

Health News

Caregivers have negative health behaviors

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LOS ANGELES, Sept. 26 (UPI) -- The estimated 6 million informal caregivers in California show serious psychological distress and negative health behaviors such as smoking, researchers say.

In a policy brief by the University of California, Los Angeles, Center for Health Policy Research, using data from the 2009 California Health Interview Survey, the authors find California caregivers provide an average of 20 hours of care per week -- on such things as bathing, shopping, managing medications or paying bills -- for friends or relatives who can no longer do such things for themselves.

The study finds:

-- 25.5 percent of middle-age caregivers are more likely than older or younger caregivers to binge drink; 16 percent are more likely to smoke and 30 percent are more likely to be obese.

-- Caregivers of all ages who reported serious psychological distress were 208 percent more than non-caregivers with serious psychological distress to smoke.

-- Nearly one-third of middle-aged caregivers are single, divorced or widowed, and more than two-thirds hold down full- or part-time jobs.

-- Only 7.4 percent of informal caregivers reported being paid for the help they provide, but nearly 20 percent spent \$250 or more of their own money on caregiving in the past month.

Recent cuts to California's In-Home Supportive Services program and the scheduled Dec 1. elimination of the Adult Day Health Care program will likely place even greater burdens on informal caregivers, the authors say.