

# Young Carers' Educational Experiences and Support: A Roadmap for the Development of School Policies to Foster Their Academic Success

Yana Lakman, Heather Chalmers, Cayleigh Sexton

Brock University

*Young Carers (YCs) provide care for ill, disabled, or addicted family member(s) and may experience risk to their educational success. This study examined 145 YCs in Southern Ontario, aged 8-18, using surveys and found that many YCs considered school important and were doing well academically whereas some YCs' education was negatively impacted. Correlational analyses revealed associations between caregiving time and missed school ( $r = .18, p = .030$ ) as well as limits on future aspirations ( $r = .2120, p = .029$ ). ANOVA analyses revealed that elementary-aged females placed higher importance on school than males ( $\eta^2 = .08, p = .036$ ). Results also revealed that many YCs would use a variety of school services if offered, but over half would still prefer to maintain their caregiving role as a secret. Further findings and recommendations for supporting academic achievement are offered.*

*Les jeunes aidants (YC—Young Carers) qui offrent des soins aux membres de leur famille qui sont malades, handicapés ou dépendants peuvent mettre à risque leur réussite éducative. Cette étude a porté sur 145 YC vivant dans le Sud de l'Ontario et âgés de 8 à 18 ans. À l'aide d'enquêtes, nous avons trouvé que plusieurs jeunes aidants considéraient l'école importante et réussissaient bien leurs études, mais que l'éducation de certains jeunes aidants était touchée négativement. Des analyses corrélationnelles ont révélé des associations entre le temps consacré à la prestation de soins et les absences à l'école d'une part ( $r = .18, p = .030$ ) et les limites sur les projets d'avenir ( $r = .2120, p = .029$ ). Des analyses ANOVA ont révélé que les étudiantes à l'élémentaire accordent une plus grande importance à l'école que leurs pairs masculins ( $\eta^2 = .08, p = .036$ ). Les résultats ont également révélé que plusieurs YC profiteraient de divers services scolaires s'ils étaient offerts, mais plus de la moitié d'eux préféreraient garder leur rôle d'aidant secret. Nous présentons d'autres résultats et offrons des recommandations pour appuyer les performances scolaires.*

For the majority of students, attending school is a normal practice, but for a portion of the student population it can be a source of additional stress. There are various circumstances that may impede the educational experience and future aspirations of students; one at-risk population, that has not yet been well-studied, are “young carers” (YCs). YCs provide care for ill, disabled, and addicted family member(s) or are in circumstances where parents may be absent or have language barriers (Charles, 2011; Charles, Stainton, & Marshall, 2009). In Canada, it is estimated that 12%–

28.2% of children and youth are YCs (Charles, Marshall, & Stainton, 2010; Remtulla, Charles, & Marshall, 2012; Stamatopoulos, 2015).

YCs are often in charge of completing a variety of responsibilities that include domestic tasks, child care, intimate or personal care, emotional and mental support, and medicine or nursing care (Fives, Keenan, Canavan, & Brady 2013; McDonald, Cumming, & Dew, 2009; Warren, 2007). Research suggests that YCs spend on average between 7 to 27 hours per week on caring responsibilities, considerably more than their non-caregiving peers who spend two hours per week helping out at home (Banks et al., 2001; Moore, McArthur, & Morrow, 2009; Nagl-Cupal, Daniel, Koller, & Mayer, 2014; Warren, 2007). As a result, education may be adversely impacted (Banks et al., 2002; Hamilton & Adamson, 2013; Moore et al., 2009; Siskowski, 2006; Thomas et al., 2003) and further impeded by limited school support services. Few studies have examined YCs' educational experiences and school supports that are available or required.

### **YCs' Educational Experience**

A majority of research that examined YCs' educational experiences demonstrated that YCs often struggle with their education (Siskowski, 2006) which negatively influenced school attendance and performance (Cluver, Operario, Lane, & Kganakga, 2012; Moore et al., 2009; Szafran, Torti, Waugh, & Duerksen, 2016). In a study by Moore et al. (2009) more than half of all YCs experienced learning challenges at school. For example, they struggled to maintain good attendance as a result of providing care for their loved ones (Moore et al., 2009). Cree (2003) indicated that YCs who cared for a longer duration (i.e., since birth) faced additional difficulties relating to their educational experiences.

