

INDISPENSABLE BUT OVERLOOKED: A Research Review of Girls' Caretaking and Household Responsibilities and Their Effects on Girls' Lives

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“There are only four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers, those who are caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers.” *Rosalynn Carter*

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ABOUT THE INITIATIVE ON GENDER JUSTICE & OPPORTUNITY

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INTRODUCTION

Every day across the country, millions of young people spend significant time at home working as unpaid caregivers and engaging in household tasks—and their numbers are increasing. While approximately 1.3 to 1.4 million children between the ages of 8 and 18 performed those duties in 2005¹, the American Association of Caregiving Youth estimates that the number of unpaid caregiving youth² has now grown to an estimated 3.4 million, with some projections as high as 5.4 million.³ Scholars and experts suggest a range of reasons for this surge, including more adults engaging in paid work outside the home, smaller families, an increased need for care as the baby boomer population ages, shorter hospital stays and other limitations on the healthcare system’s provision of services, and increased state efforts to facilitate home- and community-based services.⁴ As a result, a “care gap” has emerged—and youth are the ones filling it.⁵

As this research review reveals, studies show that these responsibilities disproportionately impact adolescent girls.⁶ Although the studies’ definitions, methods, and sample sizes varied widely, making comparisons difficult,⁷ they clearly point to a common finding—girls of all races and ethnicities disproportionately take on household responsibilities throughout adolescence, and this unpaid work has significant effects on their education and social-emotional development. Despite the significance of youths’ work at home, there is little research on their rates of participation or their effect on adolescents. Even less attention has been paid to the roles played by gender and race. In this review, the Georgetown Law Initiative on Gender Justice & Opportunity seeks to bring attention to these critical issues and bring girls to the center of research and policy efforts to relieve youth of disproportionate responsibility.

1 Gail Hunt et al., *Young Caregivers in the U.S.: Reports of Findings*, Nat’l All. for Caregiving 10 (Sept. 2005), <https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/youngcaregivers.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/F4JC-W7TM>].

2 The American Association of Caregiving Youth (AACY) defines caregiving youth as “children and adolescents who are 18 years of age or younger and who provide significant or substantial assistance, often on a regular basis, to relatives or household members who need help because of physical or mental illness, disability, frailty associated with aging, substance misuse, or other condition.” *Who We Are*, AM. ASS’N OF CAREGIVING YOUTH, <https://aacy.org/who-we-are/> [<https://perma.cc/CX4W-EVTN>] (last visited April 29, 2022).

3 NAT’L ALL. FOR CAREGIVING & AARP, *CAREGIVING IN THE U.S.* 9 (May 2020), <https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/full-report-caregiving-in-the-united-states-01-21.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/2HJ3-PEHN>].

4 *Id.*; Patricia L. East, *Children’s Provision of Family Caregiving: Benefit or Burden?*, 4 CHILD DEV. PRAC. 55, 56 (2010).

5 East, *supra* note 4.

6 *Id.*

7 For similar critiques of the variation in studies of caregiving, see Patricia L. East et al., *Youths’ Caretaking of Their Adolescent Sisters’ Children: Results from Two Longitudinal Studies*, 30 J. FAM. ISSUES 1671 (2009); Emma Armstrong-Carter et al., *A Unifying Approach for Investigating and Understanding Youth’s Help and Care for the Family*, 13 CHILD DEV. PERSP. 186 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12336>.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH GIRLS' DISPROPORTIONATE PARTICIPATION IN CAREGIVING AND HOUSEHOLD TASKS

Our analysis indicates that multiple factors can affect children's roles at home, including gender; race; age; a range of family factors, including family values, norms, sociocultural context, structure, and income; parental employment; and crises that occur both in and out of the home. For girls, performance of caregiving and household tasks were linked to outcomes including school discipline; poor perceptions of academic interest and performance; school pushout; diminished capacity to complete school work; resentment and family conflict; and limited ability to participate in extracurricular activities.

THE ROLE OF GENDER⁸

Studies demonstrate that gender discrepancies in performing household responsibilities hold constant for girls of all ethnicities and races when compared to boys.⁹ In 2019, for example, boys were found to have spent an average of 24 minutes per day on household tasks compared to girls, who worked an average of 38 minutes.¹⁰ Such disparities are not isolated. In a 2007 study, researchers found that boys spent about 70 percent of the time on household tasks than girls did (69.68 hours



⁸ Several studies did not indicate variation by gender, race or ethnicity and reported results for adults and children.

⁹ See, e.g., Jocelyn S. Winkle, *Patterns in Housework and Childcare Among Girls and Boys*, 5 J. OF RSCH. ON WOMEN AND GENDER 17, Table 2 (2014), <https://digital.library.txstate.edu/handle/10877/12869> [<https://perma.cc/5K5Y-EJXE>].

¹⁰ Gretchen Livingston, *The Way U.S. Teens Spend Their Time is Changing, but Differences Between Boys and Girls Persist*, PEW RSCH. CTR., Feb. 20, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/02/20/the-way-u-s-teens-spend-their-time-is-changing-but-differences-between-boys-and-girls-persist/> [<https://perma.cc/JCN2-U8XY>].

for girls versus 49.07 hours per week for boys).¹¹ Research focusing specifically on caring for siblings—one of the most significant categories of youth tasks at home—demonstrates that adolescent girls performed this work more often and at higher rates than boys. For example, a 2018 study revealed that girls were 42 percent more likely to engage in that task than boys.¹² Additionally, two longitudinal studies determined that girls not only spend significantly more time on childcare than boys, but that the gap increases over time.¹³ Exceptions to this pattern are rare, but have been found in narrowly defined circumstances.¹⁴ In sum, as a 2004 study found, generally boys are “rarely are expected by their families to stay home to care for younger siblings or ailing family members, or to cook and clean.”¹⁵

In examining these disparities, researchers have identified that families’ gender-based expectations of adolescents served as a contributing factor to the persistent gender gap. Evidence shows, in particular, that families tend to expect girls to care for family members, and do not expect the same of boys.¹⁶ Researchers examining a decade of qualitative research of labor in families, for example, attributed the gender gap to perceptions of boys as less reliable and less inclined to engage in caretaking.¹⁷ According to a 2018 study, parents were more likely to ask boys to assist with caregiving when they were home, suggesting that parents more often seek boys’ caregiving help when parents can supervise them.¹⁸ Multiple studies have highlighted that gender-based expectations and assignment of work responsibilities are especially important because they can have intergenerational effects, as parents “transmit behavioral values and expectations to their children ... and ... children interpret those experiences, internalize them as symbolic controls, and then reproduce them behaviorally.”¹⁹

