administered by the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR), the ESP surveyed 2,686 respondents across New York State in August 2024. The findings detailed below affirm that caregiving—both unpaid caregiving and access to paid care support—remains a pressing concern for the substantial number of New Yorkers who are providing care for children and/or adults. Respondents providing care widely report the toll it takes on their ability to do paid work, with the highest costs reported by people of color and women. The lack of affordable care support stands out as a significant barrier. Taken together, these findings reinforce the urgency of policy responses that recognize and support unpaid caregiving, make care more affordable and accessible, and provide dignified pay and working conditions for caregiving jobs.

Now a range of changes recently enacted by the Trump administration threatens to sharply aggravate this crisis of care. Major cuts to Medicaid and new work requirements are projected to limit access to healthcare and [slash funding for home care](#). The targeting of immigrants not only [endangers their access to care, but also stands to sharply reduce the workforce](#) in key care sectors where there are already shortages—healthcare, long-term care, and child care. Proposed deregulation jeopardizes important worker protections across the board, as well as for specific groups of workers such as [home care workers](#). Cuts implemented by the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and attacks on DEI initiatives [have already destabilized child care programs](#). On the whole, such changes are likely to increase reliance on unpaid caregiving, intensifying the strain families already bear.

1 Zoë West, Senior Researcher, The Worker Institute, Cornell ILR: z.west@cornell.edu
Michael Lenmark, Senior Research Support Specialist, The Worker Institute, Cornell ILR: mgl88@cornell.edu

2 See appendix for details about the Empire State Poll.

FINDINGS

Over one third of women and over one quarter of men were caring for children, adult family members, and/or friends or neighbors.

Across all Empire State Poll respondents, 29.9% were providing unpaid caregiving support for children, adult family members, and/or friends or neighbors on a regular basis. Over one third (33.7%) of women respondents were providing unpaid caregiving support, and over one quarter (26%) of male respondents.³ Among respondents between 18 to 65 years of age, 33.9% were providing unpaid caregiving support.

People of color across all racial/ethnic groups were more likely to report providing unpaid caregiving support than white respondents,⁴ with 43.2% of respondents in the “Other” category,⁵ 33.9% of Hispanic respondents, 32.1% of Black respondents, 28% of Asian respondents, and 27.5% of white respondents.

Child care was the most common form of caregiving reported, with 18.7% of respondents who reported caring for children, 13.7% caring for adult family members, and 4.1% caring for friends or neighbors. “Sandwich caregivers” who reported caring for both children and adult family members made up 4.5% of respondents. Women respondents (5.6%) were more likely to report caring for both children and adult family members than men respondents (3.5%).⁶

Overall, women respondents were significantly more likely to be caring for children than men (21.9% vs. 15.4%).⁷ Women respondents were also more likely to be caring for adult family members, friends, and neighbors than men, however the differences were not statistically significant.

Respondents reported caring for children at different rates across racial/ethnic groups, with 22% of Hispanic respondents, 22% of “Other” respondents, 19.8% of Black respondents, 18.1% of white respondents, and 10.1% of Asian respondents.⁸

Black (17.1%), Asian (16.8%), “Other” (17.8%), and Hispanic (14%) respondents were all more likely to be providing unpaid caregiving support to adult family members than white respondents (11.9%).⁹ These groups were also more likely to be caring for friends or neighbors, with a significant difference between Hispanic respondents (6.2%) and white respondents (3%).¹⁰

3 The difference in rates of caregiving between women and men is statistically significant ($P=.0046$). Due to the low number of respondents identifying as transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary, tests for statistical significance were not possible for these groups. This policy brief reports results for respondents who selected the gender identity “woman” or “man.”

4 The difference is statistically significant ($P=.0212$).

5 Due to small sample sizes, respondents were placed into the category of having an “Other” race if they self-identified as being Native American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, being an “other” race not listed, or as being two or more races that did not include Hispanic (those who selected Hispanic and another race were classified as Hispanic). The sample size for each of these groups categorized as “other” was too small to be considered representative.

