

# Young Carers

## Children as family carers: research, policy & practice

**Professor Saul Becker**

Faculty of Education  
University of Cambridge

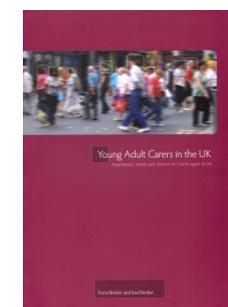
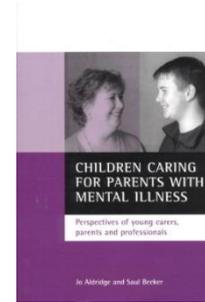
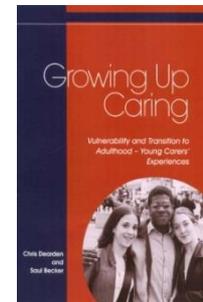
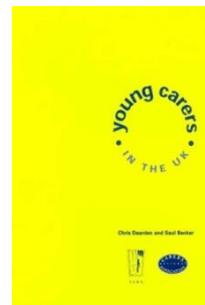
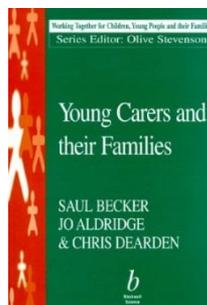
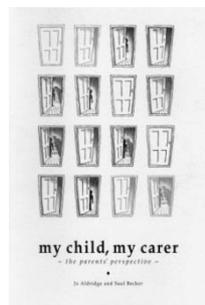
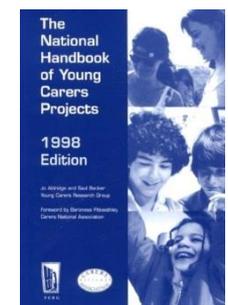
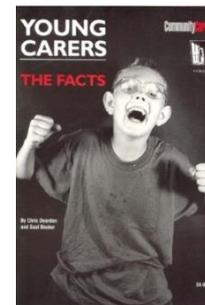
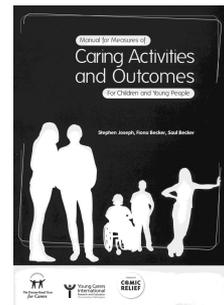
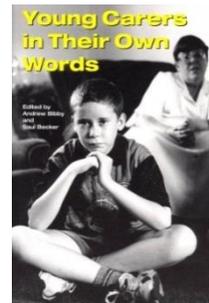
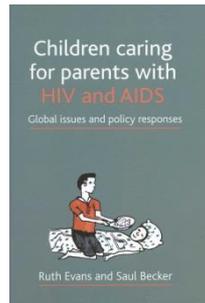
17 September 2021, UCD

**Whose responsibility  
is it to care?**



# 1992: Start of research

- No reliable 'official' figures
- Little public or professional awareness or recognition
- No young carers policy or law
- No 'rights' or entitlements
- Few young carers projects or services



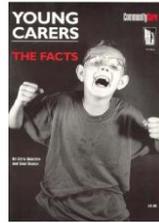
# Who are young carers and young adult carers?

*“ Young carers are children and young persons under 18 who provide, or intend to provide, care, assistance or support to another family member. They carry out, often on a regular basis, significant or substantial caring tasks and assume a level of responsibility which would usually be associated with an adult.*

*The person receiving care is often a parent but can be a sibling, grandparent or other relative who is disabled, has some chronic illness, mental health problem or other condition connected with a need for care, support or supervision.”* *Saul Becker in The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Work*

**Young adult carers** are as above, but aged 18-24. Commonly, however, YACs *in transition* include 16 & 17 year olds too.

# What do young carers do?



<b>Caring tasks</b>	<b>1995 N=641</b>	<b>1997 N=2303</b>	<b>2004 N=6178</b>
<b>Domestic</b>	65%	72%	68%
<b>General &amp; nursing</b>	61%	57%	48%
<b>Emotional</b>	25%	43%	82%
<b>Intimate</b>	23%	21%	18%
<b>Sibling care</b>	11%	7%	11%
<b>Other</b>	10%	29%	7%