Previous literature also suggested an effect on YCs' academic performance and future success (Fives et al., 2013; Thomas et al., 2003). Thomas et al. (2003) found that due to a significant amount of caregiving, YCs struggled to complete homework (Szafran et al., 2016). Similarly, due to an increased level of worry and tiredness, some YCs reported low concentration levels during class (Cluver et al., 2012; McDonald et al., 2009; Smyth, Cass, & Hill, 2011; Szafran et al., 2016). These caregiving role challenges may lower YCs' expectations and ambition to attain higher education and even restrict their future education and/or career choices (Hamilton & Adamson, 2013; Lloyd, 2013; Warren, 2007). In extreme circumstances (e.g., when caregiving became a priority or an increased obligation), some YCs reported dropping out of school (Cluver et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2003). These findings demonstrate that for many YCs, the task of balancing school work with caregiving can be extremely challenging (Hamilton & Adamson, 2013; Thomas et al., 2003). Nevertheless, research has shown that YCs maintain a positive attitude and consider school to be very important which was demonstrated by the value YCs place on their education (Moore et al., 2009; Smyth et al., 2011; Thomas et al., 2003). It has been suggested that some YCs saw school as their escape which allowed them to have a break from their caregiving responsibilities and focus on other aspects of life (Cluver et al., 2012; McDonald et al., 2009; Moore et al., 2009; Szafran et al., 2016).

### **Availability of School Support for YCs**

Studies have shown that YCs wanted school staff to become more aware of their caregiving role and provide encouragement and support through flexible policies such as homework clubs, mentoring and/or links with other students, notes, flexibility, extensions, and access to

telephones (Banks et al., 2002; Eley, 2004; Underdown, 2002; Warren, 2007). These supports may promote greater success by balancing caregiving and school work. However, a study by Ali et al. (2013) suggested that although YCs wanted support, the majority did not know where supports were available, demonstrating the need to provide support in a clear manner. Despite growing evidence of potential barriers to education, we were able to find only one study which offered indirect documentation of some availability of school support for YCs. Stamatopoulos (2016) investigated community support services for YCs in Canada and found that a program in Vancouver Island, specifically the Cowichan Family Caregivers Support Society (CFCSS), has been successful in working with schoolboards to increase awareness of YCs within schools through presentations and program implementation. However, while the presentations to increase awareness ran smoothly and frequently, the researcher noted several difficulties that the CFCSS faced when attempting to implement a program that supports YCs during lunch and/or after school (e.g., hardships to gain entry into schools, issues with parental consents, lack of awareness, etc.). Thus, the only studies that exist thus far contribute to our understanding of YCs' needs for support, rather than an actual support that is in place.

### **Purpose of the Current Study**

Knowledge regarding YCs' academic impacts are drawn from literature originating in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Europe which operates with very different educational policies and structures than those in the Canadian education system. Thus, YCs' experiences, impact, and need for support remain relatively unknown within a Canadian context. The current study expands our understanding of YCs' educational experiences within a different system by exploring whether YCs' experience negatively impacts their education and what support services, if any, they would like offered in Canadian schools. Sex and grade differences with respect to educational experiences and supports were explored.

## **Methods**

### **Procedure**

Upon receipt of ethical clearance from the University Research Ethics Board, parents and children signed consent forms for participation. Participants were recruited through local social service agencies (e.g., MS Society, Brain Injury Association) and a local YC program. Workers within the agencies identified possible participants and invited YCs to participate in the study. YCs completed surveys in groups in different community settings (e.g., church halls, community agencies, etc.). Research assistants were onsite to assist with survey completion as needed. On average, survey completion took one hour. As a compensation for participation, pizza and drinks were provided. Additionally, participating families were entered into a draw for a \$100 gift certificate from a big box store.

### **Participants**

This study was a part of a larger research project in Southern Ontario, examining YCs' daily experiences and impacts on their lives. There were 145 participants: 82 were females (56.6%) and 58 were males (40%). Five participants did not indicate their sex. YCs' age ranged from 8 to 18+

years with an average age of 12 years ( $M_{\text{female}} = 12.65$ ,  $SD = 2.86$ ;  $M_{\text{male}} = 12.43$  years,  $SD = 2.69$ ). The majority of the participants (82.8%,  $n = 143$ ) were born in Canada and 84.8% spoke English at home. All participants met the definition of a YC and were identified through family members or professionals (i.e., service providers or teachers).

