

## The National Caregiving Burden

### The National Picture

Work schedules are based on the assumption that employees will contribute in an uninterrupted way but the demands placed on individuals by family and friends are neither predictable nor confined to non-working periods. During the interview week, 30 percent of the respondents had to cut back on at least one day to meet the needs of family members, 12 percent needed to cut back on two or more days, and 5 percent needed to cut back on three or more days. While all of the working adults aged 25 to 74 had significant caretaking responsibilities, 35- to 44-year-olds were shouldering the greatest amount of caretaking. In that age group, 35 percent had to cut back on at least one day a week to meet the needs of family members, compared to 27 percent of the 25- to 34-year-olds, 29 percent of the 45- to 54-year-olds, 28 percent of the 55- to 64-year-olds, and 25 percent of the 65- to 74-year-olds. Women were more likely to take cutbacks than men, but men still had a large number of cutbacks to meet the needs of family members. Thirty-five percent of the women and 24 percent of the men had to cut back on at least one day in seven.

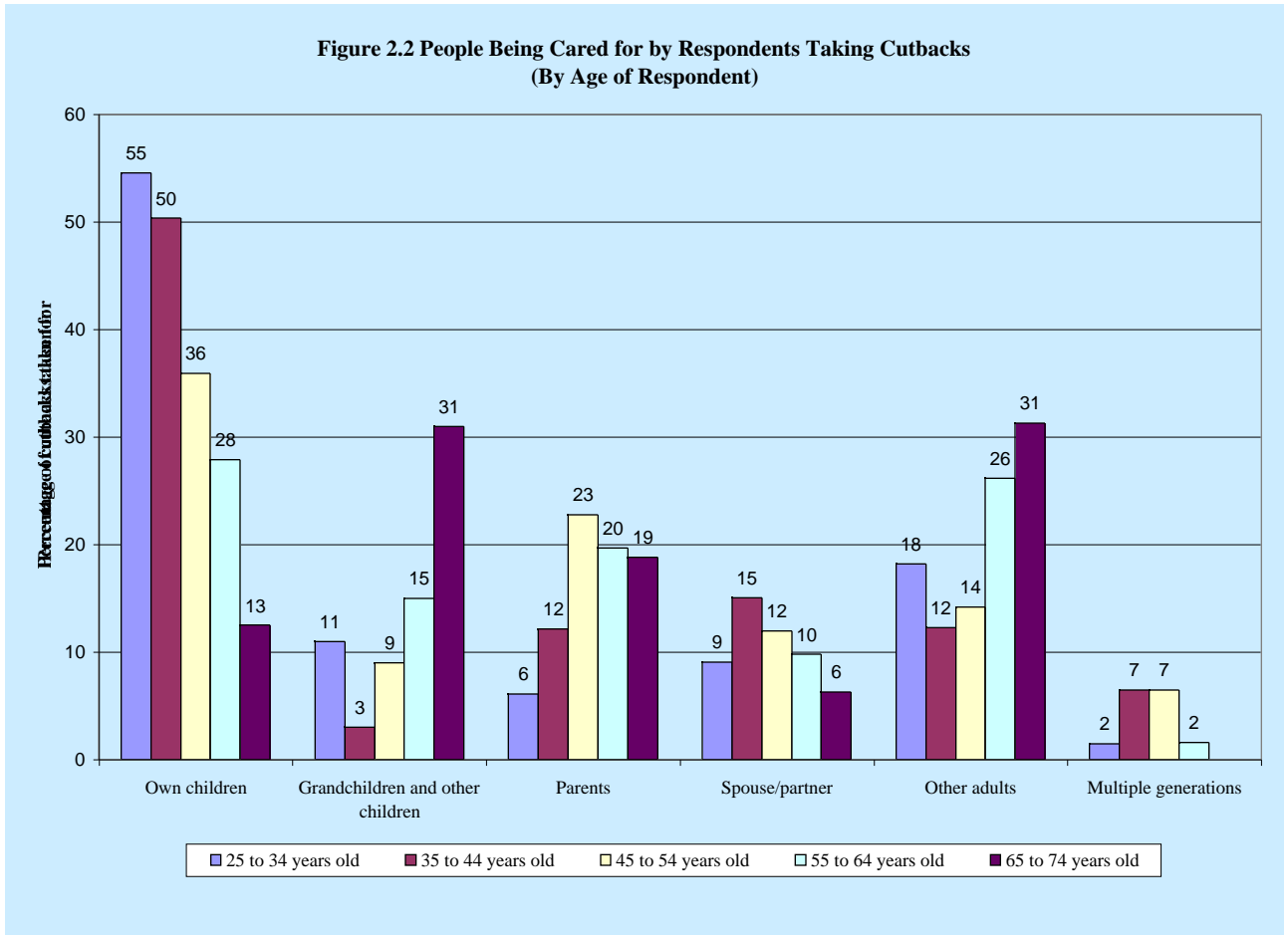
