

Article

# Coronavirus and the social impacts on unpaid carers in Great Britain: April 2021

Indicators from the Office for National Statistics' Opinions and Lifestyle Survey to understand the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on unpaid carers in Great Britain.

Contact:  
Bryony McKean  
social.care@ons.gov.uk  
+44 (0)1329 444110

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# 1 . Main points

From 31 March to 25 April 2021, among people aged 16 years and over in Great Britain:

- More women (57%) provided unpaid care than men (43%); however, there were no significant differences between men and women in the number of hours, or type of care provided.
- A higher percentage of unpaid carers than non-carers reported that they were disabled (32% compared with 23%), with unpaid carers aged 16 to 34 years and 45 to 54 years more likely to be disabled than non-carers of the same age groups.
- A larger proportion of unpaid carers than non-carers were worried about the effects that the coronavirus pandemic was having on their life (63% compared with 56%).
- More than half of unpaid carers (57%) had received their first vaccine, and a fifth (20%) had received both doses. Fewer non-carers had received their first dose (44%) or had received both doses (16%), however, on average unpaid carers were older (52 years) than non-carers (47 years).
- There were no statistically significant differences between the percentage of unpaid carers who worked compared with non-carers, however, unpaid carers were more likely to work part-time (31%) than non-carers (25%).

## 2 . Understanding the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on unpaid carers

The analysis presented has been produced and written in collaboration with the [Centre for International Research on Care, Labour and Equalities \(CIRCLE\)](#).

This article contains data and indicators from a module undertaken through the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on British society. These are fully reported in the [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain](#) series.

This article provides an insight into the social impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on unpaid carers, aged 16 years and over. Care status is self-reported and, for this analysis, a person is considered an "unpaid carer" if they provided a "yes" response to the following question:

"In the past seven days, did you look after, or give any help or support to, anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems related to old age? Exclude anything you do as part of your paid employment."

More information can be found in the [glossary](#). Anyone who responded "no" is classified as a "non-carer"; please note that while these individuals may not be providing unpaid care, they could be providing paid care as part of their employment. Of the sample studied (16,362), 17% (2,950) were unpaid carers, 83% (13,363) were non-carers and <1% (49) refused or did not answer the question.

Throughout this article, "April 2021" refers to data collected between 31 March 2021 and 25 April 2021. During this period the "rule of 6" was in place in England (29 March 2021), "stay local" restrictions were lifted in Wales (from 27 March 2021), and "stay home" rules in Scotland were replaced by "stay local" rules (2 April 2021). For more information on the periods referred to in this article see [Section 9: Data sources and quality](#).

This article presents a summary of results, with further information and data confidence intervals for the estimates contained in the [associated dataset](#). Any differences mentioned in this article are statistically significant unless stated otherwise (refer to [glossary](#) for definition).

Data used in this publication will be used to report toward Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicator 5.4.1, which measures the proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic care work by sex, age and location. For more information on SDGs, please visit the [UK SDG data site](#), or contact [sustainabledevelopment@ons.gov.uk](mailto:sustainabledevelopment@ons.gov.uk).

### 3 . Characteristics of unpaid carers

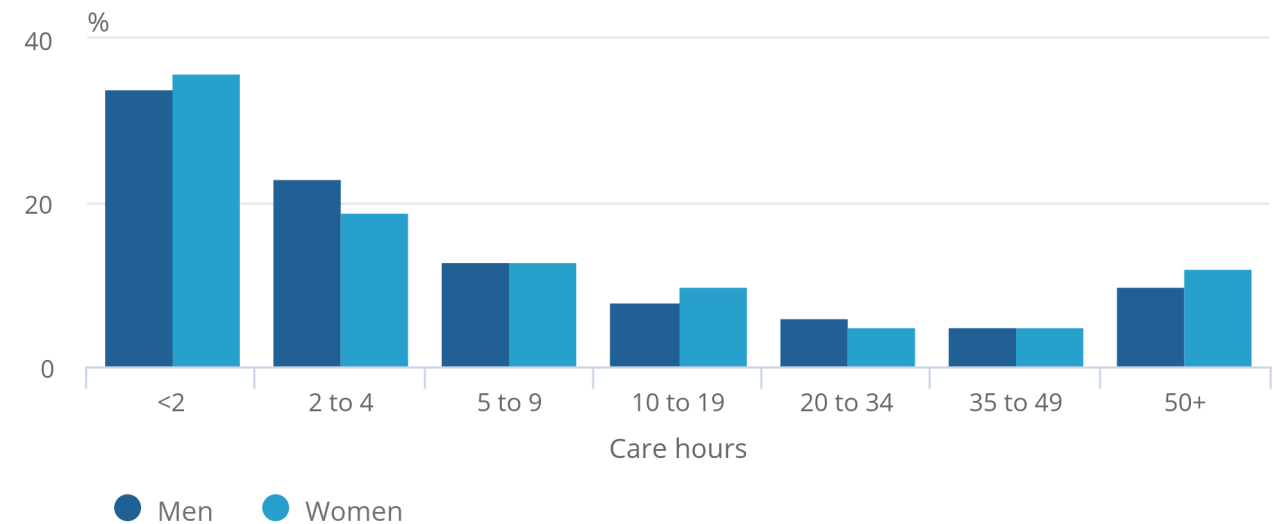
In April 2021, more women (57%) provided unpaid care than men (43%), but there was no significant difference in the proportion of hours that men and women spent caring (Figure 1). These findings are in line with [estimates in England and Wales from the 2011 Census, which show a higher proportion of women \(58%\) self-reporting as unpaid carers compared with men \(42%\)](#).

