Two thirds of people won‚Äôt put money aside for social care in older age

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Two thirds of people wonâ€™t put money aside for social care in older age

London, 1 July 2008 - Two thirds (64 per cent) of adults in the UK say they have no plans to put any money aside to fund their social care in older age.Â Moreover, nearly two thirds of adults (63 per cent) â€“ excluding those who are already receiving social care - think they will seek help from family or friends, if they find themselves in need of social care when they are older.

These are the findings from a recent survey conducted for Counsel and Care, Help the Aged and Carers UK by GfK NOP.Â When it comes to our parentsâ€™ care in their old age, two fifths (37 per cent) of us worry about having to look after them, and three quarters say we would be willing to pay towards their care, but one in five of us are worried that our inheritances will end up being spent on our parentsâ€™ care, according to a separate survey conducted for the Local Government Association by GfK NOP in February 2008.

Looking after our parents

Many of us worry about having to look after our parents in their old age, and most of us think that people who care for elderly relatives do not get adequate support from the Government. In a survey carried out for the Local Government Association across England (in February 2008), two-fifths (37 per cent) of adults who had a parent or parents still living said they worried about having to look after their parents in their old age, while in a separate study for Counsel and Care, Help the Aged and Carers UK (in January 2008), seven out of ten adults in the UK thought that family members who cared for an elderly relative did not get adequate support from the Government.

Most of us (but not all) express some willingness to give financial or other support to our parents in their old age. Three-quarters (74 per cent) of adults in England who had a parent or parents still living said they would be willing to pay towards any care required by their parents in the future, and three in five (59 per cent) said they would be willing to give up work to look after their parent/s in their old age. This is less true of adults from the most affluent AB households, only 44 per cent of whom said this applied to them, than of adults from more middle and low income households.

Fewer of us admit to more mercenary-sounding concerns in relation to paying for our parentsâ€™ care. One in five (20 per cent) of those who had a parent or parents still living said they worried that their parents would spend their inheritance on their (the parentsâ€™) care when they became older; 29% of men said this applied to them, compared with only 13 per cent of women. People from skilled manual backgrounds (C2) were more likely to admit this concerned them than people from AB backgrounds (27 per cent compared with 13 per cent).

What about our own old age â€“ are we grasping the nettle?

A substantial minority of us worry about issues related to our own care in our old age.Â In the survey for the Local Government Association, a quarter (25 per cent) of adults in England said they worried about having to sell their home to pay for social care in old age; a similar proportion (28 per cent) said they worried about having to spend their childrenâ€™s inheritance to pay for care in their old age; nearly two fifths (38 per cent) said they worried about being a burden when they got older. Those aged 45+ were more likely to worry about these things than the under 45s.

But are we preparing for our old age, and making provision that will prevent these worries from becoming a reality? In the study for Counsel and Care, Help the Aged and Carers UK, a third (32 per cent) of adults said they had made plans to set aside money to cover the costs of any social care they may need in the future, just 3 per cent said they have already set money aside, but two thirds (64 per cent) said they had no plans to put any money aside to fund their social care in older age.Â

It probably wonâ€™t surprise anyone to learn that the proportion that have no plans to put money aside for social care was higher among young people, rising to 73 per cent among those aged 16 to 35, but even among those aged 51-70, nearly three fifths (57 per cent) said they had no plans to do this. Among those aged 71 or older, 36 per cent said they had plans to set money aside, 6 per cent had already done so, but 56 per cent had no plans to do this.

Of course we would expect peopleâ€™s ability to put money aside for a specific purpose like social care to be linked to their overall affluence.Â When we look at the findings analysed by social class, we find that 38 per cent of the most affluent ABs said they had made plans to set aside money for social care, and 5 per cent of them said they had already done so, with similar levels of financial provision among C1s at 35 per cent and 2 per cent respectively.Â But among C2 and DE respondents these figures fall to 23 per cent and 29 per cent planning to set money aside, and 3 per cent and 4 per cent having already done so.

Do we have realistic expectations about the level of support weâ€™re likely to receive from our nearest and dearest, in our old age?
When asked how they would be most likely to seek help and assistance, if they found themselves in need of social care when they were older, nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of UK adultsÂ - excluding those already receiving social care - said they would seek it from friends and family. This was a more popular answer than applying to be means-tested to determine eligibility for help from their local authority (48 per cent) or paying for a private service (38 per cent), though clearly some adults (women in particular) saw themselves receiving help and assistance from more than one source.Â

Women were more likely than men to see themselves seeking help from family or friends (67 per cent compared with 59 per cent), and simultaneously more likely to see themselves apply for means-tested help from their local authority (52 per cent compared with 45 per cent). But, put another way, about half of adults not already receiving social care did NOT see themselves applying to be means-tested for eligibility for social care from their local authority in their old age, and about three-fifths did NOT see themselves paying for private services.Â This has to raise questions about how realistic our expectations are, both of our future need for care and where that care is likely to come from.

Differences between social classes in the ways people say they will seek help and assistance are perhaps not as great as we might expect.Â People from all social classes are about equally likely to say they will apply to be means-tested to determine their eligibility for local authority funded care.Â ABs are significantly more likely than DEs to say they will pay for a private service, but not significantly different from C1s or C2s.Â

Those who are already aged 71+ may be more averse to applying to be means-tested to determine eligibility for local authority careÂ - only 40 per cent of this age group said they would do this if they needed social care when older, compared with 51 per cent of those aged 36-50 and 53 per cent of those aged 51-70.Â But they are no more likely than younger people to say they will pay for a private service or seek help from family or friends â€“ the survey suggests that they are, if anything, less likely to say they will do these things.Â Should we interpret this as determination to remain independent no matter what, or a refusal to face up to the realities of frail old age?

Although they may not readily see themselves as paying for care, when a specific proposal was put to them, about three fifths of adults in England (57 per cent) said they would be willing to match what their council pays towards the cost of their care in their old age.Â However retaining independence and control is clearly important for most people, as 72 per cent said they would like to take responsibility for their own care, with support and advice from their local council.