

# IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CARER-EMPLOYEES'S WELLBEING: A TWELVE-COUNTRY COMPARISON

## Research Brief

### BACKGROUND

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns disrupted hundreds of thousands of businesses and put high amounts of strain on healthcare systems globally. Since Carer-employees (CEs) occupy the double-role of employee and unpaid carer, they are particularly vulnerable to the massive disruption caused by COVID-19 in both areas. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic caused widespread business closures and mass layoffs internationally. Many CEs were and continue to be exposed to additional stresses from two directions as they are faced with both job insecurity and increased caregiving demands.

### STUDY METHODS

We obtained data from the Carer Well-Being Index, a global study commissioned by Embracing Carers in twelve countries, including: United States, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Australia, Brazil, Taiwan, India and China. The dataset is nationally representative of each country. The study was conducted in 2020 online or over the phone from September 3 to October 27, and included questions related to carer well-being and possible ways unpaid carers are harmed during COVID-19. Unpaid carers were defined as those caring for someone with a long-term illness, physical disability, or cognitive/mental condition. In total, the data includes 6313 CEs while 479 in Canadian sample.

### RESEARCH PURPOSE

- To report on the impact of caring and COVID-19 on Canadian CEs and compare results across the twelve participating countries.
- To examine and contextualize changes to: time spent caring; sources of support for carers; the effect of caring and COVID-19 on work and career, and the impact of caring and COVID-19 on emotional/mental, financial, and physical health.
- Specific interest was placed on countries in the G7 and Australia due to similar levels of economic development, as well as having somewhat similar strategies, goals, and policy initiatives with respect to caring.

---

### RESEARCHERS

---

Jerry Wu, University of Waterloo

Allison Williams, Ph.D., McMaster University

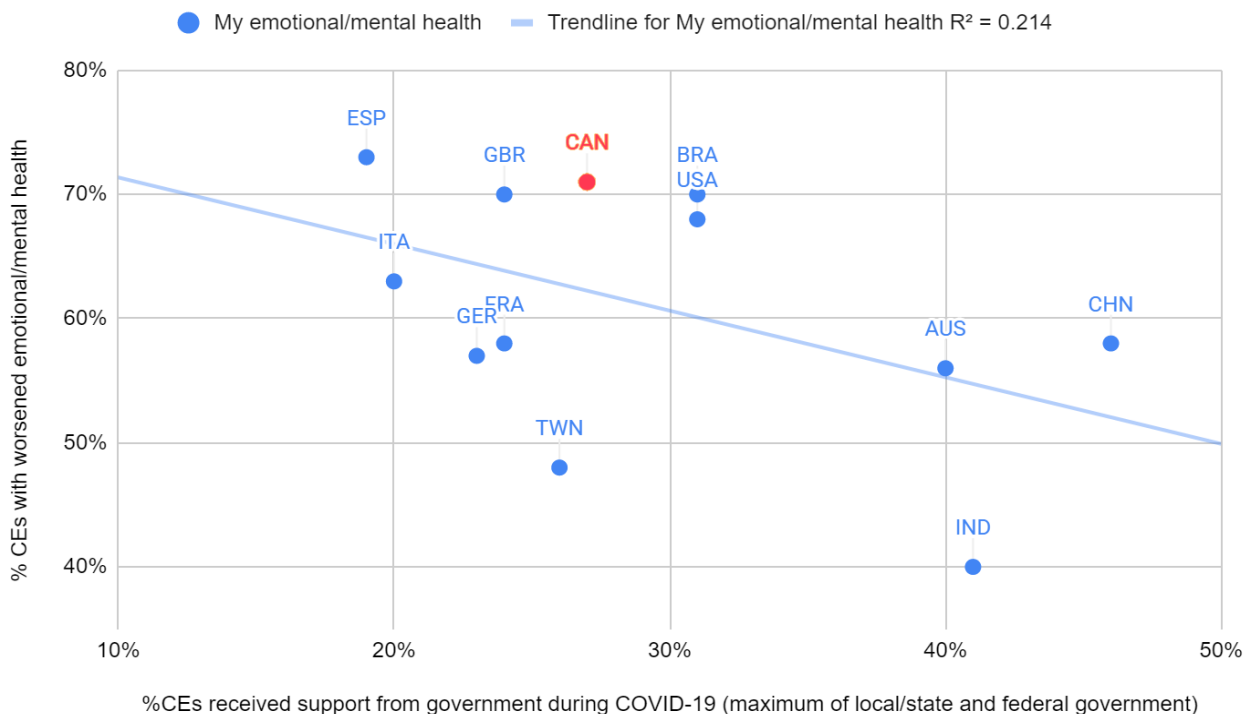
Nadine Henningsen, Chief Executive Officer of Canadian Home Care Association & Carers Canada

Li Wang, Ph.D., McMaster University

Peter Kitchen, Ph.D., McMaster University

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STUDY

- Canadian CEs on average spend more time with caregiving during the pandemic compared to before the pandemic; 68% report that caregiving is more difficult, and 34% report more difficulty balancing their paid job and caring responsibilities. 71% of Canadian CEs feel their mental health has worsened.
- 34% of Canadian CEs received support from the government and only 30% received support from their employers.
- Globally, there was a similar trend, with CEs experiencing worse mental health, work impacts, and unmet needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Countries with higher rates of support during the pandemic had better CE mental health
- Seventy percent of Canadian CEs reported never receiving support from their employers
- Canadian CEs have the lowest rate of employer support out of all twelve participating countries
- In the G7, Canadian CEs reported the most difficulty balancing their job with caring amid COVID-19
- Working from home arrangements is not the best answer to supporting CEs amidst COVID-19



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Federal, provincial, and local governments in Canada should create policies that increase the proportion of Canadian CEs receiving support either through new support legislation or increased awareness of existing supports.
- The social isolation of dependent care recipients should be addressed, which would help ease the growing responsibility for CEs to provide emotional support.
- Large well-resourced employers need to take a systemic approach to supporting CEs, such as providing flexible work arrangements, paid and unpaid leave, flexible hours, and the required technology to best balance paid work and unpaid care.



Funding was provided via a  
CIHR/SSHRC Healthy, Productive  
Work Partnership Grant: "Scaling  
up the Carer Inclusive  
Accommodating Organizations  
Standard" FRN: HWP - 146001  
(CIHR); 890-2016-3018 (SSHRC)