GENDER DIFFERENCES WITHIN RACIAL AND ETHNIC GROUPS

Children of color are more likely to engage in caretaking work than white children. A survey of young caregivers by the National Alliance for Caregiving and the AARP, for example, found that Latino and Black youth were twice as likely to be caregivers as non-Latino white children.²⁰ Within racial and ethnic groups, however, research has shown that girls consistently take on household tasks at higher rates than boys of the same race and ethnicity. According to a 2014 study that disaggregated data

11 Eva Österbacka & Cathleen Zick, *Time Use in the Transition from Adulthood: Cross-National Comparisons* 17 (Draft, 2007), http://atususers.umd.edu/wip2/papers_i2007/Osterbacka.pdf [<https://perma.cc/3XP7-XCDD>]. Used by permission. Girls’ high participation rates has been true for decades: a 1999 study of high-school girls found that 80 percent of participants performed regular cleaning and did the household’s laundry; more than half contributed 5 to 20 hours of childcare every week; 25 percent cooked for their families; and nearly all helped with grocery shopping. See also LISA DODSON, *DON’T CALL US OUT OF NAME: THE UNTOLD LIVES OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN POOR AMERICA* (1999).

12 Jocelyn S. Wikle et al., *Adolescent Caretaking of Younger Siblings*, 71 *Soc. Sci. Resch.* 72 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2017.12.007>.

13 East, *supra* note 7.

14 E.g. Patricia L. East & Sharon B. Hamill, *Sibling Caretaking Among Mexican American Youth*, 35 *HISP. J. BEHAV. SCI.* 542, 551 (2013) (finding, in a study of Mexican-American families in southern California, younger siblings engaged in sibling care at near-identical rates).

15 *Id.* at 13.

16 E.g. Wikle, *supra* note 9, at 20; East & Hamill, *supra* note 14, at 543–44; Reed W. Larson & Suman Verma, *How Children and Adolescents Spend Time Across the World: Work Play and Developmental Opportunities*, 125 *PSYCH. BULL.* 701 (1999).

17 Lisa Dodson & Jillian Dickert, *Girls’ Family Labor in Low-Income Households: A Decade of Qualitative Research*, 66 *J. MARRIAGE & FAM.* 318, 320 (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.0005.x>; East et al., *supra* note 7.

18 Wikle et al., *supra* note 12, at section 4.1.

19 Emory Luce Baldwin, *The Relationship of Children’s Household Work to Measures of Children’s Prosocial Behaviors and Positive Self-Perceptions* 17 (2004) (M.S. thesis, University of Maryland, College Park) (on file with author) (citing A. Bandura & F.J. Jourden, *Self-Regulatory Mechanisms Governing Social Comparison Effects on Complex Decision Making*, 60 *J. Personality and Soc. Psych.* 941 (1991)), <https://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/handle/1903/1665/umi-umd-1408.pdf?sequence=1> [<https://perma.cc/92BA-WF34>].

20 NAT’L ALL. FOR CAREGIVING & AARP, *supra* note 3, at 44.



by gender and race, the greatest gender gap was identified among Black youth, and the narrowest discrepancy was found among non-Hispanic white children.²¹

Latinas/Hispanic girls.²² The most commonly studied population of the research included in this review was Latinx youth. Within this group, Latinas have been shown to engage in household work at significantly higher rates than their male peers. A 2014 study of Hispanic youth, for example, found that girls engaged in household work at almost twice the rate of boys: 73 percent of girls compared to 37 percent of boys.²³ Latinas' rate of engagement in household work was also found to be higher than any other racial or ethnic group examined in that study—or, for that matter, than any population in all the research identified. A study of 195 Mexican-American adolescents and their mothers noted that in these families, “children’s household work and family care is highly differentiated by gender, with girls performing a significantly larger share of such tasks than boys.”²⁴ Supporting data emerged from a 2009 study of Mexican-American younger siblings’ time caring for nieces and nephews, with measurements taken at 6 weeks and 6 months after birth. The study determined that daughters spent more time caretaking than sons at both points. At 6 weeks postpartum, younger sisters provided more than 2.5 times the amount of childcare that boys did—an average of 13.2 hours per week, compared to younger brothers’ 5.2 hours per week. At 6 months postpartum, the disproportionality decreased but remained significant: younger sisters provided childcare for an average of 11.5 hours per week, compared to younger brothers’ weekly average of 6.7 hours.²⁵

21 Wikle, *supra* note 9, at 19-20 & Table 4 (defining “household activities” to include cleaning, laundering clothing, preparing food, and grocery shopping).

22 To maintain accuracy, the terms in this report are the same as those used in the studies’ original publications.

23 Wikle, *supra* note 9, at 22 & Table 4.

24 East & Hamill, *supra* note 14, at 544.

25 East et al., *supra* note 7, at 1671.

Black girls. While fewer empirical studies have examined Black youths' household roles, existing research has identified a gender gap that is greater than in any other racial or ethnic group. In a 2014 study, 60 percent of Black girls reported that they performed household tasks, compared to 8 percent of Black boys.²⁶ In a longitudinal study on sibling childcare, Black girls spent a mean of 9.7 hours a week on this task, compared to a mean of 8.5 hours a week for Black boys.²⁷ Consistent with other studies, the gender gap identified in this research increased over time: 1.8 years later, Black girls reported an increase in hours worked (14.8 hours per week), while Black boys reported a decrease (5.5 hours per week).²⁸

White girls. White girls, like all other girls, take on household responsibilities at higher rates than their male counterparts throughout childhood,²⁹ though studies have produced a wide variation in findings. According to one study of European American families,³⁰ girls participated in household tasks at higher rates than boys at all ages at which data was measured.³¹ The study measured parents' activities, including time spent at work, driving to and from work, and work-related activities at home. The findings note that when mothers spent more time working, girls spent more time on housework.³² A 2014 study found a far narrower gender gap: 54 percent of non-Hispanic white girls and 52 percent of non-Hispanic white boys engaged in household tasks.³³ A contradictory result emerged in a survey conducted 10 years earlier, which found that parents expected their children to participate in household responsibilities that benefit the family "almost always" at higher rates for boys than girls.³⁴ This contrasting finding is an outlier among the research identified.