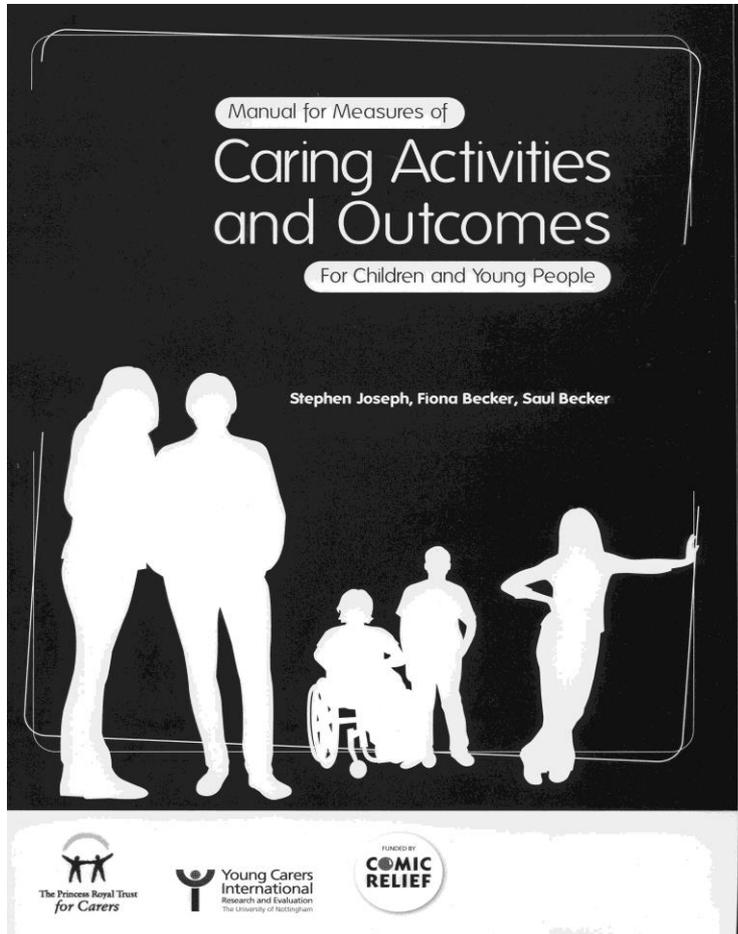
# Number of children caring England & Wales (Census 2001, 2011)

AGE	2001 England and Wales	2011 England and Wales	Increase	% increase
5 - 7	5,465	9,985	4,520	<b>83%</b>
8 - 9	7,834	12,148	4,314	<b>55%</b>
10 - 14	62,661	72,266	9,605	15%
15	21,402	23,848	2,446	11%
16 - 17	52,580	59,671	7,091	13%
All	149,942	177,918	27,976	<b>19%</b>

# Hours per week spent caring, England & Wales (Census 2011)

AGE	1 - 19 HOURS	20 - 49 HOURS	50+ HOURS	TOTAL
5 - 7	7,177	1,166	1,642	9,985 (6%)
8 - 9	9,424	1,204	1,520	12,148 (7%)
10 - 14	59,262	7,043	5,961	72,266 (41%)
15	19,596	2,489	1,763	23,848 (13%)
16 - 17	47,309	7,520	4,842	59,671 (33%)
All	142,768 (80%)	19,422 (11%)	15,728 (9%)	<b>177,918</b>

# BBC Surveys, 2010, 2018



## The caring jobs I do

Below are some jobs that young carers do to help. Think about the help you have provided **over the last month**. Please read each one and put a tick in the box to show how often you have done each of the jobs in the last month. **Thank you.**

	Never	Some of the time	A lot of the time
1 Clean your own bedroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 Clean other rooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Wash up dishes or put dishes in a dishwasher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Decorate rooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Take responsibility for shopping for food	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 Help with lifting or carrying heavy things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Help with financial matters such as dealing with bills, banking money, collecting benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 Work part time to bring money in	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 Interpret, sign or use another communication system for the person you care for	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10 Help the person you care for to dress or undress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11 Help the person you care for to have a wash	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12 Help the person you care for to have a bath or shower	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13 Keep the person you care for company e.g. sitting with them, reading to them, talking to them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14 Keep an eye on the person you care for to make sure they are alright	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15 Take the person you care for out e.g. for a walk or to see friends or relatives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16 Take brothers or sisters to school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17 Look after brothers or sisters whilst another adult is near by	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18 Look after brothers or sisters on your own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

MACA-YC18  
Copyright © 2008 Fiona Becker, Saul Becker, Stephen Joseph & Steve Duggal. All rights reserved.  
School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham, University Park, Nottingham NG7 2RD.  
Developed for The Princess Royal Trust for Carers.