6 The difference is statistically significant ($P=.0446$).

7 The difference is statistically significant ($P = .0011$).

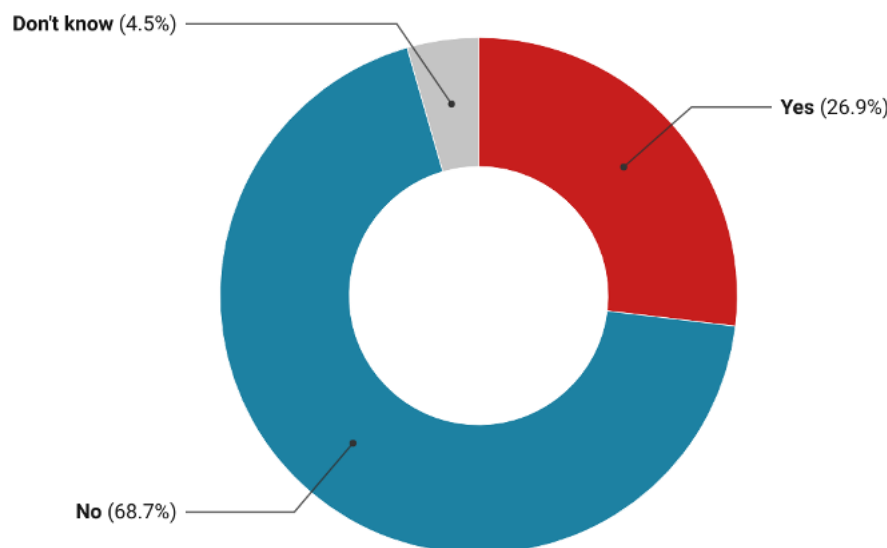
8 There is a statistically significant difference between Hispanic respondents and Asian respondents ($P = .0045$). Significance testing was not done for the “Other” racial/ethnic category.

9 There is a statistically significant difference between Black and white respondents here ($P = .0494$). Significance testing was not done for the “Other” racial/ethnic category.

10 The difference is statistically significant ($P = .0187$).

More than a quarter of all caregiving respondents said their caregiving responsibilities made it difficult to maintain a job, with Hispanic and Black respondents reporting this challenge at significantly higher rates.

Have your unpaid caregiving responsibilities made it difficult for you to maintain a job?



Universe: Respondents who reported unpaid caregiving responsibilities [n=805 weighted observations]

Source: 2024 Cornell University ILR Empire State Poll • Created with Datawrapper

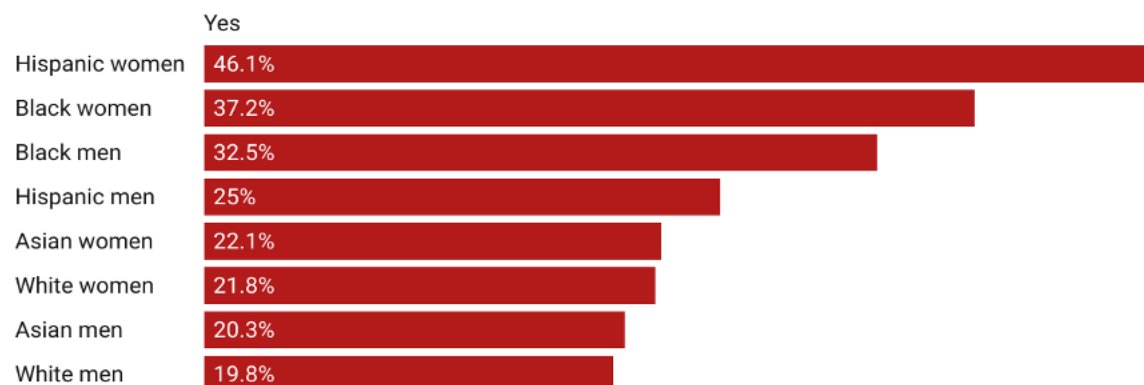
Among respondents providing unpaid caregiving support, more than a quarter of respondents (26.9%) reported that their caregiving responsibilities made it difficult for them to maintain a job.