THE ROLE OF GIRLS' AGE

Studies demonstrate that girls begin taking on household tasks at younger ages than boys³⁵ and engage in these tasks at higher rates throughout childhood.³⁶ A 2014 study, for example, found that girls' rates of participation in household tasks outpace boys' as early as the age of eight.³⁷ Recent research has further found that the gender gap widens throughout childhood.³⁸ A study of Mexican-American mothers and daughters, for example, found that expectations for daughters to perform household work increase as girls grow older, and noted that the tradition of the quinceñera may play a role in this upward trend, as participants expressed the expectation that "rules surrounding household chores and responsibilities would remain the same or increase at the age of 15."³⁹

26 Wikle, *supra* note 9, at 21–22.

27 East et al., *supra* note 7, at 1679 Table 1.

28 *Id.*

29 Chun Bun Lam et al., *Housework Time from Middle Childhood Through Adolescence: Links to Parental Work Hours and Youth Adjustment*, 52 DEV. PSYCH. 2071, 2077 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000223> [<https://perma.cc/TH5C-5XTJ>].

30 *Id.* This research studied "European American" youth, which appears to be intended as a proxy for white youth. The term "white" is never used, however. It is unclear whether this terminology indicates that all participants were in fact white, or whether this study was based on the premise that all Europeans are white.

31 *Id.*

32 *Id.*

33 Wikle, *supra* note 9, at Table 4 & 19–20.

34 Baldwin, *supra* note 19, at 49.

35 East et al., *supra* note 7, at 1671.

36 E.g. Wikle, *supra* note 9, at 20–21; Constance T. Gager et al., *The Effects of Family Characteristics and Time Use on Teenagers' Household Labor*, 61 J. MARRIAGE AND FAM. 982, 987–88 (1999), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/354018?origin=cross-ref>.

37 Wikle, *supra* note 9, at 20.

38 Jonathan Gershuny & Oriell Sullivan, *Household Structure and Housework: Assessing the Contributions of All Household Members, with a Focus on Children and Youths*, 12 REV. ECON. HOUSEHOLD 7 (2014); East et al., *supra* note 7, at 1673. An exception was found in a study of European-American families, in which girls' engagement rates leveled off after mid-adolescence. Lam, *supra* note 29, at 2075.

39 Laura F. Romo et al., *Latina Mothers' and Daughters' Expectations for Autonomy at Age 15 (La Quinceañera)*, 29 J. ADOLESCENT RSCH. 271, 284 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558413477199>.

FAMILY GENDER NORMS, SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT, AND STRUCTURE



Families' values, beliefs, and structure play significant roles in determining how caregiving and household tasks are distributed. In general, evidence shows that adults tend to assign traits to girls that are conducive to caretaking, such as maturity, responsibility, and nurturing characteristics.⁴⁰ One study noted, in particular, the influence of "sociocultural bias of many American families" that "suggests that girls and women are more fit for caretaking tasks."⁴¹ The perception that girls are better suited for caretaking and household tasks contributes to girls' being "asked to forego their own activities to attend to family kin care needs."⁴² This factor is significant because, as one scholar noted, parental expectations themselves can "influence [youths'] choices of how to act."⁴³ In other words, girls may be more likely to "value and desire greater participation in the care of children than boys based on gender role expectations and gender socialization."⁴⁴ Some evidence indicates the converse: boys' contribution to families more often takes the form of paid work outside the home; they are more likely, in other words, to serve as financial "'providers' for the benefit of the family, rather than home-bound 'caregivers' per se."⁴⁵

Studies suggest that the influence of gender norms in determining household roles is especially pronounced in Latinx families. A qualitative analysis of Latinx high-school friend-groups from low-income neighborhoods in Los Angeles, the majority of whom were Mexican-American, indicated

40 See, e.g., Wikle et al., *supra* note 12, at 72; Thomas S. Weisner et al., *My Brother's Keeper: Child and Sibling Caretaking*, 18 CURRENT ANTHROPOLOGY 169, 178 (1977).

41 Wikle, *supra* note 12, at 73.

42 East et al., *supra* note 7 (citing Lisa Dodson & Jillian Dickert, *Girls' Family Labor in Low-Income Households: A Decade of Qualitative Research*, 66 J. MARRIAGE & FAM. 318, 326 (2004)).

43 Baldwin, *supra* note 19, at 16–17.

44 East et al., *supra* note 7, at 1671.

45 Laurie J. Bennett & Martha Abele Mac Iver, "Girls Tend to Stop Going; Boys Get Told Not to Come Back": A Report on Gender and the Dropout Problem in Colorado Schools 1, 13 (2009), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED539113.pdf>. Other studies note that girls, too, work outside the home at high rates.

that “prevailing gender norms regarding homemaking” influence the assignment of household tasks in Latinx families.⁴⁶ Indeed, according to a study of Mexican-American families, cultural mechanisms are key to analyses of household responsibilities in Latinx groups.⁴⁷ In an analysis of data on Hispanic families, 31.8 percent of primary adult caregivers were reported to have high expectations for girls in the family to do housework (defined as “almost always”), compared to 25 percent for boys.⁴⁸ Conversely, 50 percent of primary caregivers had low expectations (ranging from “never” to less than half the time) for boys to participate in housework; only 27.3 percent held that expectation for girls.⁴⁹

Gender norms may exacerbate the gender gap in girls’ work at home, but research suggests that they are not the sole cause. One study of Mexican-American households, for example, measured the gender gap in household tasks between families with traditional, patriarchal views about gender roles and those with non-traditional views. It found that girls in families who held traditional views spent over twice the time that boys did on housework: 391.17 minutes per week on these tasks, compared to boys’ 173.81 minutes.⁵⁰ In families who did not hold these traditional views, the gap was narrower but still significant: girls spent 280.52 minutes and boys spent 230.13 minutes on housework.⁵¹ The results suggest even in homes that do not ascribe to conventional gender norms, girls spend considerably more time on housework than boys.⁵²