We care what YOU think

Multidimensional Assessment of Caring Activities-Young Carers (MACA-YC18)

# BBC Survey 2010

4,029 pupils surveyed

8%

are involved in  
*personal and intimate*  
*caring activity*  
(dressing, washing,  
showering)

29%

are involved in emotional  
care (keeping the person  
they care for company,  
keeping an eye on them,  
taking the person out)

# BBC Survey 2018

925 secondary age pupils aged 11-15

22%

caring

32%

involved in high amounts  
of caring (MACA scores >14)

9%

involved in very high amounts of  
caring (MACA scores >18)

32%

caring for more than one person

# BBC Survey 2018

925 secondary age pupils aged 11-15

10%

are involved in  
*personal and intimate*  
*caring* activity -  
dressing, washing,  
showering  
**(8% in BBC 2010)**

48%

are involved in emotional  
care - keeping the  
person they care for  
company, keeping an  
eye on them, taking the  
person out  
**(29% in BBC 2010)**

# BBC Survey 2018

## Who they care for

**46%** care for their mother

**40%** care for a sibling

**23%** care for their father

**23%** care for a grandparent

**32%** caring for more than one person

# BBC Survey 2018

## Difficulties of the people cared for

Physical disability	Mental health	Long term illness
35%	24%	24%

**Learning Disability 13%**

**Drug Use 4%**

**Alcohol problems 2%**

# % young carers in child populations

<b>UK</b> 2-3% 8-22%	<b>Norway</b> 6%	<b>Australia</b> 4%	<b>USA</b> 3%+
<b>Sweden</b> 7%	<b>Canada</b> 12-27%	<b>Italy</b> 3%	<b>Switzerland</b> 8-10%
<b>Germany</b> 5-6%	<b>Austria</b> 4%	<b>Japan</b> 4-6%	<b>Netherlands</b> 10%

# Young carers in Ireland

## Census 2016

- *Adult completion*
- 3,800 carers under 15
- Numbers **fell** from 4,228 in 2011 Census (10% drop)
- Half in 2016 are aged 10 or under
- 79% provide up to 2 hours care a day
- Average = 16 hours care per week
- In total, YCs provide 42,227 hours of care per week
- Or 2.2m hours of care per year

## Health Behaviour in School Children 2018

- *Pupil self-completion*
- 13.3% of young people aged 10-17 report a regular caring role
- Extrapolation = 67,000 YCs
- YCs report poorer outcomes than non-carer peers
- Lower life satisfaction
- Poorer mental health
- One third bullied at school
- One quarter go hungry to school or bed

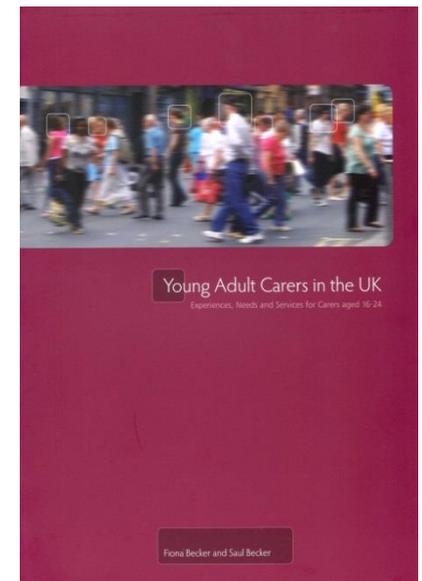
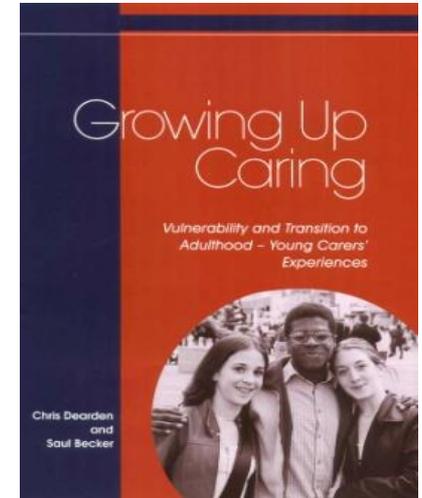
# Outcomes

Negative	Positive
Restricted friendships	Responsibility
'Stigma by association'	Maturity
Fear of interventions	Skills
Silence and Secrets	Control
Emotional problems	Inclusion
Health problems (PH & MH)	Resilience?
Educational difficulties	

# Transitions to adulthood and YACs (2000, 2008)

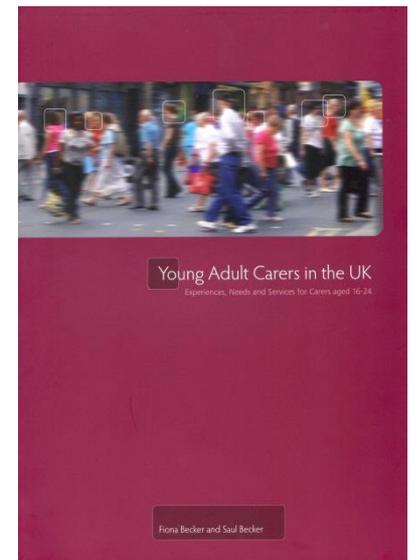
*The process whereby young people move away from dependence for primary, emotional and financial support from their childhood family carers, and their needs for income, shelter and social life are met from a wider range of sources*