## Measures

**Demographics.** Age, grade, sex, ethnicity, and language(s) spoken at home were assessed.

**Education-Related Variables.** Questions assessed YCs' experience at school and their educational impacts as a result of their caregiving role at home. YCs indicated what marks they usually received (6-point scale: 1 = A+ [90-100%] to 6 = Below 50%), the importance of getting good grades, the importance to do well in school (both on a 4-point scale: 1 = Very important to 4 = Not at all important) and educational goals (e.g., "how far one plans to go in school?"; 6-point scale: 1 = Not finish high school to 6 = Professional training). YCs were asked how much time they spend on caregiving per day (6-point scale: 1 = < 1 hour to 6 = 9+ hours), how many school days they missed due to caregiving (5-point scale: 1 = None to 5 = 7+ days), and the level of impact on their homework completion, absence, lateness, and choices regarding future education (5-point scale: 1 = Not at all to 5 = A great deal)

**School Support Services.** Nine school support services were assessed as to their potential usability by YCs (5-point scale: 1 = A great deal to 5 = Not at all). The list of services included: copy notes, homework buddy systems, a phone line, a quiet place to do homework, an adult to talk with, flexible attendance policies, fact sheets, information sessions, and access to all services while keeping their role as a secret. Alternative credit and correspondence services were missing in the younger group survey and thus were not included in the following analyses. Additionally, two items on the survey assessed how much support they received from teachers and whether school staff was aware of their situation (5-point scale: 1 = A great deal to 5 = Not at all).

## Data Analysis Plan

An overall summary of missing values revealed a 12.41% of missing data that ranged from the lowest, 0.0% (i.e., age) to the highest, 18.6% (i.e., one's usual marks). Since there was no pattern to the missing data, multiple imputations were conducted (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Further analyses included interpretations of the first imputed data set. Appropriately missing data (e.g., those who were no longer in school) were not imputed resulting in different sample sizes for some analyses. All analyses were compared to the original set to maintain accuracy, quality, and integrity of results. Two school services (alternative credit and correspondence) were eliminated from analyses due to low sample size.

Descriptive analyses provided mean and standard deviation statistics for the YCs demographics, educational experiences, and support service preferences. Independent sample t-tests were conducted to assess sex differences. Correlation analyses explored relations among the educational-related variables and one-way ANOVA analyses assessed grade and sex differences. Data were separated into three groups: elementary (grade 3-5,  $n = 45$ ), middle school (grades 6-8,  $n = 54$ ), and secondary school (grades 9-12,  $n = 46$ ) to explore developmental differences. Tukey's Post Hoc tests revealed specific differences. As this was the first study conducted on Canadian YCs, significance levels between .06-.10 were noted. Cohen's  $d$  and  $\text{Eta}^2$  were used to assess effect size.

## Results

### Educational Experience and Impact

On average, YCs reported normally receiving an A (80%–89%) in their school work ( $M = 2.34$ ,  $SD = .96$ ,  $n = 145$ ). It was 'very important' or 'important' for them to do well in school (85.3%,  $n = 143$ ) and to get good grades (90.8%,  $n = 141$ ). Eighty-seven percent of YCs' educational goals included at least some post-secondary education. When asked how long each day they provided care, the majority of YCs (68.3%) indicated spending two hours or less on caregiving. Results also showed that while on average YCs spend between one to two hours on caregiving per day ( $M = 2.31$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ,  $n = 145$ ), some (24.2%) spend three to six hours, and a smaller number of YCs (7.6%) spend seven hours or more per day.

Regarding missed school due to caring in the past month, the majority (62.1%,  $n = 145$ ) reported not missing any school days, 20.7% missed one to two days, 11.7% missed three to four days, and 5.5% missed five or more days. The perceived impact of the caregiving role on homework completion, attendance, or future choices was examined with one quarter of YCs (25%,  $n = 120$ ) reporting there was 'a great deal' or 'quite a bit' of impact on homework completion, 14.2% ( $n = 120$ ) felt they experienced 'a great deal' or 'quite a bit' of absence, 19.2% ( $n = 114$ ) reported 'a great deal' or 'quite a bit' of lateness, and 26.5% YCs ( $n = 117$ ) experienced 'a great deal' or 'quite a bit' of restrictions to their future academic choices. A larger percentage of YCs (e.g., between 39.3%, for making choices about future education, and 52.6%, for being late for school/work) reported that they did not experience any of these academic difficulties.