Evidence also indicates that family structure is an important factor that affects the degree of youths’ household responsibilities. The presence and activities of parents at home, for example, have been shown to influence the household roles of boys and girls differently. Studies show that boys engage in sibling caretaking at higher rates when their parents are home, whereas girls’ rates of sibling caretaking have been shown to increase when parents are absent.⁵³ Consistent with this finding, a 2009 study found that when mothers provided many hours of care for siblings’ children at home, boys provided fewer hours of care, while girls provided more.⁵⁴ According to the author of this study, these results suggest that “[d]aughters may be more understanding than sons to their mothers’ household work and strive to relieve some of their burden. Or . . . mothers may rely more on daughters than sons when their workload becomes excessive. In either case, these findings highlight the cooperative and dynamic nature of family kin care and corroborate the results of other studies that show the importance of family structure for youths’ kin care involvement.”⁵⁵

The presence of others living at home and in need of care, including elderly family members, is also associated with increased caregiving responsibilities for youth.⁵⁶ According to a 2020 national survey of caretakers, adults who lived with care recipients were more likely to report relying on youth for assistance than adults who cared for individuals outside the home.⁵⁷ Siblings living at home can also affect caregiving responsibilities. While the number of siblings at home itself does not appear to affect adolescents’ rate of participation in household work,⁵⁸ the presence of older siblings who are

46 Melissa Hyams, *Adolescent Latina Bodyspaces: Making Homegirls, Homebodies and Homeplaces*, in *LIFE’S WORK* 119, 547 (Katharyne Mitchell et al. eds., 2012); see also Sandra L. Hofferth & John F. Sandberg, *How American Children Spend Their Time*, 63 *J. MARRIAGE AND FAM.* 295, 297 (2001) (noting influence of familism in Hispanic families).

47 East, *supra* note 14, at 543-44.

48 Baldwin, *supra* note 19, at Table 8.

49 *Id.*

50 Lam, *supra* note 29, at 2072.

51 *Id.*

52 *Id.*

53 Wikle et al., *supra* note 12, at 72–84 (citing consistency of finding with prior research); East et al., *supra* note 7.

54 East et al., *supra* note 7.

55 *Id.*

56 Jonathan Gershuny & Oriel Sullivan, *Household Structure and Housework: Assessing the Contributions of All Household Members, with a Focus on Children and Youths*, 12 *REV. ECON. HOUSEHOLD* 7, 7–27 (2014). This data was not disaggregated by race.

57 NAT’L ALL. FOR CAREGIVING & AARP, *supra* note 3, at 44.

58 Elizabeth Ackert & Jocelyn S. Wikle, *Familism among Latino/a Adolescents: Evidence from Time Use Data*, *J. MARRIAGE & FAM.* 879 (2021).

also young mothers corresponds with increased caretaking responsibilities for younger siblings—especially younger sisters. A study of Mexican-American youth, for example, found that 18 months after the birth of an older sibling's child, younger sisters averaged 13.7 hours per week on caregiving for that child, contrasted with younger brothers, who spent 7.4 hours per week.⁵⁹ The differences were even more pronounced three years after birth: younger sisters averaged 18.4 hours per week on childcare, whereas younger brothers averaged 4.6 hours per week.⁶⁰ The same study found a similar differential in African-American families: girls took care of older siblings' children for an average of 14.8 hours per week, compared to an average of 5.5 hours for boys.⁶¹

PARENTS' EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, AND INCOME

Studies that examine the effect of parental employment status on youth housework responsibilities have produced mixed results.⁶² A 2016 study of European American families with children aged 8 – 18, for example, found that when mothers increased time spent doing paid work, girls' time on housework increased but boys' did not.⁶³ The same study found that fathers' hours spent working did not have an effect on the amount of time children spent on housework.⁶⁴

Parental education and income have also been found to affect girls' engagement in housework. A 2014 study found that while boys in low-income families participated in "home duties" at the same rate as high-income boys, "stark differences exist[ed] between low-income and high-income girls."⁶⁵ Similarly, a 2018 analysis found that the education level of parents has a unique effect on girls: daughters of college graduates spend 25 percent less time on chores than daughters of parents with no more than a high school education. The pattern was not found to be true for boys.⁶⁶

FAMILY MEMBERS' MENTAL HEALTH AND EXTERNAL CRISES

When families experience major disruptive events, they turn to their children for help. According to the National Alliance for Caregiving's 2020 survey, youth are more likely to provide care in high-intensity cases (17 percent) than in low-intensity settings (10 percent).⁶⁷ Families tend to rely on girls, in particular, when faced with urgent need. As researchers noted in one study, "during difficult times ... [g]irls are frequently asked by their parents to stay home to cook and clean and care for siblings

59 The number of hours girls spent providing care was higher when their childbearing sister was older. Patricia L. East et al., *Youths' Caretaking of Their Adolescent Sisters' Children: Results from Two Longitudinal Studies*, 30 J. FAM. ISSUES 1671, 1681–82 (2009).

60 *Id.*

61 *Id.* at 1679. Additional results suggest that girls argued more and were more likely to feel angry about having to provide care than boys; this indicates that girls' relatively higher levels of caretaking may not be completely voluntary but rather reflect obligation, whether overt or internalized. Regardless, resentment suggests that youth are compelled (or "conscripted") to respond to their family's needs (Stack & Burton, 1993, pg. 11). See also Patricia Zukow-Goldring, *Sibling Caregiving*, in HANDBOOK OF PARENTING: VOL. 3: BEING AND BECOMING A PARENT 253 (Marc H. Bornstein ed., 2d ed., 2002) ("sociocultural bias of many American families suggests that girls and women are more fit for caretaking tasks").

62 E.g. Lam, *supra* note 29; Wikle et al., *supra* note 12; Wikle, *supra* note 9.

63 Lam, *supra* note 29, at 2075–76. The study did not indicate whether employment status was outside the home.

64 *Id.* at 2077.

65 Wikle, *supra* note 9, at 23.

66 Claire Cain Miller, *A "Generationally Perpetuated" Pattern: Daughters Do More Chores*, N.Y. TIMES, Aug. 8, 2018, (citing Sandra Hofferth and Frances Goldscheider, *Reflections on the Future of the Second Half of the Gender Revolution*, PAA AFFAIRS (Population Assoc. of Am., Alexandria, VA), Summer 2017, at 8), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/08/upshot/chores-girls-research-social-science.html>.