**Figure 1: There are no significant differences in the proportion of hours of care provided between men and women**

Percentage of unpaid carers by sex and hours of care provided in the previous week, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021

Figure 1: There are no significant differences in the proportion of hours of care provided between men and women

Percentage of unpaid carers by sex and hours of care provided in the previous week, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics - Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Notes:

1. Question: “In the past seven days, did you look after, or give any help or support to, anyone inside or outside your household because they have: long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems related to old age? Exclude anything you do as part of your paid employment”.
2. Base population for percentage: unpaid carers.

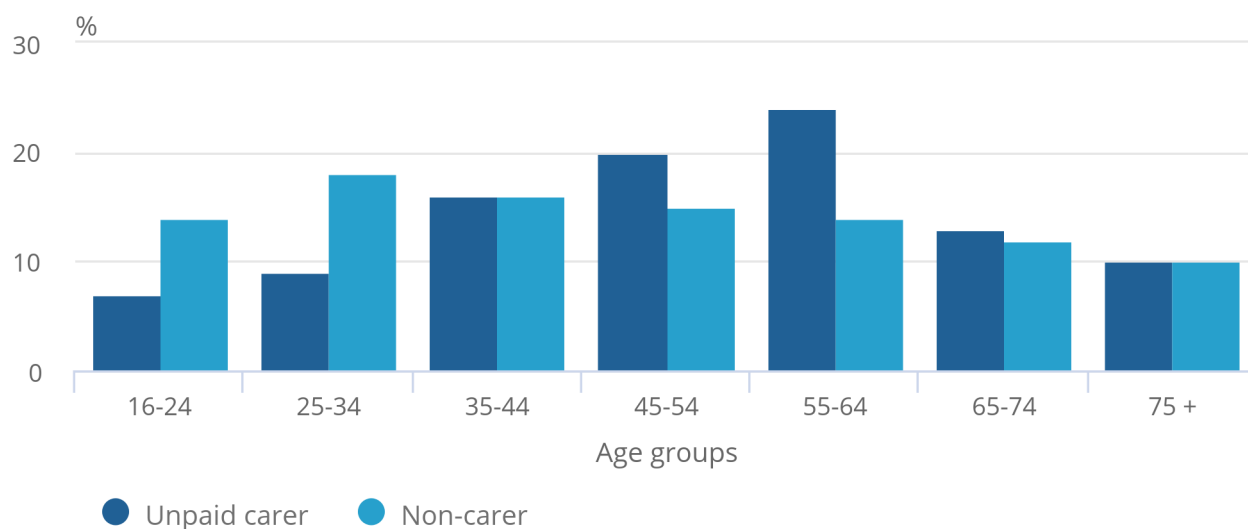
The proportion of people who were unpaid carers (24%) was highest in the age group 55 to 64 years (Figure 2). Unpaid carers were older than non-carers with an average age of 52 years in comparison to 47 years. Further age breakdowns are available in the [accompanying datasets](#).