This was most pronounced among Hispanic respondents (38.8%) and Black respondents (36.9%), who were significantly more likely than white respondents (20.9%) to report that their caregiving responsibilities made it difficult for them to maintain a job.¹¹ Asian respondents and those in the “Other” category were 21.1% and 21.4%, respectively.

When considering race and gender together, **Hispanic women respondents (46.1%) and Black women respondents (39.7%) were the most likely to report that caregiving responsibilities made it difficult to maintain a job.** This was reported by 32.5% of Black men, 25% of Hispanic men, 22.1% of Asian women, 21.8% of white women, 20.3% of Asian men, and 19.8% of white men.

¹¹ These findings are significant by race ($P = .0028$). Black respondents were more likely to report yes than whites ($P = .0084$). Hispanic respondents were more likely to report yes than whites ($P = .0037$). Black respondents were more likely to report yes than Asians, who report more “Don’t Know” ($P = .0038$), though this significance disappears when “Don’t Know” responses are removed ($P = .1638$).

Have your unpaid caregiving responsibilities made it difficult for you to maintain a job?



Universe: Respondents who reported unpaid caregiving responsibilities [n=752 weighted observations]

Subsamples: Hispanic women [n=105], Black women [n=72], Black men [n=47], Hispanic men [n=56], Asian women [n=29], White women [n=224], Asian men [n=39], White men [n=180]

Source: 2024 Cornell University ILR Empire State Poll • Created with Datawrapper

Unpaid caregiving responsibilities made it difficult for respondents to maintain a job across all forms of caregiving. Among respondents caring for both children and adult family members, 30.4% reported that their unpaid caregiving responsibilities made it difficult to maintain a job; among respondents caring only for adult family members, 28.1%; among respondents caring only for children, 25.6%; among those caring for friends and/or neighbors, 21.7%.

More than one third of caregiving respondents reduced their paid work due to their unpaid caregiving responsibilities, with women, Hispanic, and Black respondents disproportionately affected.

Among caregiver respondents, over one third (36.3%) indicated that the amount of time they spent on unpaid caregiving caused them to spend less time doing paid work over the past year. Women respondents were significantly more likely to report this (40.4%) than male respondents (30.5%).¹²

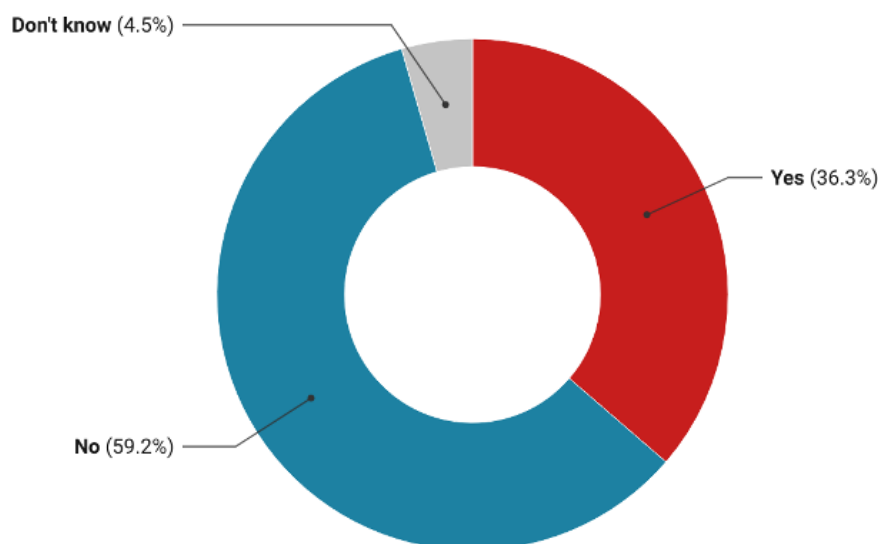
People of color were significantly more likely than white respondents to report that unpaid caregiving caused them to reduce their time spent doing paid work over the past year.¹³ In particular, Hispanic respondents (49.5%) and Black respondents (44.4%) were significantly more likely to report this than white respondents (30.3%).¹⁴

¹² This question is significant by gender when "Don't Know" responses are removed ($P = .0284$).