67 NAT'L ALL. FOR CAREGIVING & AARP, *supra* note 3, at 44. High-intensity care situation refers to caregivers who score a 4 or 5 on *The Level of Care Index*, first developed in the 1997 study *Family Caregiving in the United States* to provide one way to articulate the impact of a disease or disability on the people who care for a patient during the caregiver journey. The index is based on the number of hours of care given and the number of activities of daily living (ADLs) and instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs) performed. NAT'L ALL. FOR CAREGIVING & AARP, *supra* note 3, at n. 28.

and elderly relatives.”⁶⁸ Paradoxically, despite the important roles girls play in family survival and management strategies, one case study noted that, with rare exception, “daughters are generally overlooked as key contributors.”⁶⁹

Major illness is one example of family crisis that can result in girls’ assuming greater responsibilities at home. An intervention specialist who participated in a 2009 study, for example, described that a girl under her purview had to cook, clean the house, take her mother to medical appointments, look after younger siblings, and care for a dozen relatives while her mother had cancer. This study found that girls often provide this kind of daily care for ailing family members.⁷⁰

Challenges to parents’ mental health have also been identified as a contributing factor to youths’ greater amount of home labor. For example, a study of children of mothers who are clinically depressed indicated that they frequently took on the responsibility of younger siblings’ care.⁷¹ This factor has spiked during the pandemic, which has had a well-documented destructive effect on mental health. According to a 2020 study, 57 percent of mothers and 32 percent of fathers reported that the pandemic had harmed their mental health. The authors of the study noted that the difference between mothers and fathers “suggests that mothers may be bearing a disproportionately large part of the burden” of care responsibilities.⁷²

The totality of the impact of COVID-19 on girls performing unpaid work in the home is not yet known, but preliminary data indicates an upward trend.⁷³ A 2020 California-based survey of 246 girls, for example, found that over 40 percent of participants took on additional caregiving responsibilities at home during the pandemic.⁷⁴ That rate increased to 44 percent in a 2021 follow-up survey of 1,214 girls.⁷⁵ Emerging narratives further reflect the pandemic’s overall disproportionate effect on communities of color, indicating that girls of color have disproportionately become primary caregivers for siblings and grandparents, with tasks that include teaching younger siblings while their schools were closed.⁷⁶

68 Bennett & Abele Mac Iver, *supra* note 45.

69 Dodson & Dickert, *supra* note 17, at 320.

70 Bennett, *supra* note 45.

71 Carmen R. Valdez et al., *Latina/o Children Living with an Immigrant Mother with Depression: Developmental and Cultural Nuances in Recognition and Coping*, 58 *FAM. PROCESS* 986, 986–1002 (2018).

72 Kate Power, *The COVID-19 Pandemic Has Increased the Care Burden of Women and Families*, 16 *SUSTAINABILITY: SCI., PRAC. AND POL’Y* 67, 67–73 (2020).

73 *Safe, Surviving, and Thriving: A Report on the Impacts of COVID-19 on Young Women in Minnesota*, WOMEN’S FOUNDATION OF MINNESOTA (Sept. 16, 2020), <https://www.wfmn.org/safe-surviving-and-thriving-a-report-on-the-impacts-of-covid-19-on-young-women-in-minnesota/> [<https://perma.cc/H8GA-BP5A>].

74 *Meeting Girls’ Needs during COVID-19*, ALL. FOR GIRLS (2020), <https://www.alliance4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/FINAL-AFG-Survey-Data-June-8-2020.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/CQ9B-EZUX>].

75 ALL. FOR GIRLS, *UNITING ISOLATED VOICES: GIRLS & GENDER EXPANSIVE YOUTH DURING COVID-19* 25 (2021), https://www.alliance-4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/UnitingIsolatedVoices_FINAL_ForUpload.pdf [<https://perma.cc/53RQ-69RM>].

76 Siobhan Davenport, *Who Does Home Care Fall On? Girls of Color Stepping up for Their Families & Communities during the COVID-19 Crisis*, WASH. AREA WOMEN’S FOUND. (Apr. 17, 2020), <https://thewomensfoundation.org/2020/home-care-fall-girls-color-stepping-families-communities-covid-19-crisis/> [<https://perma.cc/8RWU-88KM>].

THE EFFECT OF HOME RESPONSIBILITIES ON GIRLS⁷⁷

The research we identified clearly demonstrates the powerful impact of girls' caretaking and household duties on their development, health, and wellness. As shown in this section, while some studies show that such responsibilities positively influence self-esteem and other competencies, others indicate that these tasks can cause stress and diminish time and energy for activities that promote developmental growth that may outweigh benefits. Research on the experiences of Black girls in



four Ohio cities, for example, indicates that responsibilities at home— including child-rearing, preparing meals, and housecleaning —can leave little time to enjoy childhood.⁷⁸ Girls in low-income families appear to be uniquely affected; one study found that low-income girls assume far more responsibilities within the home than other children, resulting in significantly less time and family resources to pursue other activities that would be key to their development. Our review focused primarily, but not exclusively, on studies that examine the relationship between household responsibilities and girls' educational experiences and outcomes.

