



Wittgenstein Centre

FOR DEMOGRAPHY AND  
GLOBAL HUMAN CAPITAL



# The effect of parental caregiving on the fertility expectations of adult children

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# Motivation

- Parental caregiving is physically and emotionally challenging (Schulz et al. 2020) with potential repercussions on fertility plans
- Pathways linking caregiving and fertility plans:
  - 1) Loss of grandparental support in the form of childcare
  - 2) Time and energy devoted to caregiving
- Increasingly relevant due to the trend of fertility delay and increasing life expectancy

*Do adult children change their fertility expectations after becoming care providers to their parents?*

# Pathway 1: Loss of grandparental support

- Grandparents provide emotional, financial, and time-based resources, and are the “best form of childcare” ([Wheellock and Jones 2002](#))
- Positive impact of grandparents on fertility (e.g., through childcare)
  - Higher childbearing intentions ([Rutigliano and Lozano 2022](#); [Tanskanen and Danielsbacka 2021](#); [Tanskanen and Rotkirch 2014](#))
  - Higher likelihood of becoming a parent ([Rutigliano 2020](#))
  - Higher likelihood of second and higher order births ([Aassve et al. 2012b](#); [Rutigliano 2020](#); [Yoon 2017](#))
- Negative effect of parental death on fertility ([Okun and Stecklov 2021](#))

## Pathway 2: Lack of resources, time and energy

- Reduction in labour force participation and increasing costs (Frimmel et al. 2020; Hammer and Neal 2008; Løken et al. 2017; Reelstab et al. 2020; Vangen 2021)
- Emotionally demanding with implications for mental health (Fortinsky et al. 2007; Hammer and Neal 2008; Schulz et al. 2020)
- Risk of being 'sandwiched' between the needs of parents and future children (Hammer and Neal 2008; Perrig-Chiello and Hopflinger 2005)
- Positive effects?
  - Changing values and priorities (Rackin and Gibson-Davis 2022)

# The Australian context

- Childcare system is market driven – cost is 26% of average earning (vs 17% OECD)
- Almost two-thirds of grandparents provide childcare to grandchildren ([Baxter 2022](#))
- Sustained decline in mortality rates among individuals aged 50 to 90 since the mid-1990s ([Booth et al. 2016](#))
- Increasing demand for unpaid family caregivers – Adult children due to a sense of emotional obligation/belief that they can provide the best support ([ABS 2016](#))
- 1 in 10 adults provide unpaid care to an aging family member ([AIHW 2021](#))
- Fertility delay and strong two-child family norm ([Lazzari 2021a](#) and [2021b](#))
- 22% of reproductive age men and women consider caring responsibilities to be a crucial factor in their decision about whether to have a child ([Gray et al. 2022](#))

# Data



- HILDA panel dataset – Waves 6 to 21 (2006-21)
- Dependent variable: “How likely are you to have more children in the future?”, where 0 means “Very unlikely” and 10 “Very likely”
- Independent variable: Providing ongoing care or help with activities of daily living to a parent or parent-in-law
- Controls: age, relationship status, employment, parity, and health status
- Sample: Respondents with positive fertility expectations (N= 2,643)