### Extent of Caregiving

The focus of work-family debates over the past two decades and of private- and public-sector policies has been on young parents caring for infants and preschoolers. This is an important piece of the work-family pie, but only one small piece, as shown clearly in our interviews. When we asked people about work disruptions associated with care for family members, every age group clearly had sizeable caregiving responsibilities. What changed was who was being cared for. Younger adults were more frequently caring for children, and the middle-aged were more often caring for their parents. In addition, as they aged, the working Americans we talked with were more likely to be caring for their spouses and partners, as well as their grandchildren. The full circle of individual and family lifecourses intersected -- and often conflicted -- with work demands over and over.

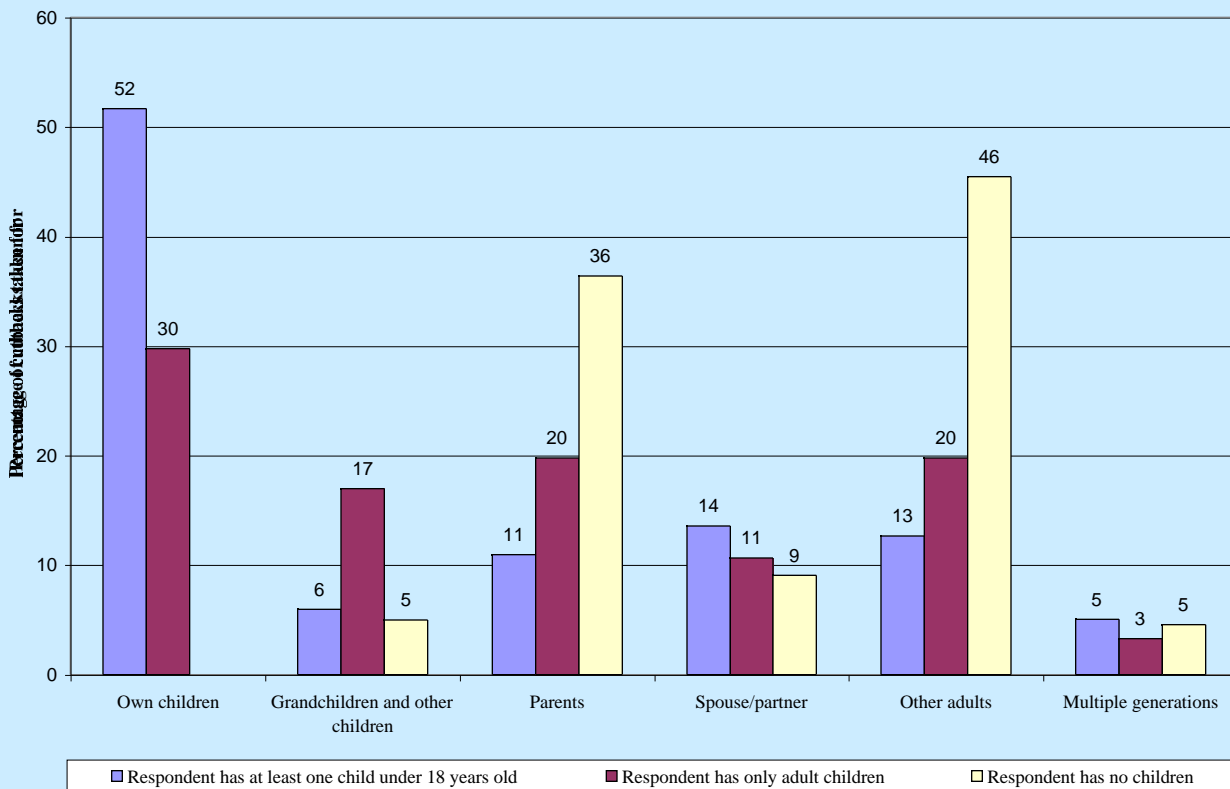
Employees' children accounted for more cutbacks than any other group receiving care, but even when adult children were included as well as preschool and school age children, even when health and educational needs were included as well as childcare and other needs, they still accounted for only 42 percent of cutbacks. Fifteen percent of cutbacks were taken to care for parents, 12 percent for spouses or partners, 7 percent for grandchildren, and 24 percent for other family members.