Higher grades were correlated with lower usual marks obtained ( $r = .18$ ,  $p = .033$ ,  $n = 145$ ), less importance of getting good grades ( $r = .26$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $n = 141$ ), higher absence from school ( $r = .25$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $n = 120$ ), and greater impact on making choices about future education ( $r = .25$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $n = 117$ ). The amount of time spent caring was correlated with more missed school due to caregiving ( $r = .18$ ,  $p = .030$ ,  $n = 145$ ) and greater impact on making choices about future education ( $r = .20$ ,  $p = .029$ ,  $n = 117$ ). A series of independent t-test analyses did not reveal any sex related differences on the educational variables. Specifically, males and females did not differ on the marks they usually obtain ( $t(138) = .60$ ,  $p = .551$ ), how far they plan to go to school ( $t(103) = -.112$ ,  $p = .264$ ), their importance to do well ( $t(94.91) = 1.13$ ,  $p = .262$ ), importance to get good grades ( $t(134) = .59$ ,  $p = .559$ ), how much school they have missed due to care ( $t(138) = .85$ ,  $p = .397$ ), impacts on homework ( $t(113) = -.39$ ,  $p = .698$ ), absence ( $t(113) = .28$ ,  $p = .782$ ), lateness ( $t(108) = .62$ ,  $p = .539$ ), or future aspirations ( $t(110) = .02$ ,  $p = .985$ ). Although the amount of time spent caring was statistically significant in the original sample,  $t(125.28) = -2.03$ ,  $p = .045$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.36$ , the imputed data indicated a trend towards significance,  $t(134.93) = -1.88$ ,  $p = .062$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.32$ , where females cared for longer hours ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ) than males ( $M = 2.05$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ). In both analyses the effect size was small.

To examine differences in educational experiences and impacts as a function of sex and grade, ANOVA analyses were conducted. Results indicated that in contrast to males, females placed higher importance on obtaining good grades,  $F(2, 76) = 3.48$ ,  $p = .036$ ,  $\eta^2 = .08$  (i.e., medium effect size). Tukey's tests determined significant grade group differences between elementary and high school females ( $p = .033$ ). Overall, elementary females ( $M = 1.21$ ,  $SD = .50$ ) considered it more important to get good grades in school than high school females ( $M = 1.67$ ,  $SD = .68$ ). Two trends towards significance revealed that in contrast to females, males indicated that they missed more school days due to caregiving,  $F(2, 55) = 2.65$ ,  $p = .080$ ,  $\eta^2 = .08$ , but interestingly, they

also reported spending less time on caregiving per day,  $F(2, 55) = 2.70, p = .076, \eta^2 = .09$ . The effect size was medium, approaching strong.

### Likelihood of Using School Support Services

YCs were asked to report how much support they perceived to receive from their teachers. While 50.4% ( $n = 121$ ) reported receiving 'a great deal' or 'quite a bit' of support from their teachers, 31.4% claimed it was minimal ('a bit' or 'very little'), and 18.2% claimed they received 'no support at all'. Moreover, YCs reported that on average, school staff were only somewhat cognizant of their situation at home ( $M = 3.09, SD = 1.49, n = 121$ ), 38.9% claimed 'a great deal' or 'quite a bit' of school awareness of their situation, and 36.3% reported school awareness to be minimal (i.e., 'a bit' or 'very little'). Still, 24.8% stated that school staff were 'completely unaware' of their situation.

With respect to school support services, Table 1 illustrates that on average, YCs reported they would use 'quite a bit' of the services if they were to be provided at school. It is important to note that despite the high rates of reported usage, especially for copy notes, phone line, adult to talk to, and information sessions, over half of all YCs (57.6%) would still prefer to access these services in secrecy. An independent sample t-test analyses revealed a significant difference between males' and females' usage of a quiet place for homework,  $t(120) = 3.05, p = .003$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.57$  (i.e., medium effect size) where females ( $M = 2.47, SD = 1.41, n = 74$ ) would prefer to use it more often than males ( $M = 3.25, SD = 1.33, n = 48$ ). No other sex differences in service preference were found. Males and females scored similar on usability of copy notes ( $t(121) = .23, p = .821$ ), homework buddy ( $t(114) = .83, p = .409$ ), phone line ( $t(116) = 1.36, p = .176$ ), adult talk ( $t(119) = 1.32, p = .188$ ), flexible attendance ( $t(105) = .12, p = .904$ ), fact sheet ( $t(111) = .36, p = .719$ ), information session ( $t(114) = 1.08, p = .281$ ), or service usage while maintaining role a secret ( $t(111) = -.21, p = .831$ ).

Table 1.