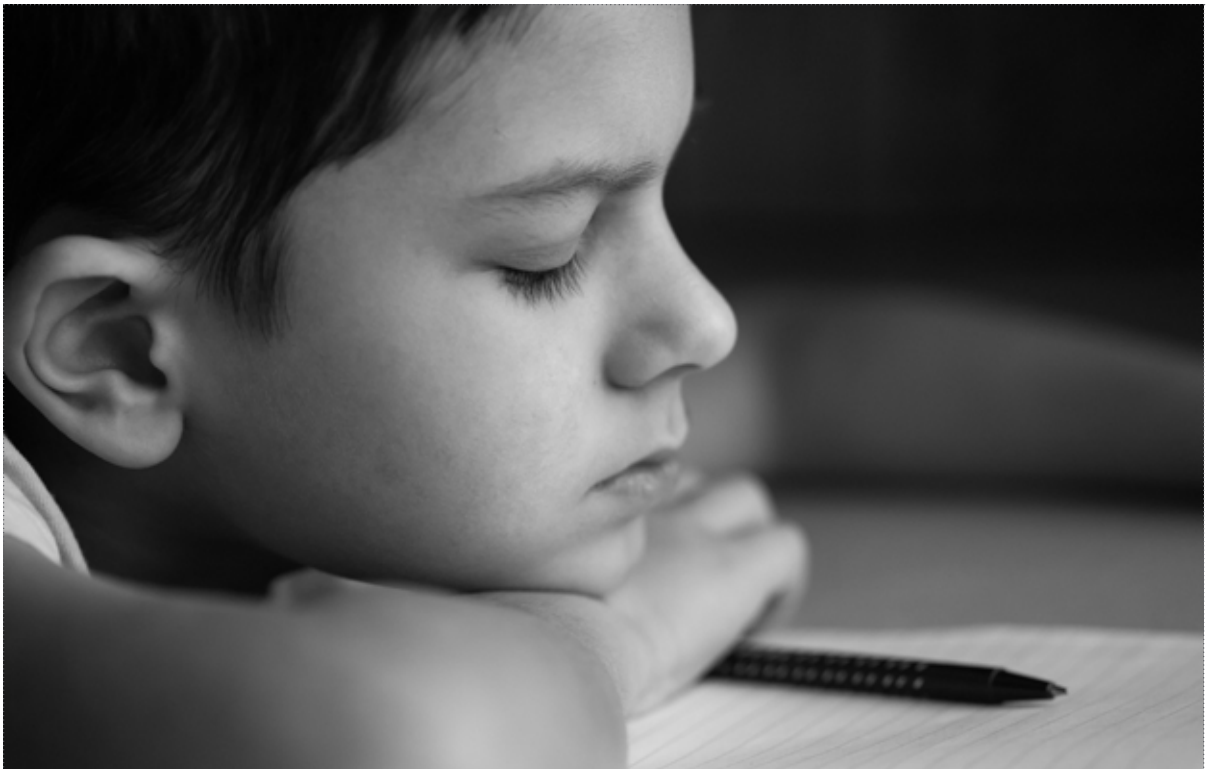
77 The effect of caregiving, of course, is not limited to girls. For example, a study of young male caregivers during early adolescence noted an association between caregiving and the likelihood of receiving a disruptive behavior disorder diagnosis which, in turn, is associated with delinquency. Christopher Trentacosta et al., *Longitudinal Prediction of Disruptive Behavior Disorders in Adolescent Males from Multiple Risk Domains*, 44 *CHILD PSYCHIATRY & HUM. DEV.* 561 (2013).

78 Frances Curtis Frazier et al., *Placing Black Girls at Promise: A Report of the Rise Sister Rise™ Study*, OHIO MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERV. 1, 55 (2013), https://blackgirlrising.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/RiseSisterRise_4-City-results.pdf. See also Rebecca Epstein et al., *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood*, GEO. L. CTR. ON POVERTY & INEQUALITY 1, 2 (2017), <https://genderjusticeandopportunity.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/girlhood-interrupted.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/DYU6-W5KM>].

INTERFERENCE WITH ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Poor Perception of Girls' Academic Interest and Performance

Multiple studies have established that household tasks interfere with students' attendance and focus at school, which can result in poor academic experiences and outcomes. For example, a 2004 analysis of studies suggested that educators can perceive girls as irresponsible or disinterested in academics if they are unaware of the reason for students' tardiness, absences, or fatigue—a situation that can happen often, especially since students may not be comfortable disclosing their personal circumstances. Disciplinary action, rather than support, can result.⁷⁹ Consistent with these findings, a study of Mexican-American girls linked sibling care responsibilities with girls' lessened likelihood and desire to pursue higher education.⁸⁰



Pushout from School

According to a 2016 study, 22 percent of students who leave high school do so to care for a family member.⁸¹ This appears to be particularly true for girls: in a comparative analysis of dropout rates in Colorado schools, researchers found that caregiving for a family member was a significant “pullout factor” that contributed to girls' leaving school.⁸² Boys, by contrast, were more likely to be pulled out of school to earn money for the family.⁸³ Overall, the study found that caretaking girls “missed many days of school, are exhausted and inattentive when they do attend, and ultimately stop going at all.”⁸⁴ Researchers highlighted one of the study's participants, whose mother had cancer; she had to

79 Dodson & Dickert, *supra* note 17, at 326.

80 East & Hamill, *supra* note 15, at 556.

81 Jane E. Brody, *Supporting Children Who Serve as Caregivers*, N.Y. TIMES (May 23, 2016, 6:31 AM), <https://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/05/23/supporting-children-who-serve-as-caregivers/>.

82 Bennett & Abele Mac Iver, *supra* note 45.

83 *Id.*

84 *Id.*

leave school after taking multiple absences to provide caretaking at home and frequently being tardy because she had to walk a younger sibling to school.⁸⁵

Lack of Capacity to Complete Schoolwork

Research shows that household and caretaking responsibilities interfere with the time and support girls need to complete schoolwork. In a 2021 survey of girls in Northern California, 31 percent of participants reported that increased caregiving responsibilities during the pandemic harmed their capacity to do schoolwork.⁸⁶ An earlier analysis of listening sessions with 63 middle-school and high-school girls of color⁸⁷ produced similar results; according to one participant, her uncle frequently asked: “Why is she doing homework when she should cook?”⁸⁸ A 2012 analysis of group sessions with 46 volunteers from a predominantly low-income Latinx neighborhood in Los Angeles produced consistent findings. In an illustrative example, one participant stated that she could not complete her homework because her mother continuously interrupted her to ask her to do tasks around the house.⁸⁹

RESENTMENT AND FAMILY CONFLICT

Studies reveal that girls report experiencing stress from their responsibilities at home. One analysis of group discussions among Latina girls found that their “expressions of resentment unambiguously convey[ed] young women’s [negative] feelings about the limitations and constraints on their mobility and time and represent a collective identity as aggrieved daughters.”⁹⁰ This tension has been found



85 *Id.*

86 ALL. FOR GIRLS, *supra* note 76, at 44.

87 The ethnicities and races represented in this study sample are not specified.

88 ALL. FOR GIRLS, TOGETHER, WE RISE: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GIRLS OF COLOR IN OAKLAND, SAN FRANCISCO, AND SAN JOSE 24 (2019), <https://www.alliance4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/Together-We-Rise-Report.pdf>.

