

ARTICLE SUMMARY

Caregiver Burden and Mental Health: Millennial Caregivers

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Author	Jacqueline M. Arnone, PhD, PMHNP-BC
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Why this matters: Millennials now make up one in four caregivers in the United States, and one in three of them is caring for someone with a mental or emotional health condition. This nursing journal article shines a light on a group that rarely gets attention in caregiving conversations— younger adults who are juggling full-time jobs, early careers, and the emotional weight of caring for a loved one with mental illness. If you are a younger caregiver, or you know one, this article validates the unique challenges they face and highlights programs that can help.

Summary

This article explores the growing role of Millennials (ages 18–34) as caregivers for family members with mental illness and the toll that caregiving takes on their own mental and physical health. The author reviews research showing that caregivers of people with mental illness experience rates of psychological distress twice that of the general population, with increased risk for depression, anxiety, and sleep disorders.

Millennial caregivers are more racially and ethnically diverse than previous generations, more likely to be working full-time while caregiving, and more likely to face career-related consequences such as missed work and reduced productivity.

The article highlights the NAMI Family-to-Family (FTF) program—a free, 12-week educational program that teaches coping skills, crisis management, communication techniques, and self-care strategies through peer-led support. Research on FTF shows sustained benefits, including increased empowerment and reduced distress, lasting at least six months after completion. The author calls for more culturally inclusive programs and future research designed specifically for the diverse Millennial caregiver population.

Key takeaways

- Millennial caregivers face a double burden: they are building careers and adult lives while simultaneously providing complex care for loved ones with mental illness, and their own mental health suffers as a result.
- Stigma, isolation, and financial strain are major barriers for caregivers of people with mental illness. Many caregivers do not recognize themselves as “caregivers” and delay seeking help until they are already overwhelmed.

- Free, evidence-based programs like NAMI's Family-to-Family can make a real difference. Also, research shows participants experience increased empowerment and decreased distress that lasts well beyond the program itself.

What you can do

Whether you are a Millennial caregiver or supporting one, here are concrete steps you can take:

- Look into NAMI's free Family-to-Family program at nami.org or programs similar. It is available in all 50 states, with a Spanish-language version in several states, and teaches practical skills for coping with a loved one's mental illness.
- Talk to your own healthcare provider about how caregiving is affecting your mental health. Be specific about symptoms like trouble sleeping, anxiety, or feelings of depression—these are common among caregivers and treatable.
- If you are employed while caregiving, learn about your workplace rights. Many employers offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) with free counseling, and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) may provide job-protected leave for caregiving situations.

Questions to consider

- Am I experiencing signs of caregiver burnout—such as persistent fatigue, irritability, withdrawal from friends, or changes in sleep or appetite—that I should discuss with a provider?
- What local or online support groups exist for family members of people with mental illness, and which ones are designed for younger or working caregivers?
- Are there screening tools or brief assessments my provider can use to check in on my mental health as a caregiver, not just the person I'm caring for?

Related CarePoint topics: Caregiving, Mental Health, Wellness, Millennial Caregiving