#### Frequencies for the Likelihood of Using School Support Services

Services	Combined sample size ( $n$ )	Combined Sample $M$ ( $SD$ )	'Great deal'+ 'quite a bit' (%)	'Very little'+ 'a bit' (%)	'Not at all' (%)
Copy notes	128	2.56 (1.37)	56.2	32.0	11.7
Homework buddy	120	2.78 (1.53)	50.8	26.7	22.5
Phone line	123	2.72 (1.50)	52.9	27.6	19.5
Quiet place for homework *	127	2.79 (1.42)	42.6	41.7	15.7
Adult to talk to	126	2.60 (1.33)	48.4	41.3	10.3
Flexible attendance	111	2.57 (1.43)	53.1	34.2	12.6
Fact sheet	118	2.70 (1.46)	50.0	32.2	17.8
Information session	121	2.62 (1.41)	50.4	37.2	12.4
Secret	118	2.44 (1.44)	57.6	28.0	14.4

Note. \* = Independent sample t-test revealed statistically significant differences with respect to the service of finding a quiet place to do homework, with females preferring it more often than males. There were no statistically significant differences among males and females on any other support service variables. Higher scores indicated very little to no usage.

ANOVA examined differences in service usage as a function of sex and grade. Females were more likely to use an adult to talk to than male participants,  $F(2, 68) = 3.16, p = .049, \eta^2 = .08$  (i.e., medium effect size). Post-hoc Tukey's comparisons indicated significant grade differences between elementary school and high school students ( $p = .038$ ). Elementary females ( $M = 1.96, SD = 1.23$ ) were more likely to talk to an adult than high school females ( $M = 2.89, SD = 1.39$ ). One trend towards significance was found in female's usage of a phone line,  $F(2, 66) = 2.58, p = .083, \eta^2 = .07$  (i.e., medium effect size). Finally, males showed a trend towards preferring to use more fact sheets than females,  $F(2, 44) = 2.61, p = 0.85, \eta^2 = .11$  (i.e., strong effect size).

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore YCs' educational experiences and preferred school supports. The results of the correlational analyses revealed that the amount of time spent caring was associated with an increase in risk factors for academic success. YCs who cared for more hours were more likely to miss more days of school which correlated with a greater negative impact on future choices. Previous findings by Moore et al. (2009) revealed that YCs spent an average of 27 hours on caregiving per week. While the current sample included YCs who indicated providing care for 14 hours per week on average, almost a quarter of YCs reported to spend three to six hours on caregiving daily; this is the equivalent of a part-time job. While our imputed dataset revealed no sex differences in the amount of time spent caregiving, the original dataset revealed a significant difference. These mixed findings are reflected in the literature where some researchers have found that females provide more caregiving than males (Cass, 2007; Eley, 2004) while others failed to replicate this finding revealing that caregiving is equal among the sexes (McDonald et al., 2009). Thus, further examination of this issue is needed.

Our sample included academically strong YCs who valued their education and expressed a desire to complete post-secondary education. These findings were similar to previous research (Moore et al., 2009; Smyth et al., 2011; Thomas et al., 2003) suggesting that despite YCs' circumstances, they still valued school, planned ahead, and desired to attain higher education. The majority did not miss any days of school nor indicate any difficulties or negative impact on their homework, school attendance, and future educational choices. This may reflect the fact that this sample reported minimal daily caregiving. Therefore, it is probable that with more caregiving time being required, more school absence may result. Future studies should explore this relationship.

Elementary-aged females placed a greater importance on getting good grades in school than high school females. No differences were found for males. This finding was not surprising given previous research found that at a younger age, females usually planned ahead and outperformed males due to greater motivation, focus, and effort put into their school work (Houtte, 2004; Martin, 2004; Warrington, Younger, & Williams, 2000). The reduction in motivation in high school may be related to increased freedom, importance of peer groups, and increasing interest in extracurricular activities.

The majority of YCs, particularly elementary YCs, reported they would use services if they were made available at schools. Future studies should examine the reasons for why children from lower grades may be more open to using support services. While our findings revealed that females preferred to use a quiet place for homework more often than males, females also preferred to talk to an adult more often and at a lower grade than males. Females typically are more relational than males (Kirsh & Kuiper, 2002; McBride, Bacchiochi, & Bagby, 2005), are more likely to seek help

and access services (Grebennikov & Skaines, 2009; Morgan, Ness, & Robinson, 2003; Rickwood & Braithwaite, 1994), and thus, may be more supported. Since we could find no additional research to compare these findings to, it may be argued that if service usage habits develop at earlier grades, then by high school, perhaps males may begin to seek support more frequently. Finally, since this study found a preference of support usage among females, future studies could investigate the reasons for why males do not use services and explore potential ways that would encourage support access.