¹³ The difference is statistically significant ($P = .0090$).

¹⁴ Hispanic respondents were more likely to respond yes compared to white respondents ($P = .0035$). Black respondents were more likely to respond yes compared to white respondents ($P = .0318$). This test was performed by removing "Don't Know" responses due to having low expected frequencies.

Over the past year, has the unpaid amount of time you spend on caregiving support for children, adults, or other loved ones caused you to spend less time doing paid work?



Universe: Respondents who reported unpaid caregiving responsibilities [n=805 weighted observations]
Source: 2024 Cornell University ILR Empire State Poll • Created with Datawrapper

Over the past year, has the unpaid amount of time you spend on caregiving support for children, adults, or other loved ones caused you to spend less time doing paid work?



Universe: Respondents who reported unpaid caregiving responsibilities [n=804 weighted observations]
Subsamples: Hispanic [n=161], Black [n=119], Asian [n=69], White [n=404], Other [n=52]
Source: 2024 Cornell University ILR Empire State Poll • Created with Datawrapper

All forms of unpaid caregiving responsibilities drove respondents to spend less time doing paid work. Among respondents caring only for children, 39% reported that the amount of time spent on unpaid caregiving caused them to spend less time doing paid work; among those caring only for adult family members, 36.3%; among those caring for both children and adult family members, 34.5%; and among those caring only for friends and/or neighbors, 27.6%.

Among respondents who reduced their paid work due to unpaid caregiving responsibilities, the top reason was that care was not affordable.

Among respondents who reported spending less time doing paid work due to their unpaid caregiving responsibilities, 57.6% reported that the decision to do so was because care was not affordable, 40.5% said it was due to a personal preference to provide care oneself, and 26.8% said it was because care was difficult to access.¹⁵ Among those who said the decision to work less was due to a personal preference to provide care themselves, more than one third (39.2%) of them reported that the decision to do so was *also* because care was not affordable and/or difficult to access.

Was the decision to spend less time doing paid work primarily because...?



Universe: Respondents who reported spending less time doing paid work due to their caregiving responsibilities for children [n=235 weighted observations]

Source: 2024 Cornell University ILR Empire State Poll • Created with Datawrapper

Among those caring for children who reported spending less time doing paid work because of their caregiving responsibilities, more than two thirds (67.7%) said the decision to spend less time doing paid work was because care was not affordable, 35.7% said it was due to personal preference, and 28.2% said it was because care was difficult to access.

Among those caring for adults who reported spending less time doing paid work because of their caregiving responsibilities, 50.1% said the decision to do less paid work was due to personal preference, 44.2% said it was because care was not affordable, and 31.3% said it was because care was difficult to access.

LOOKING AHEAD

Ensure universal access to care.

As New Yorkers strain to balance the need to provide care for their loved ones and the need to earn an income, these findings highlight the importance of addressing care as a systemic issue. While our findings confirm that women and people of color disproportionately bear the costs of unpaid caregiving, they also demonstrate that this issue affects New Yorkers across all genders and racial/ethnic groups. Caregiving is a vital foundation of society, and the economy cannot function without it—as such, it must be recognized as a public issue that demands public solutions. Ensuring universal access to child care and long-term care and to paid family leave policies can bolster people’s agency and choice in determining how much time they spend on caregiving and on paid work. While a large-scale federal investment and policy response is ultimately needed, state- and local-level solutions have become increasingly important sites for creatively confronting the care crisis in a moment when

¹⁵ Note that respondents could select multiple response options.

federal funding and protections are being slashed. To create care systems that advance equity and dignity, the needs and experiences of care recipients and care providers should be at the center of designing our care infrastructure.