# Demands of caring for ageing parents increase with age

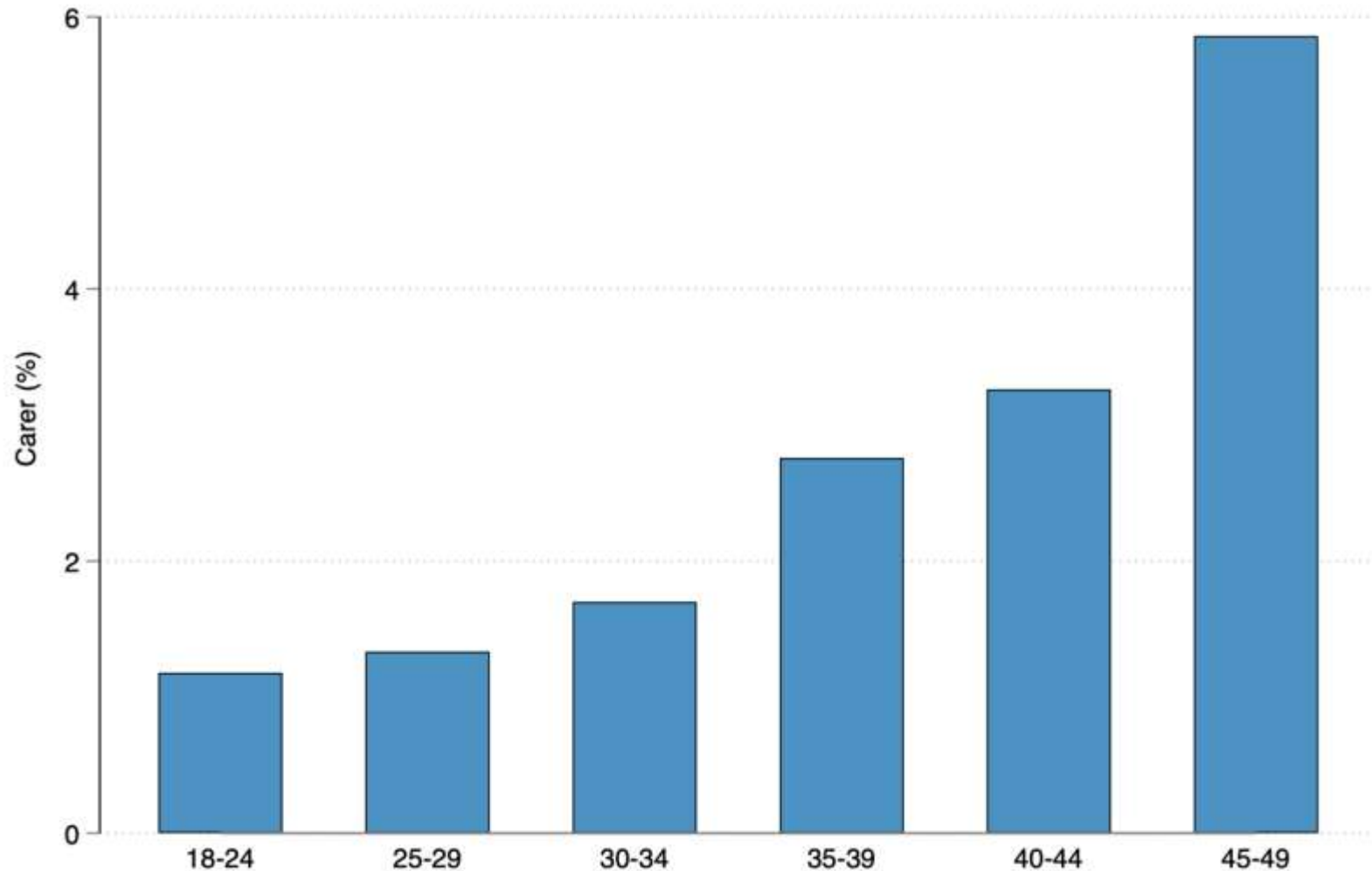


Figure 1. Informal carers of a parent or parent-in-law by age

Data source: HILDA, waves 6-21 (release 21), weighted

# Empirical strategy

- Difference-in-differences model
  - Measure the effect of a treatment: becoming a caregiver or caregiving shock
  - Before the shock: C and T groups have similar outcomes
  - After the shock, the trajectory of the T group significantly diverge from that of the C group
  - C and T groups have to be similar - Parallel trend assumption
  - Two specifications: With and without never treated



