College Student Caregivers Transcript

Sharon: This week on family caregiving matters Dr. JudI Phillips and Dr. Sharon Hamill from California State University San Marcos talk about what we know about college student caregivers. We’ll be talking about information from three recent sources the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP report on caregiving in the United States in 2020. A second AARP report that focused on college student caregivers and a recent Lumina Gallup student study focused on student caregivers and their persistence in college.

Sharon: Good afternoon JudI we're back again for our second episode.

Judi: and it's good to be back how are you, Sharon?

Sharon: Great, great to see you Judi like so many other people uh we haven't physically been in the same room actually for a year

Judi: I know

Sharon: How wonderful to see you virtually and to spend this time together to share some information with our college student caregivers young caregivers and actually any caregiver out there who might be in need of a little bit of information to help them deal with their caregiving role. So today, we're going to start out by talking about those college student caregivers using the reports that were mentioned in the intro so just in general how many of them are there and who are they what are some of their characteristics?

Judi: Well, what we have found from some of the studies is that 10 to 11% of all caregivers are college students they are a very diverse group, okay. Uh, more often African American, Hispanic, or Asian students than white college students but although they are a very diverse group, they do have a lot of similarities um, they care for a younger parent or grandparent who has a long-term condition or mental health problems and what is interesting is that most of the time, they are single means that they are handling these caregiving tasks on their own versus when you were looking at adult children who may have a partner or a spouse to help them care for their parents or grandparents and not only are these college students being caregivers but they're also still working and many times they're working about 30 hours.

Sharon: Wow!

Judi: they are part of the iGen generation and because of that their knowledge of Technology helps them in their caregiving roles because many times they use apps such as apps to look in and check on their grandparents or their parents, they use videos to watch them learn how to do different tasks and they order their groceries online and what I think is even more remarkable and something that we many times don't see a lot with the older caregiver is that these young college caregivers have a sense of purpose they have a sense of meaning in their role. They feel positive about providing care to their family caregivers even though they face all kinds of challenges.

Sharon: And then I'm thinking that the challenges that we see most as they're doing all of these things while they're taking our classes

Judi: Yes

Sharon: and trying to figure out how is that role impacting what's going on for them in the classroom and I know that in one of these studies one of the things they talked about was, first of all, um over half of these young people have been caregiving for years so it's not like they started college, the majority of them, started college and then it happens, they've actually it's been a caregiving career for them that they've been doing this when we ask just in general how many of them are feeling like caregiving has this impact seven out of ten said that caregiving had a direct impact on their academic ability at least to some extent and six out of ten said that it impacted their Finance ability to pay for school because so many caregivers as you know are paying money out-of-pocket the thing that I've been thinking about with covid-19 we're talking about the fact that we're not in the same room etc. and we all know Across the Nation we've got classes going on in cyberspace and we know about the caregiving situation these reports that we’re talking about’re all written in Fall 2020 what is going to happen now that COVID is here because we know that in an acute phase when somebody’s suffering from covid-19 we know our college student or a family member there's some care giving that has to go on there but what about these long-term effects that we're starting to understand that COVID can actually result in some lingering symptoms that may become a lifelong pattern for many people which means that perhaps some of our caregiving students are going to have more extensive caregiving responsibilities and some of our students who have not been caregivers up to this point,

Judi: Correct!

Sharon: may all of a sudden find that they are. One of the things that I think was really surprising to me about the Luminous study, in particular, they were looking at college students who are pursuing bachelor's degrees and they asked them, “have you ever considered pulling out of college?” and almost half of them 49% said that their caregiving responsibilities had made them think maybe I should. The data from the AARP study suggests that 11% actually did pull out of school and what’s frustrating is that you know, these are people with dreams these are people that that are trying to pursue that college degree and certainly have dreams of social mobility and a better life for themselves and their families and caregiving is making it more difficult for them to pursue those dreams who do you even tell that you're experiencing that?

Judi: Well, one of the things they will talk about that they tell their friends okay and they do talk to their friends about this but when you think about it how well can their friends understand what they are going through? If they, if their friends are not caregivers also.

Sharon: Uh, great point

Judi: so one of the things that we have found from these studies is that these college-age caregivers have been asked where do you feel the help should come from? And what they responded is their number one choice of where they should get help was counseling centers at the universities that they go to but they also said that financial aid would be an area of where they'd be able to ask and get information from or the student health centers or from their academic advisors and from their instructors but I think one of the issues is when there aren't clearly defined policies and support and resources for caregivers where someone like you and I who are instructors where do we know where to send them?

Sharon: Great point I think if they came to you and I, we would probably have a response

Judi: Haha, yea we would!

Sharon: however many people wouldn't and because it's not necessarily readily apparent the other thing that’s kind of funny about it too is you know these reports show that in only 5% of the cases did caregivers say that there was some sort of policy at their University that addressed this.

Judi: That’s right!

Sharon: Um, but they often didn't know about it and the resources that were offered were few and far between, and because of this sometimes the student makes the assumption that well then there's just nothing to be done what's the point in telling my professor that my loved one was up wondering all night because she has Alzheimer's disease. There's nothing to be done for that and this is where I think we come in because we believe there are things that you could do in this

Judi: Yes, exactly!

Sharon: I think people think that you need to immediately start with some massive program that requires millions of dollars and funding but I think you and I have had many conversations about sharing information is a great starting point. It doesn’t solve all the problems but it starts to help you get the tools that you're going to need to solve whatever issues are facing you as that family caregiver and so this podcast is our attempt to help to raise awareness to students to let you know we know you're out there and we stand ready to help you navigate the system and identify how you can be resilient how you can find resources and to help you move a little bit closer to that ultimate goal of getting that college degree so as we go through our episodes we will be focusing on specific tasks you can do kinds of approaches you can take, uh we will bring in experts on different things and as matter of fact next week I have invited my graduate student Sean Greiser he's a master student in the Psychological Science department at California State University San Marcos and he is conducting a study with caregivers of Alzheimer's patients and he's going to be joining us to talk about the different types of dementia that people deal with because we know that our loved ones with dementia can post some of the biggest caregiving challenges that caregivers have to face and so we'd like to have one of our very own students join us to talk about what these issues are and the kinds of support that are available in the community so we hope that if you're listening that you'll join us again for the next episode that will focus on dementia and we look forward to sharing more family caregiving matters with you

Judi: thanks so much for tuning in today be kind to yourself remember you're providing valuable support to your loved ones.