

REVIEW

Family Carers and Caring: What It's All About

**Alisoun Milne and Mary Larkin, Emerald, 2023, 239 pp.,
pbk £17.99, ISBN 978-1-80043-349-6**

Sladana Pavković

Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre, University of Tasmania, Hobart, TAS, Australia
Email: sladana.pavkovic@utas.edu.au

(Accepted 1 August 2024)

The book *Family Carers and Caring: What It's All About* is a comprehensive exploration of the undervalued world of family carers. Written by two academics, Alison Milne and Mary Larkin, dedicated to the field of social care, family caring and carers, the book urges policy makers and politicians worldwide to recognise family carers as a critical issue of the 21st century. Milne and Larkin provide a thorough examination of the numerous challenges associated with family caregiving, aiming to illuminate the complexities and significant unacknowledged contributions carers make to society. The book is composed of seven main chapters.

Chapter 1, 'Introduction', discusses the meaning of family caring, establishing a foundation for understanding the following six chapters. This chapter justifies the need for the book by highlighting the limitations of previous literature and the fragmentation of the topic of family carers across various disciplines.

Chapter 2, 'Profile of Family Caring in the UK: Patterns and Trends', details the main aspects of the UK carers' profiles and roles. It presents statistical evidence on the number of carers and demographic data related to the gender, age, socio-economic status, race and sexuality of family carers. The chapter identifies several emerging issues: the rapid increase in the number of carers and the rise in the number of ageing, childless individuals, or individuals with no family support for any reason, posing challenges for the UK and other developed countries. Additionally, this chapter highlights caring as a source of inequality.

Chapter 3, 'Impact and Consequences of Caring on Carers', reviews primarily the various negative consequences of caring, including emotional, financial and social aspects. The authors note the benefits of being a family carer, but, as the negative consequences outweigh the benefits, Milne and Larkin delve deeply into the negative consequences of caring. This chapter builds on the typology of carers, presenting the consequences in relation to different types, such as sandwich carers, who care for an ill person while also taking care of their own children or grandchildren; Black and

minority ethnicity (BAME) carers; dementia carers; former carers; young carers; and older carers. The authors suggest ways to mitigate the negative consequences but also highlight a critical point: the changes occurring in the caregiving journey are complex and not easily addressed.

Chapter 4, 'Supporting Carers', presents the lengthy process of care regulation in the UK policy. The authors acknowledge and build on the work of Liz Lloyd, summarised in her book *Unpaid Care Policies in the UK: Reflections on Rights, Resources and Relationships* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2023), which outlines the UK policies related to unpaid carers from the first Carers Act in 1995 to the Health and Care Act in 2022. Milne and Larkin explain the features of two essential funds designed to compensate family carers – the 'Carer's Allowance' and the 'Carer Premium' – highlighting in detail their pros and cons. Additionally, they introduce the Carer's Leave Act, which became law in May 2023; it enables one more week of leave for all working carers and will come into force in 2024.

Importantly, the authors of *Family Carers and Caring* elucidate how family carers are conceptualised in policy, providing additional clarification on the causes of their marginalisation, which is the topic covered in Chapter 5, 'Conceptualising and Understanding Carers and Caring'. This chapter delves into various theoretical and practical aspects of caring. It highlights inequalities associated with family caring, related not only to gender but also to other socio-economic factors such as age and employment.

Chapter 6, 'Social Justice, Social Citizenship, and Rights for Carers', builds on Chapter 5, addressing the inequalities and exploitations faced by family carers. It examines the intersection of carers' human rights and social justice to suggest a non-discriminatory, egalitarian model of family caring. The authors highlight how caring is a political issue, expanding from micro-level family relationships to macro-level social injustice, thus necessitating urgent political involvement. Notably, the term 'social citizenship' is introduced for the first time in relation to carers, utilising dementia literature to draft a concept that addresses unmet carers' needs requiring urgent attention.

Finally, Chapter 7, 'Final Reflections: Looking Forward', provides an overview of the issues related to caring and carers, discusses the potential contributions of the book and addresses its limitations.

The authors fill a gap in the literature on caring and carers by logically combining information from sociology, psychology, health science and their own research into a holistic narrative. The book's strength lies in its structure, with chapters building on the previous to develop a narrative that delves into the complexities of family caring. Each chapter ends with 'Concluding Comments', summarising key points and clarifying the authors' intentions, to aid reader comprehension. The empathetic tone conveyed by the case studies included in each chapter significantly enriches the theoretical considerations and the authors' research-based perspectives.

While the book does not cover in depth the experiences of minority carers or those caring for individuals with rare conditions, it remains a substantial contribution to the literature on family carers and to social science in general. *Family Carers and Caring: What It's All About* addresses a range of inequalities in family caring and serves as both a theoretical resource for researchers and students, and a practical repository for policy advocates/makers and research funders.

Reference

Lloyd L (2023) Unpaid care policies in the UK: Reflections on rights, resources and relationships. *Policy Press*.

doi:10.1017/S0144686X24000394

Cite this article: Pavković S (2024) Family Carers and Caring: What It's All About. *Ageing and Society*, 1–3.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X24000394>