- Educational problems
- Issues finding appropriate work
- Leaving home problematic
- Career & job choices influenced by skills gained
- Transition support is needed for those aged 16+



# Young Carers Aged 16-17

- Most had cared throughout childhood
- Families expected them to do more as they got older
- Schools not supportive
- Lack of career advice
- Low income
- Concern about post-18 support
- Many young carers will continue caring into adulthood
- YC Projects not good at 'transitions' work



# YC/YACs Online Survey (2013)

295 responses  
Aged **14-25**

**25%** at school

**41%** at college or uni

**16%** in work

**16%** NEET

YOUNG ADULT CARERS SURVEY

YACSURVEY.COM

Researching to improve the lives of Young Carers and Young Adult Carers

If you are a Young Adult Carer aged 14-25 and you provide care, assistance or support to another family member on an unpaid basis we are interested in your views and experiences of school, college or university and work.

[Please click here to go to our survey.](#)

YACsurvey.com is a website of Professor Saul Becker and Dr Joe Sempik of the School of Sociology and Social Policy at The University of Nottingham. If you would like more information about this survey please contact [joe.sempik@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:joe.sempik@nottingham.ac.uk)





seven million reasons to care



UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

# Young Adult Carers at College and University

Dr Joe Sempik and Professor Saul Becker  
Young Carers International  
The University of Nottingham



seven million reasons to care



UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

# Young Adult Carers and Employment

Dr Joe Sempik and Professor Saul Becker  
Young Carers International  
The University of Nottingham



seven million reasons to care



UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

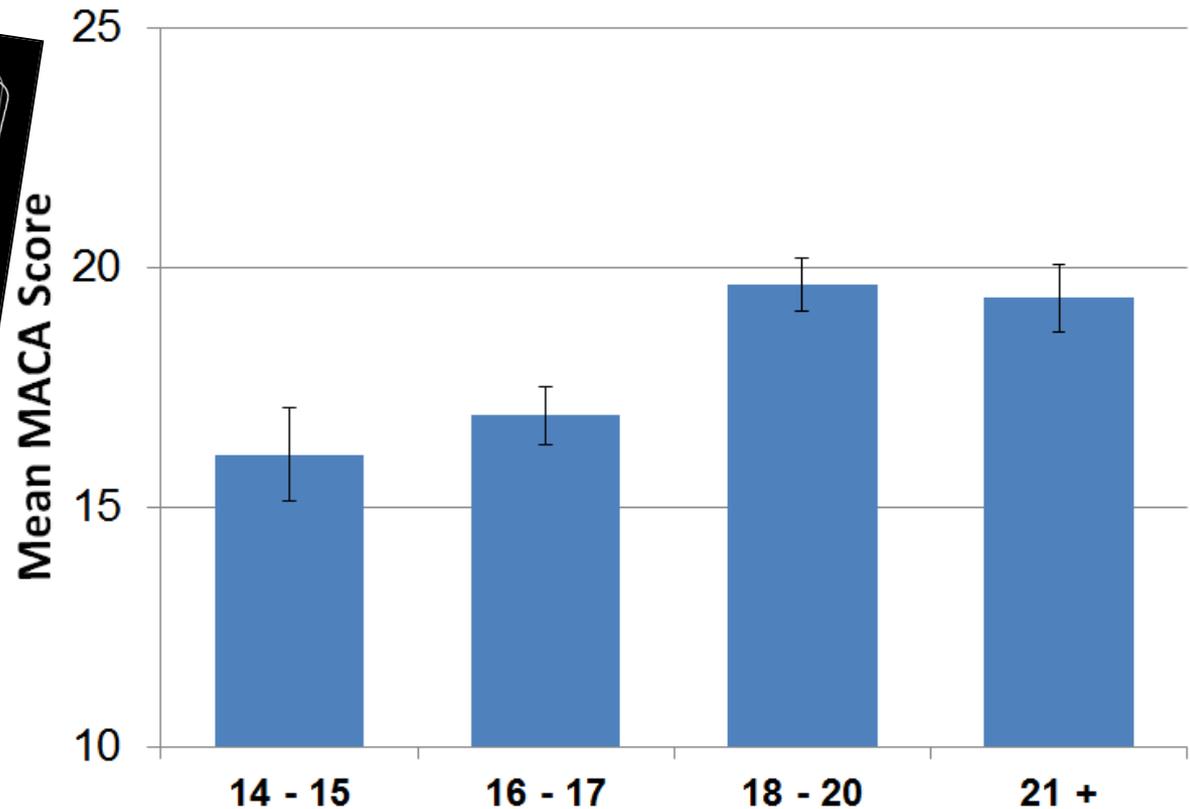
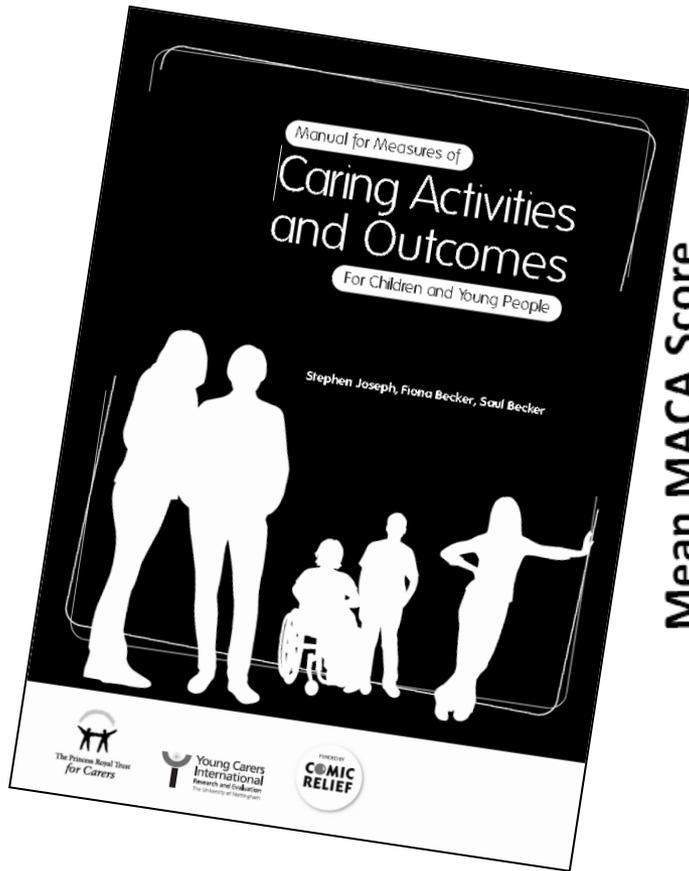
# Young Adult Carers at School: Experiences and Perceptions of Caring and Education