Over half of all students preferred to use services while keeping their caregiving role a ‘secret’. This tendency for secrecy is very different from privacy. While some YCs may choose to keep their role private, studies showed that it is more prevalent to keep it as a secret; they do so intentionally in order to avoid ‘potential’ or ‘perceived’ negative consequences that may be associated with their role. For example, Bolas, Wersch, and Flynn (2007) found that YCs often keep their caregiving role a secret because they either feared judgment or rejection from others. Moreover, Cass (2007) found that YCs and their families feared unwanted intervention and involvement of child protection services. As a result, families actively try to remain hidden since getting noticed by others increased the chances for investigation and even potential familial separation (Metzing-Blau & Schnepf, 2008; Moore & McArthur, 2007). This was reflected in our findings where just over one-third of YCs reported school staff knew of their situation whereas half of the YCs felt teachers supported them. While teachers are a part of school staff, it may be that YCs consider “school staff” to refer to administration and see teachers as separate from administration.

One possible reason for keeping their role secretive could be attributed to not feeling safe (e.g., fear of retribution, judgement, etc.) to discuss their role with others. Additionally, since some teachers may not offer support, YCs may feel that there is no value in revealing their caregiving role to the school administration. If supports are to have the greatest impact, they will need to be systematically and consistently offered in all schools and among all teachers. It is important to note, however, that there is no existing research to show actual rates of teacher support or school administration awareness.

### **Recommendations**

Based on our findings, several recommendations for future policy makers and school stakeholders can be made. First, academic support services need to be offered at elementary, middle, and secondary schools to ensure that everyone who requires support is able to access support. Examples of school support services could include: copy notes, homework buddy system, phone line, adult talk, flexible attendance, and fact sheet(s). Second, schools could increase YC awareness through information sessions and classroom curriculum, and build mechanisms for identification and referral such as attendance monitoring and promoting connections among YCs. Third, schools should create a comfortable, confidential, and supportive environment where YCs feel safe to come forward and ask for help. Since there is the preference for YCs to keep their role secretive, services should be offered to the general population as they may be equally beneficial to all students. Fourth, it is also essential that school staff be cognizant of the relationship between missing school and caregiving. Upon observing poor student attendance, school personnel could ask more questions in order to identify potential YCs.

## Limitations

Given the hidden nature of the YC population, random sampling could not be implemented. A targeted sample was used instead, where participants were drawn from a local agency that works to identify and support YCs. Thus, results of this study identified YCs' needs and demonstrated their unique experiences at school and may not reflect the experiences of those YCs who have not yet been identified. This highlights the need for population-based studies to uncover this hidden population.

This study was a self-report from YCs themselves. A strength of this study reflects a large age range. Participants were in grades 3-12 (8 to 18 years and older). This enabled the researchers to investigate three developmental periods related to different educational contexts: elementary, middle, and high school. It focused on YCs' perceptions of their educational experiences, impacts, and support service usage. This was also a strength as it provided an opportunity to learn about YCs' experiences within the Canadian educational system. However, it may not reflect what school services may be offered without their knowledge and/or awareness. Future studies should examine supports from a school board perspective.

Finally, this study only focused on the time spent caregiving and how it impacted YCs' education. This may be a limited view since the activities that YCs perform are varied and may result in different impacts (e.g., emotional, psychological, physical, etc.). Thus, it would be beneficial for future studies to examine whether the activities they perform in their daily schedules affect their academic experiences.

## Conclusion

This is the first Canadian-based study that we are aware of that explored YCs' educational experiences. Like many students, YCs want to succeed academically, and according to our study, many are doing well. However, there is a group who are struggling as a result of their caregiving role. It is paramount that schools begin to recognize and support YCs by increasing school staff awareness, systematically asking questions, making identifications, and offering supports. Implementing universal support programs would ensure all students have an equal chance of success in the Canadian educational system.

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Yana Lakman is a Ph.D. Candidate in the Child and Youth Studies Department at Brock University. Her research explores a population of children and youth called "young carers". In particular, she is interested in how the caregiving role impacts young children and adolescents. For any correspondence, please E-

mail: yana.lakman@brocku.ca

*Heather Chalmers* is an Associate Professor in the Department of Child and Youth Studies at Brock University. Her research interests include adolescent risk taking and at-risk youth and the impact on development.

*Cayleigh Sexton* is a Master's Candidate in the Child and Youth Studies Department, Brock University, St. Catharines. Her research interests include the young carer population, what causes stress, and what coping strategies are used by children and youth with caregiving responsibilities.