Strengthen worker representation and voice to support greater agency in care choices.

Workplace policies and conditions can play a critical role in addressing the challenges people face in managing caregiving, particularly as recently enacted federal changes threaten to exacerbate the care crisis and intensify reliance on unpaid caregiving. Policies for paid leave and flexibility for caregiving, higher pay, and job security can enable people to have more agency in their care choices. Unionization and other models of collective organizing and representation can be an important avenue for improving pay and working conditions and for strengthening workers' ability to demand equitable and sustainable policies for paid leave, care support, and flexibility for caregiving.

Efforts to expand the care workforce must prioritize securing more dignified pay and working conditions for care workers.

While the Trump administration has recently proposed a rollback of basic workplace protections for home care workers and argued that this will help expand access to home care services,¹⁶ researchers and advocates have long made the case that what is needed is precisely the opposite—to increase the workforce and reduce high turnover in key sectors such as home care and child care, workers must be valued with higher pay and dignified working conditions. This is also critical in order to confront the legacy of structural racism and gender inequality that has long devalued a workforce disproportionately made up of women, people of color and immigrants. In the current absence of federal solutions, states and localities must continue to play an important role in enacting policies that lift standards and facilitate unionization for care workers whose work has been devalued and who have often been excluded from core labor rights and protections.

¹⁶ The Department of Labor (DOL) recently proposed a new rule that would remove federal minimum wage and overtime protections for millions of home care workers. The proposed rule would rescind a 2013 rule that expanded the inclusion of home care workers in wage and hour protections under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), and would revert back to the 1975 regulations that were previously in place. For details, see: <https://www.phinational.org/trump-administrations-proposed-labor-rules-will-strip-wage-and-overtime-protections-from-millions-of-home-care-workers/>

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

The Empire State Poll (ESP) is an annual survey of labor and employment across New York State conducted by Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. The survey was administered online and by phone in English and Spanish. The data were collected by SSRS between August 14-30, 2024. A total of 2,686 respondents participated in the 2024 poll. The ESP uses a blended sampling design that combines randomly selected respondents from SSRS's probability-based Opinion Panel ($n = 1,043$) as well as opt-in respondents from their nonprobability panel partner, Dynata ($n = 1,643$). Respondent recruitment was targeted to ensure a representative sample of NYS residents by age, race, and region across both sample sources. SSRS's Encipher Hybrid calibration methodology weights each respondent to correct for selection bias based on their sample source. Respondents were further weighted on several key indicators¹⁷ to calibrate results to definitive demographic sources¹⁸ in order to improve the generalizability of results to the residential adult population of New York State.

This report presents weighted crosstabulations of data from the Empire State Poll. Analyses were conducted using Stata statistical software, version 19, and data visualizations were created using Datawrapper. Testing for statistical significance was conducted by using Rao-Scott corrected chi-square tests, with the threshold for significance set at $P < .05$, the commonly accepted research standard. Tests for statistical significance by gender were performed only on cisgender respondents, due to the low number of transgender and gender non-conforming respondents. Tests for statistical significance by racial/ethnic group were only performed on white, Black, Hispanic, and Asian respondents, due to the low number of respondents who identified as Native American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, as two or more races that did not include Hispanic (those who selected Hispanic and another race were classified as Hispanic), or as an "other" race; tests for statistical significance between white respondents and all respondents of color include all respondents, regardless of the size of their individual groups.

¹⁷ In addition to sample source, key weighting indicators included: age, civic engagement, education, gender, internet usage frequency, interview mode, political party identification, race/ethnicity, and region.

¹⁸ The ESP was calibrated to the American Community Survey 5-Year 2018-2022 Estimates (U.S. Census Bureau), the 2023 Current Population Survey (U.S. Census Bureau), the September 2021 Current Population Survey Volunteering and Civic Life Supplement (U.S. Census Bureau), and the National Public Opinion Reference Survey (Pew Research Center).