Dr Joe Sempik and Professor Saul Becker  
Young Carers International  
The University of Nottingham



# Level of caring

## Young Adult Carers: Age and Care Level



Age they started caring

10

# Who they care for

**52%** care for their **mother**

**14%** care for their **father**

**14%** care for a **brother**

**8%** care for a **sister**

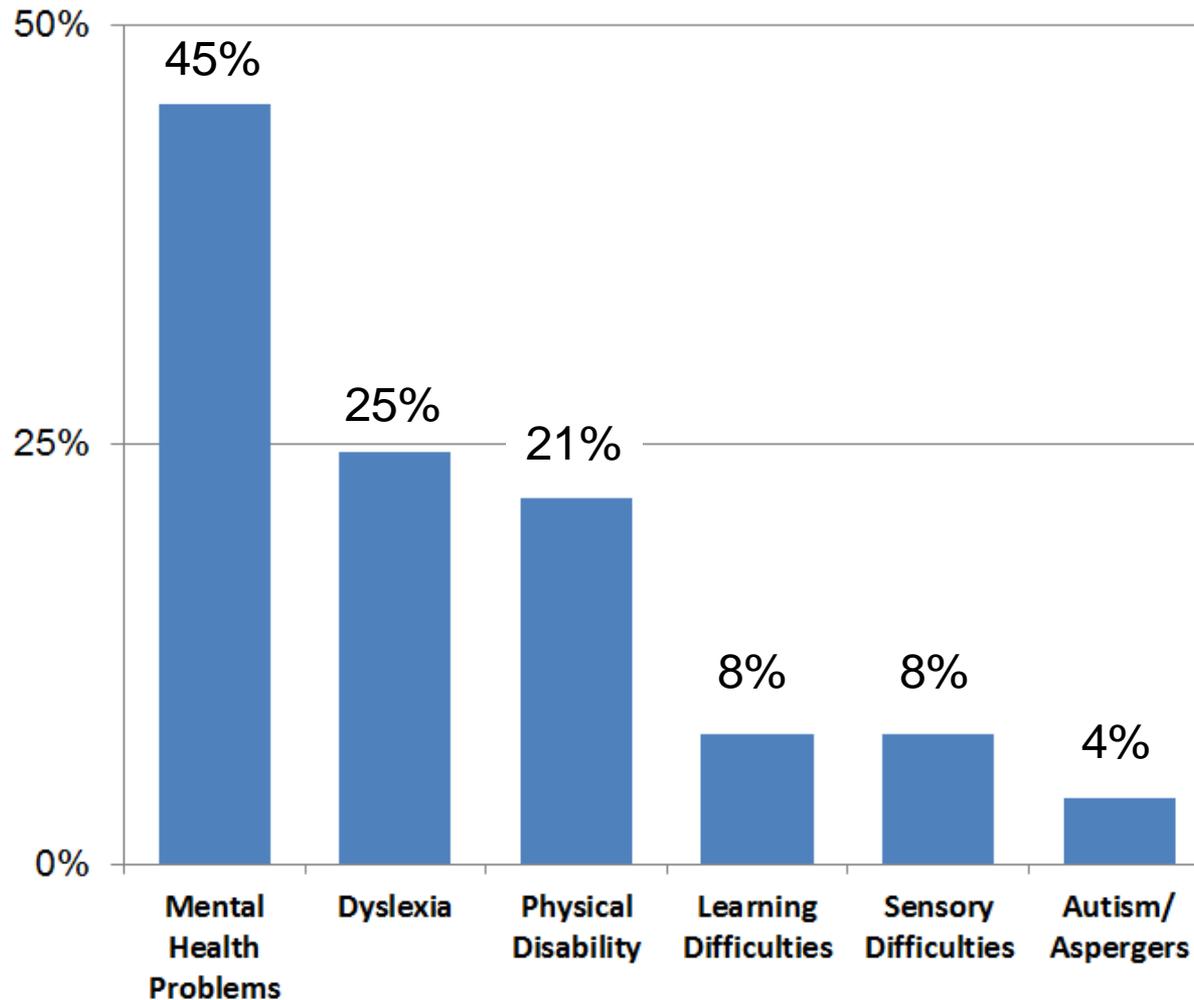
**4%** care for a **grandparent**

**1 in 5** care for more than one person

# Difficulties of the people cared for

Physical disability	Mental health	Long term illness
55%	49%	47%

# Young Carers/YACs: self-reported disabilities and difficulties



# Absence and lateness for all YC/YACs

School	College and University	Work
<b>A quarter</b> of all school days are affected	<b>Half of days</b> at college or university are affected	<b>79 days per year</b> were affected
<b>5%</b> of school days missed due to caring	<b>3 days per month</b> were missed due to caring responsibilities	<b>17 days per year</b> were lost because of caring



# ME-WE (2018-21)



Psychosocial Support for Promoting **M**ental Health and **W**ell-being among Adolescent Young Carers (aged 15-17) in Europe

- UK, Sweden, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Slovenia, Italy

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 754702

# ME-WE Online Survey (2018/19)

## 9,427 participants

7,146 aged 15-17

## 2,099 AYC's aged 15-17

70% female

27% male

## Who receives care?

- 69% care for family member [mum, dad, grandparents, siblings]
- 16% care for >1 family member
- 53% care for close friend
- 22% care for family AND friend
- **Grandparent** care is highest in Italy [72% cf 13% UK]

## Family's health conditions

- **Physical disabilities** 46%
- **Mental illness** 40%  
[57% UK cf 18% Italy]
- **Cognitive impairments** 26%
- **Addiction** 10%

Friends: 69% have mental illness [82% UK cf 30% Italy]

# ME-WE Online Survey

## General findings

- Amount of caring (MACA) varies between countries
- Female AYC's do significantly more caring in Netherlands and UK
- Both positive and negative adaptation is found
- AYC's have lower state of wellbeing (Kidscreen) than non-carers [females have lowest]
- Higher levels of caring (MACA) are associated with > school difficulties, bullying, mental health

## Impacts

- **36%** say their own **mental health** has deteriorated [country range 18-56%]
- **19%** say **school performance** negatively affected [country range 12-41%]
- **17%** report being **bullied** [41% in UK]
- **16%** say they have thought about **hurting themselves** [range 9-31%]
- **7%** say they have thought about **hurting others** [inc. person they care for] [range 4-13%]

# Physical and mental health difficulties due to caring

## Italy

- 6% of AYC's report physical health problems
- 18% of AYC's report mental health problems

## The Netherlands

- 11% of AYC's report physical health problems
- 24% of AYC's report mental health problems

