

# Elder care looks doubtful for the childless and some divorced dads

Continued from 1A

to act as caregivers down the line. Like Sheaffer, almost one-fifth (19%) of women in their early 40s have no children.

Boomers will live longer. The life expectancy for a person born in 1957 — the peak of the baby boom — was about 70 years at birth, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. That's six to 15 years longer than their parents' generation. A huge number will reach an age requiring assistance at the same time, choking the already gasping caregiving system.

## Cover story

The concept of "family" has changed, creating a powerful societal shift that will alter the face of caregiving. Boomers have chosen to divorce, to cohabit, to remarry and create stepfamilies, to remain single, to marry and not have children. Mounting research shows that divorce and blended families tend to weaken ties between generations. Most at risk are divorced dads who have lost close touch with their children.

Experts are just beginning to study the effects today's restructured families will have on caregiving. So far, they find few answers.

Carol Dawson worries about her 14-year-old son's generation. "These kids have several sets of grandparents," from various step and blood relationships, says Dawson, 44, of Jeffersonville, Ind. "My son will have a mom, a dad, a stepdad and, maybe down the road, a stepmom. These kids will have huge responsibilities."

Boomers just have not done much thinking about their future need for elder care, says Jake Sheaffer, 42, Nancy's husband. "And that is really scary. We live in an increasingly complicated world. The Ozzie-and-Harriet family is pretty much passé."

People in their 80s are most likely to fall ill and to need care, and their numbers will burgeon. By 2020, 7 million people will be 85 or older, says the National Institute on Aging. That group will at least double again by 2040.

Although those boomers will live longer than their parents, the prognosis is mixed. Demographer Kenneth Wachter of the University of California, Berkeley, says that he believes technological advances will lead to fewer people with disabilities among the frail elderly.

But others worry about the future health picture. "The probability that someone will get dementia, Alzheimer's and stroke-related dis-



There for each other: Nancy Sheaffer and her mother, Bonnie Lynch, get ready for lunch in their home in Richmond. When Sheaffer is in her 80s, she won't have a child to help her through life's ups and downs.

eases rises dramatically during one's 80s," says Robert Willis of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. "As other causes of disease decline, it is more likely people will end their lives in a demented state."

The Alzheimer's Association says 4 million Americans have the disease now. Without a cure, that number is expected to jump to 14 million by 2050.

The reassembling of families — through divorce, remarriage and cohabitation — is prompting a hot debate: Will the divorced and remarried receive the same support from adult children, particularly stepchildren, as those who stayed in intact families?

Demographer Wachter has developed projections sponsored by the National Institute on Aging and published in the *British Royal Society journal Philosophical Transactions: Biological Sciences*.

Stepchildren. People who are now 70 to 85 have an average of 2.5 living biological children. But that age group in 2030 will have an average of 1.5 children. The mix changes if stepchildren are added. Their numbers could help make up for the loss.

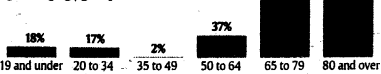
Stepgrandchildren. The number of biological grandchildren will drop by 40% for 70- to 85-year-olds, from four grandchildren today to 2.5 in 2030. But the average goes back up to four in 2030 if stepgrandchildren are added in.

Wachter believes the "steps" will step up to the plate and provide elder care, although they do not tend to do so now. In the future, he believes, there will be so many of them that being "stepkin" will be commonplace and somewhat normal. "The health care system will

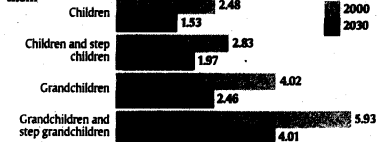
## Aging population faces care crisis

Two trends in the next 30 years — an America growing older, on average, and baby boomers having fewer children — are the forces driving a crisis in eldercare.

Americans 65 and older will be the fastest-growing age group ...



... but they will have fewer offspring to care for them



1 - Projected change in population, 2000-2030  
2 - Projected average number of offspring for each white resident of the USA aged 70 to 85  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Kenneth Wachter, University of California, Berkeley; USA TODAY analysis by Anthony DeBarros

By Julie Smider, USA TODAY

be so stressed that stepkin will see that "the need is stronger."

Elizabeth Bier Krieg believes her kids will be there for her. She has one child from her first marriage, two from her second and a stepson from her third.

"I have no doubt when I become old, my children will watch over me. They will get together and provide a solution," says Krieg, 47, of Bethel, Vt.

But there is a growing body of research that says expanded families can't be counted on later in life when the going gets tough. The elderly may be able to rely on the expanded step network "for an occasional dinner or symphony ticket," says researcher Lynn White of the

University of Nebraska-Lincoln. "But the network will not be there to help you go to the toilet."