Respondents aged 25 to 34 were more likely to be taking cutbacks for their own children; and those between 65 and 74 for grandchildren (see Figure 2.2). People in our study who had no children of their own took cutbacks for other children, such as nieces and nephews, and were the most likely to take cutbacks for parents and other adults (see Figure 2.3). While women were somewhat more likely to have taken cutbacks to care for

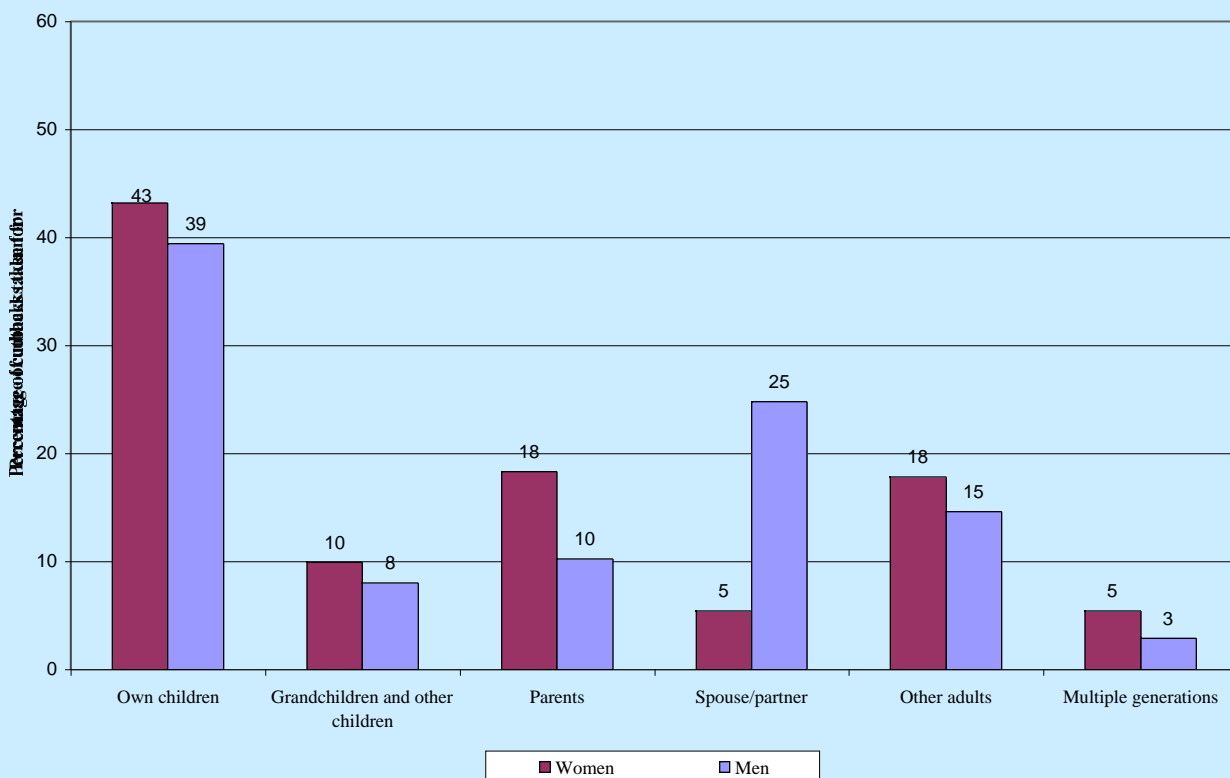
children and parents, men were more likely to have done so to help spouses or partners (see Figure 2.4).



**Figure 2.3 People Being Cared for by Respondents Taking Cutbacks  
(By Presence and Age of Children)**



**Figure 2.4 People Being Cared for by Respondents Taking Cutbacks  
(By Gender of Respondent)**



All of the family situations described here need to be understood in light of the fact that the only federal policy which addresses the need for adults to take leave from work to care for family members is the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Passed by Congress in 1993, the FMLA requires employers to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a child, parent, or spouse. However, the FMLA covers only half of all working adults – those who work in firms that employ 50 or more people, and who have worked at least 12 months and for at least 1,250 hours in the prior year for their current employer. In addition, the FMLA only covers births, adoptions and major illnesses. While health-related problems were the most common reason for employees in our study to take leave to help family members, they accounted for only 29 percent of work-related absences. Furthermore, most of children’s illnesses requiring parental work absence would not have qualified under the FMLA as major illnesses. Family members’ needs in our study were far more varied and complicated than those covered by the FMLA. Twenty-two percent of cutbacks were taken because of problems with childcare, 5 percent were taken to provide for eldercare, 3 percent to address children’s school needs, 10 percent to provide transportation to family members, 16 percent to provide other instrumental support, 3 percent to cope with a death, 1 percent to deal with divorce, and 15 percent to provide emotional or other support (see Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1 Respondents' Reasons for Taking Cutbacks  
(By Age of Respondent)**