89 Hyams, *supra* note 46.

90 *Id.*

to be more significant for girls: in a study of Mexican-American youth, girls were more likely than boys to report feeling “mad” about providing care and more likely to state that these responsibilities interfered with their own activities.⁹¹ The authors noted, however, that most of the youth also “indicated that they liked providing care.”⁹² While the evidence is limited, there is growing attention to the potential long-term effects of conflict and stress on children, including social-emotional development, attributed to assuming household roles.⁹³ One expert, noting the need for more research, summarized some of these impacts:

Many carry into their adult lives resentment and anger at being saddled with so much caregiving responsibility at a young age, as well as emotional burdens beyond their capacity to understand and manage. Those who opt out—literally running away or refusing to help—also pay an emotional price.⁹⁴

DIMINISHED ABILITY TO PARTICIPATE IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND CONNECT WITH PEERS

Though a less examined area of research, studies have shown that significant duties at home can decrease the time available for girls to participate in extracurricular activities.⁹⁵ As one scholar noted, when girls do not engage in extracurricular activities, they may miss opportunities to accumulate social capital, defined as resources based on an individual’s social network, including family and community.⁹⁶ According to one study, this relationship increased as girls enter high school.⁹⁷ A longitudinal study of siblings of young mothers found that 43 percent of Black and Latinx participants indicated that providing care interfered with their own activities at least some of the time.⁹⁸ Household tasks can similarly decrease girls’ opportunities to socialize. A study of Latinas found that caregiving responsibilities can serve as a factor that interferes with opportunities to “hang out” or “go out.”⁹⁹

BENEFITS: SELF ESTEEM, MATURITY, COMPETENCE, AND EMPATHY

Although the majority of studies indicate that significant household tasks create challenges for young caregivers, some identify significant benefits.¹⁰⁰ In a study of youth caregiving and self-esteem, for example, researchers found that household roles “may facilitate the development of a sense of responsibility, self-agency, efficiency, and competencies.”¹⁰¹ Another analysis suggested that handling these responsibilities can increase youths’ maturity, self-reliance, and empathy; improve their self-confidence, self-esteem, and competence; and strengthen their connections to family members.¹⁰² One expert stated:

91 East et al., *supra* note 7, at 1681.

92 *Id.*

93 See Carol Levine, *More Than 1 Million Young Caregivers Live in the United States, but Policies Supporting Them Are Still ‘Emerging,’* HEALTH AFFAIRS BLOG (Aug. 7, 2017), <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20170807.061390/full/> [<https://perma.cc/G6NS-NZGW>]<https://perma.cc/G6NS-NZGW>].

94 *Id.*

95 E.g. Amanda M. White & Constance T. Gager, *Idle Hands and Empty Pockets? Youth Involvement in Extracurricular Activities, Social Capital, and Economic Status*, 39 YOUTH & SOC. 75, 75–111 (2007); Dodson & Dickert, *supra* note 17, at 326.

96 White & Gager, *supra* note 96, at 77, 106 (James S. Coleman, *Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital*, 94 AM. J. OF SOCIO. S95-S120 (1988)).

97 *Id.*

98 East et al., *supra* note 7.

99 Hyams, *supra* note 46, at 537.

100 See generally East, *supra* note 4.

101 Judyta Borchet et al., *We Are In This Together: Retrospective Parentification, Sibling Relationships, and Self-Esteem*, 29 J CHILD & FAM. STUD. 2982, 2983 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-020-01723-3> (citing Linda Burton, *Childhood Adultification in Economically Disadvantaged Families: A Conceptual Model*, 56 FAM. REL. 329–45 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2007.00463.x>).

102 See, e.g., East, *supra* note 4, at 57-58.



Caregiving influences children's lives and development, sometimes profoundly and in both positive and negative ways. In any group of health or social service professionals, there will be several who chose their careers because they were child caregivers, even though they were probably never identified in that way. Many child caregivers become super-achievers at home and school.¹⁰³

Given the number and complexity of factors individual to each youth, it may be impossible to empirically compare the benefits and harms of youth caretaking and household labor.¹⁰⁴ Analysis of a 2021 national survey of youth caregivers framed the issue in terms of balance: "[Caregiving] can help kids develop a sense of responsibility, empathy[,] and confidence. The problem comes when their school-work, their friendships, their lives as a child are so affected by caregiving that they can't develop in those other important ways."¹⁰⁵ Noting the effect of family income on youth responsibilities and the potential for a two-generation harmful effect for women and girls in low-income families, one researcher noted: "If, in fact, home duties crowd out beneficial activities for low-income girls, [they] could be a channel through which disadvantage perpetuates intergenerationally for women."¹⁰⁶

103 Levine, *supra* note 94.

104 See East, *supra* note 7, at 1681.

105 Heidi de Marco, *Role Reversal: COVID Increases Ranks of Child Caregivers*, CAL. HEALTHLINE (Mar. 16, 2021), <https://californiahealthline.org/news/article/role-reversal-covid-increases-ranks-of-child-caregivers-2/> [<https://perma.cc/L6MK-CJG6>].

106 Wikle, *supra* note 9, at 23.

CONCLUSION

Our review of the literature aims to bring attention to an often-overlooked aspect of the caregiving economy in the United States: girls' unpaid labor at home. Analysis of studies indicates that both gender and race are critical factors in the degree of adolescents' household and caregiving responsibilities. There is consensus among the studies that girls of all races and ethnicities assume a higher proportional share of unpaid work in the home compared to their male peers, with the most significant gap found among Latina and Black youth. While some research shows that caregiving and household tasks can develop strengths and assets for children, a larger body of evidence indicates that such labor can impair academic success, family cohesiveness, and opportunities for socialization and adolescent development, most acutely for girls. And while the evidence is still nascent, these outcomes appear clearly to have been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given the significant impact that caretaking roles have on youth, research must address current gaps in knowledge. Well-designed studies on household responsibilities are needed to robustly examine diverse adolescent groups and disaggregate results by race, ethnicity, and gender, using carefully crafted categories and measurements of household tasks. In addition, given the benefits that have been identified alongside the challenges, studies should include strengths-based analyses to examine protective factors that may be associated with these responsibilities.¹⁰⁷ Finally, given the data showing effects on academic experiences, attention should be paid to school systems' role, including educators' responses to youth caregivers.

The resulting evidence base can provide a key foundation for another needed development: structural reform. The "care gap," in particular, must be addressed in policy and practice by building a more robust care infrastructure that provides supports for, and alternatives to, adolescent caregiving. One important step forward will be the implementation of protective policies and programs across public systems that serve youth—especially schools—to reduce the harms of unpaid and unrecognized household labor and to better support adolescents' ability to grow, learn, and enjoy the freedoms of childhood.