## Slovenia

- 6% of AYC's report physical health problems
- 27% of AYC's report mental health problems

## Sweden

- 2% of AYC's report physical health problems
- 40% of AYC's report mental health problems

## Switzerland

- 14% of AYC's report physical health problems
- 27% of AYC's report mental health problems

## United Kingdom

- 10% of AYC's report physical health problems
- 56% of AYC's report mental health problems

# Mental Health impacts: Self-harm and harm to others

## Italy

- 11% of AYC's reported self-harming thoughts
- 8% of AYC's reported thoughts of harm to others

## The Netherlands

- 13% of AYC's reported self-harming thoughts
- 4% of AYC's reported thoughts of harm to others

## Slovenia

- 9% of AYC's reported self-harming thoughts
- 6% of AYC's reported thoughts of harm to others

## Sweden

- 13% of AYC's reported self-harming thoughts
- 5% of AYC's reported thoughts of harm to others

## Switzerland

- 21% of AYC's reported self-harming thoughts
- 6% of AYC's reported thoughts of harm to others

## United Kingdom

- 31% of AYC's reported self-harming thoughts
- 13% of AYC's reported thoughts of harm to others

Why children become carers  
- cultural, relational, structural -

A word cloud of factors influencing why children become carers. The words are arranged in a roughly circular pattern and vary in size and color. The words include: Culture (black, diagonal), Family (light blue), Illness (red), Duty (purple), No Alternatives (dark grey), Intergenerational (green), Socialisation (light blue), Disability (dark grey), Poverty (yellow), and Love (green).

Culture  
Family  
Illness  
Duty  
No Alternatives  
Intergenerational  
Socialisation  
Disability  
Poverty  
Love

# A continuum of children's caring

## CARING ABOUT

Low levels of caring and responsibility

Most children

'Routine' levels and types of caregiving, including some help with instrumental tasks of daily life

Little evidence of negative outcomes

## TAKING CARE OF



Caregiving tasks and responsibilities increase in amount, regularity, complexity, time involved, intimacy and duration

## CARING FOR

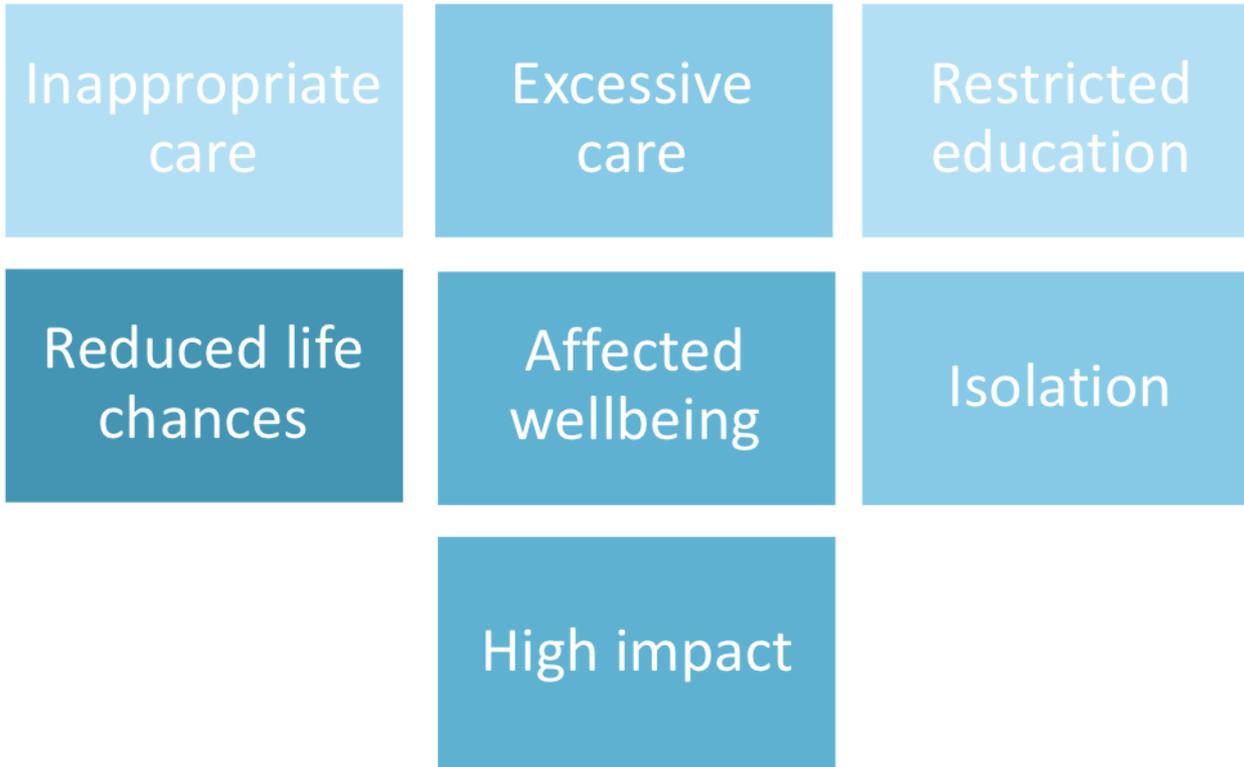
High levels of caring and responsibility