Divorce itself increases the risk that the aging parent's adult children will not be there when needed, experts say.

"If parents do not stay involved with their kids after divorce, the kids are often not in the picture for those parents when they need help," says Lawrence Ganong, a University of Missouri-Columbia researcher and co-author of *Changing Families, Changing Responsibilities*. "Genetic ties do not matter as much as the quality of the relationship between the generations."

Aging single moms will get support from their adult children as

## Caregiving by the numbers

► 54% of caregivers are between 35 and 64.

► About 59% of adults either are or expect to be family caregivers.

► More than one-quarter (27%) of the adult population has provided some type of caregiving in the past year.

► Those older than 85 are the fastest-growing segment of the population. Half need some help with personal care.

► About three-fifths (61%) of family caregivers who give intensive care — at least 21 hours a week — have suffered from depression.

► Family members provide about 80% of home care services.

► Caregivers provide services worth about \$196 billion a year.

► American businesses lose between \$11 billion and \$29 billion a year to employees who take time off to be caregivers.

Source: National Family Caregivers Association

long as the moms stay single, but the help dwindles if the moms remarry, says sociologist Paul Amato of Pennsylvania State University.

And biological children are much more likely to help their mothers than stepchildren are to rally for their stepmothers, says Beth Soldo of the University of Pennsylvania.

Sally Corwin-Osgood of the Stepfamily Association of America knows how second marriages can compound the complications of caregiving. She gave up her career as a nurse and moved 900 miles with her second husband and her child to provide substantial elder care for her mother-in-law.

"The remarriage factor certainly complicates being a daughter-in-law," says Corwin-Osgood, 48, of Cleveland. "I came here to make caregiving a priority, and I still feel like an outsider in his family."

Most at risk for being left without help from adult children are divorced dads, many researchers say. Although custody arrangements are changing, the children often go to the mother. "Perhaps half of divorced men are estranged from their children," White says. "There is liable to be nobody around for them."

On the other hand, they often remarry and will be taken care of by their younger wives, Amato says.

William Paprota, 49, of Overland Park, Kan., is a divorced dad whose children live with their mother in Salina, Kan. "Maybe I need to run out and get married," he says.

Short of that, he works hard to keep up close relationships with his two daughters. "If you pay attention to your child, she will pay attention to you." He also has a sister nearby who is "single, with no children, and is a mother hen. And she is a dear friend."

But Paprota, a divorce lawyer, agrees that divorced boomers may not be well cared for in later years. "It is more difficult for men to have intimate friends. When they get a divorce, they find themselves isolated, totally cut off."

Adding to the complex future of elder care are two trends, says Bonnie Lawrence of the Family Caregiver Alliance. Today's society is mobile, and divorce often causes families to move. "The long distance between families has a huge impact," Lawrence says. And although some surveys show that more men are providing elder care, women are the traditional caregivers. And "women now are in the workforce."

The caregiving, working women of today — and tomorrow — are part of the "sandwich generation," looking after their children and their parents. And in disrupted families, they often do it alone, a situation many of the boomers' children will face.

Joan Cooper, a divorced teacher, cared for her parents in her home while she still had two teenagers living with her. With 13 other women, she wrote about the experience in *Fourteen Friends' Guide to Eldercaring*.

Cooper's mom is in a retirement facility now, but her father died in Cooper's home at 79. "He taught me the dignity of what it means to have to die," says Cooper, 56, of Dallas.

She empathizes with the single caregivers of the future. "In the privacy of my bedroom, I wept. It is very lonely first of all to be a single adult, and even lonelier when you just have so much to take care of. You can't turn to someone."

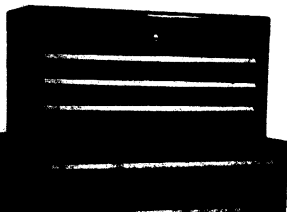
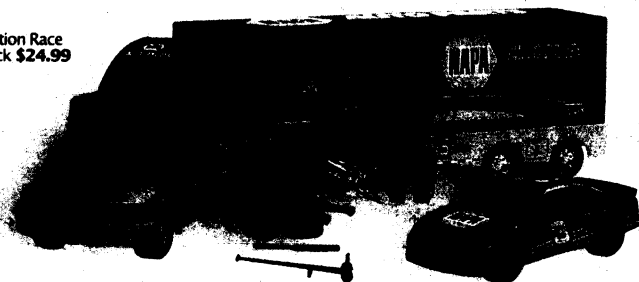
Many boomers believe caregiving will be made easier for restructured families in the future because their sheer numbers will demand solutions.

"I'm a boomer, and we are not a quiet generation," says Suzanne Mintz of the National Family Caregivers Association. "There are no guarantees, but as we roll into that next phase, there will be answers."

Contributing: Anthony DeBarros

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