¹⁰⁷ Camille R. Quinn et al., *The Influence of Familial and Peer Social Support on Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Among Black Girls in Juvenile Correctional Facilities*, 48 *CRIM. JUST. AND BEHAV.* 867, 867–83 (2020); Suzanna So et al., *Future Orientation and Health Related Factors among African American Adolescents*, 61 *CHILD. AND YOUTH SERV. REV.* 15, 15–21 (2016).

APPENDIX

Method

Systematic or scoping reviews are an established method of synthesizing information within emerging areas of research to identify knowledge gaps, clarify concepts and to investigate research that has been conducted as well as identify research that needs to be conducted. They can also be used to confirm the relevance of inclusion criteria and potential research questions.¹⁰⁸ Since little is known about the invisible care economy and adolescents, a systematic scoping review process was appropriate for this review.¹⁰⁹ An initial search in PubMed and LexisNexis Legal & Professional databases revealed a lack of studies as well as significant variation in methodological approaches for the studies we did find. We identified and summarized the relevant literature, including gray literature, regardless of the study designs (or lack thereof), and identified both themes and gaps in the current literature.¹¹⁰

Key terms. Researchers used a comprehensive group of key search terms to ensure identification of all articles meeting this study's aims. Terms included: adolescents and caregivers; adolescents and family members; adolescents and relatives; adolescents and informal caregiver; girls housework; Asian girls housework; Latina girls housework; Hispanic girls housework; girls of color housework; girls of color childcare; Black girls childcare; household labor girls; adolescent girls household work; household work; characteristics and consequences; girls schooling domestic work; girls care home responsibilities; girls housework; COVID-19; caretaking; girls; chores; girls; black; chores; girls; Asian; chores; girls; Latina; girls; housework; girls housework; Asian girls housework; Latina girls housework; Hispanic girls housework; girls of color housework; girls of color childcare; Black girls childcare; Household labor girls; adolescent girls household work; household work characteristics and consequences; girls schooling domestic work; girls care home responsibilities; girls housework; COVID-19 caretaking girls; chores girls black; chores girls Asian; chores girls Latina; girls housework; boys' role in caretaking; boys and sibling caretaking; parentification of boys; boys and parentification or adultification;¹¹¹ and sibling and caretaking.

Search engines. PubMed, EBSCOhost, LexisNexis Legal & Professional were used, based on the rigorous standards for their included journals, as well as Google, Google Scholar, and Google News. The inclusion and exclusion criteria included: (1) articles published between 2000-2022, to ensure data is current and accurate with one exception to include a study from 1999 given its significant relevance to this review; (2) studies with experimental/quasi-experimental research designs (though literature reviews and/or review or conceptual articles were included if published) and; (3) journal articles published in English, to avoid possible issues of language or cultural translation. Articles published in peer-reviewed journals were prioritized in recognition of the scientific rigor and quality of their findings.

Research Process. The studies that specifically focus on adolescent caregiving is scant. We identified a variety of terms to describe adolescent caregivers, including 'young caregivers' and 'young carers,' and various terms to describe their work, which included 'caregiving' or 'caretaking,' or more generalized terms, such as 'responsibilities,' 'tasks,' or 'duties'. A team of researchers conducted a

108 See Heather Colquhoun et al., *Scoping Reviews: Time for Clarity in Definition, Methods, and Reporting*, 67 J. CLINICAL EPIDEMIOLOGY 1291, 1291–94 (2014).

109 See Micah D.J. Peters et al., *Guidance for Conducting Systematic Scoping Reviews*, 13 INT'L J. EVIDENCE-BASED HEALTHCARE 141, 141–46 (2015).

110 See Kathy Davis et al., *What are Scoping Studies? A Review of the Nursing Literature*, 46 INT'L J. NURSING STUD., 1386, 1386–1400 (2009); Kathryn Ehrich et al., *How to Do a Scoping Exercise: Continuity of Care*, 20 RSCH., POL'Y & PLAN. 25, 25–29 (2002); & Danielle Levac et al., *Scoping Studies: Advancing the Methodology*, 5 IMPLEMENTATION SCI. 69 (2010).

111 See Hanna Van Parys et al., *Toward Understanding the Child's Experience in the Process of Parentification: Young Adults' Reflections on Growing Up with a Depressed Parent*. 41 J. MARITAL & FAM. THERAPY 522, 523 (2015); Epstein et al., *supra* note 79, at 1.

broad and deep search, using somewhat flexible inclusion and exclusion criteria using EBSCOhost and PubMed search engines. Finally, two independent reviewers who are part of the research team conducted a final review of the findings to identify categories and themes or the lack thereof. It is important to note that most of the empirical studies we identified examined Latinx adolescents, especially Latina girls; this unbalanced set of data may skew any potential conclusions about the factors that determine level of caregiving and its effects.

Limitations. The greatest challenge in conducting this review was the lack of studies on the topic of the invisible care economy as well as adolescent caregiving. The few studies we identified used extremely narrow sample sets, resulting in findings that do not necessarily apply to a population outside of the specific confines of the particular study.¹¹² In addition, few studies disaggregate their analyses by race and gender.

112 See generally East et al., *supra* note 7 (examining the caretaking patterns of Latinx and Black adolescents with teenage sisters who had recently given birth); Phyllis W. Berman et al., *Development of Sex Differences in Response to an Infant and to the Caretaker Role*, 143 J. GENETIC PSYCH., 283, 283–84 (1983) (using 19 daycare children of both sexes, between ages three and five, to observe caretaking responses to a younger child in the daycare); Thomas J. McMahon & Suniya S. Luthar, *Defining Characteristics and Potential Consequences of Caretaking Burden Among Children Living in Urban Poverty*, 77 AM. J. ORTHOPSYCHIATRY 267, 268 (2007) (“This study was designed to examine the psychosocial correlates of caretaking burden within a sample of 8- to 17-year-old children living in high-risk family systems characterized by urban poverty, maternal substance abuse, and maternal psychopathology.”); Joann Hsueh & Lisa A. Gennetian, *Welfare Policies and Adolescents: Exploring the Roles of Sibling Care, Maternal Work Schedules, and Economic Resources*, 48 AM. J. CMTY. PSYCH. 322, 322 (2011) (evaluating “state welfare reform programs to examine whether program-induced changes in families’ reliance on sibling care are linked with the effects of welfare programs on selected schooling outcomes of high risk, low-income adolescents”).

10 INITIATIVE ON
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