Few children

'Substantial, regular and significant' caregiving, including considerable help with instrumental tasks of daily life

Evidence of significant negative outcomes

## From *Vulnerability* ...



## ... To *Growth*

Learn

Thrive

Achieve

Protected

Enjoy

Supported

Identified

Assessed

Flourish

# Becker & Leu classification 2016, 2021

## Classification 2016

## Updated classification 2021

1

2

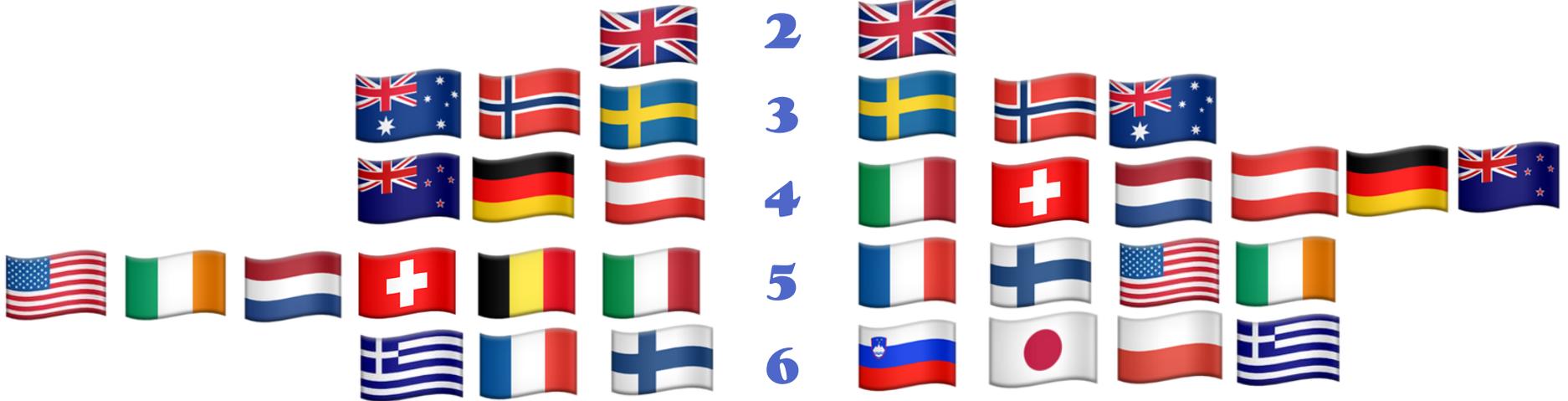
3

4

5

6

7



Leu, A., & Becker, S. (2016). A cross-national and comparative classification of in-country awareness and policy responses to 'young carers'. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 1-13.

# Messages from research

- **Need greater awareness of young carers and YACs by governments, policy makers, professionals**
- **Early interventions can prevent caring roles from becoming institutionalised and normalised within families**
- **Services and interventions can improve YCs' health, mental health, educational experiences, wellbeing and future labour market participation (but robust evidence on child outcomes still in infancy)**
- **Whole family approach can be beneficial to young carers & families**
- **Caring roles can be reduced when *families* receive adequate support, (but little evidence that this is part of intervention plans)**
- **Targeted support at key transition points *may* help (desirable, but not yet proven)**
- **Identification & assessments critical for targeted intervention(s)**
- **More research and evaluation needed – especially big data/cohort studies and evaluation studies**

# Thank you for listening!

[sb2516@cam.ac.uk](mailto:sb2516@cam.ac.uk)  
[@profsaulbecker](https://twitter.com/profsaulbecker)



International Journal of  
*Environmental Research  
and Public Health*

an Open Access Journal by MDPI



Young Carers: Research, Policy and  
Practice

**Guest Editor**

Prof. Dr. Saul Becker

**Deadline**

30 April 2022

**Special** Issue

[mdpi.com/si/92606](https://mdpi.com/si/92606)

Invitation to submit