# The impact of a caregiving on fertility expectations (1)

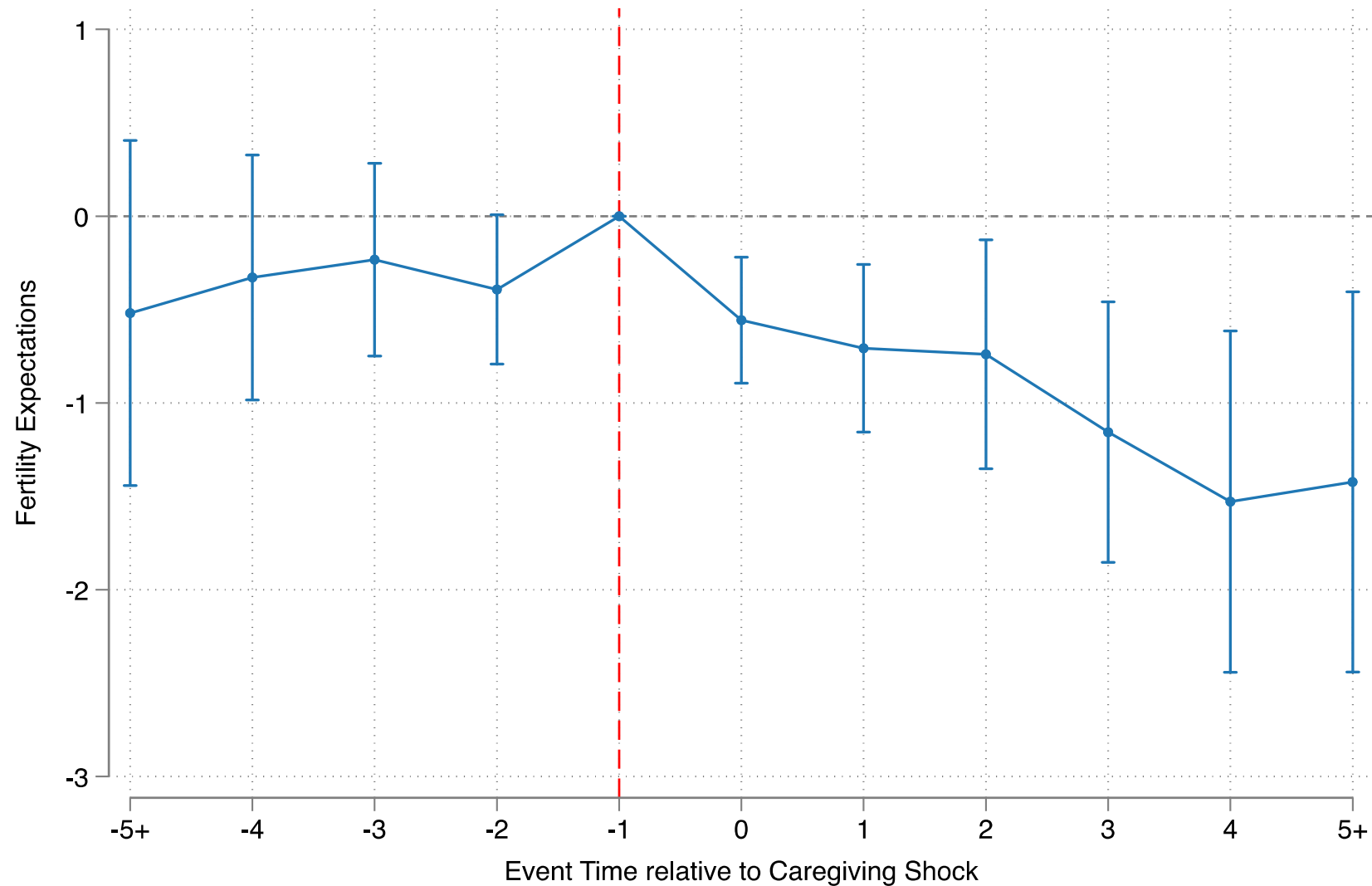


Figure 2. Effect of caregiving responsibilities on adult children's fertility expectations

Data source: HILDA, waves 6-21 (release 21), weighted

# The impact of a caregiving on fertility expectations (2)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Fertility expectations	Fertility expectations	Fertility expectations	Fertility expectations
treat*post SHORT-TERM (<=2 years)	-0.366*	-0.379**	-0.484***	-0.460***
treat*post LONG-TERM (>= 3 years)	-1.354***	-1.479***	-1.351***	-1.267***
Observations	2,643	2,643	2,640	2,640
R-squared	0.558	0.575	0.616	0.672
Ind. FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Year FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
Age FE	NO	YES	YES	YES
Controls	NO	NO	YES	YES
Age-by-Year FE	NO	NO	NO	YES

Table 1. Effect of caregiving responsibilities on adult children's fertility expectations

Data source: HILDA, waves 6-21 (release 21), weighted

# Summary of results

- Becoming a caregiver has a negative impact on fertility expectations of 5.9% in the first 2 years and 16.3% after 3 years
- The effect did not significantly differ by gender
- More pronounced decline among parents with only one child than among childless respondents after 2 years

## Limitations:

- Limited ability to uncover the underlining mechanisms
- Country-specific (formal care policies, support measures for at home caregiving, childcare systems)

# Conclusion

- The postponement of parenthood coupled with longer life expectancies is changing the life-course context within which individuals decide whether to become parents.
- Caregiving responsibilities towards parents may be an increasingly relevant factor explaining the revision of fertility expectations at older ages
- Policies aimed at reducing the informal caregiver burden could provide an opportunity to positively influence fertility rates



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