**Figure 2: The largest proportion of unpaid carers were between the ages of 55 to 64 years**

Percentage of unpaid carers and non-carers by age, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021

## Figure 2: The largest proportion of unpaid carers were between the ages of 55 to 64 years

Percentage of unpaid carers and non-carers by age, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics - Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

**Notes:**

1. Base population for percentage: unpaid carers and non-carers.
2. Totals may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

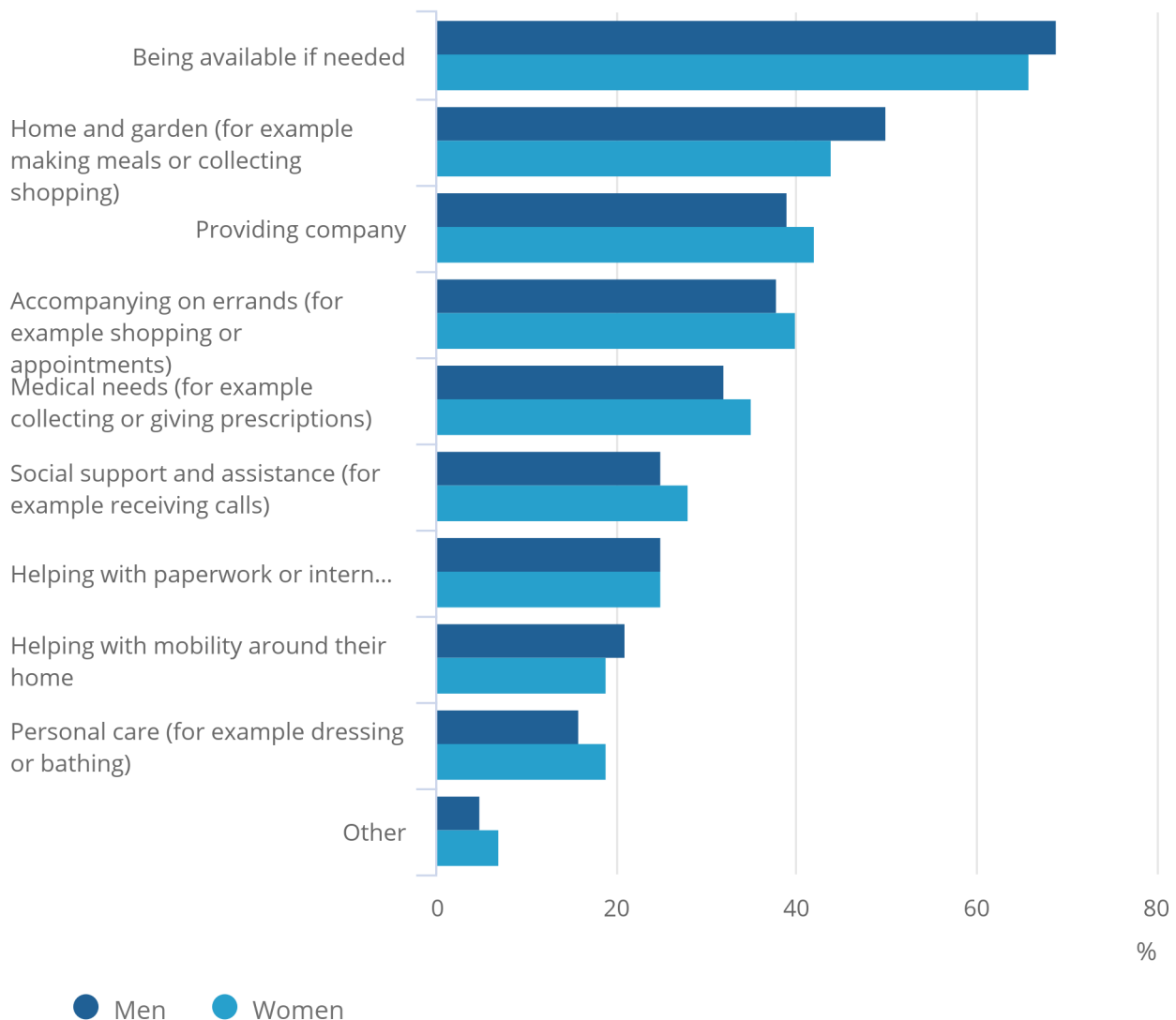
There were no significant differences between men and women in the types of care activities provided (Figure 3). The most common care activity provided was “being available if needed” (69% men, 66% women).

**Figure 3: The most common care activities provided were being available if needed and helping with the home and garden**

Percentage of unpaid carers providing different types of help or support by sex, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021

**Figure 3: The most common care activities provided were being available if needed and helping with the home and garden**

Percentage of unpaid carers providing different types of help or support by sex, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics - Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Notes:

1. Question: "In the past seven days, have you carried out any of the following activities to look after, or give any help or support to someone inside or outside your household, that was not a part of your paid employment?"
2. Respondents asked to select all that apply.
3. Base population for percentage: unpaid carers.
4. "Other" care type responses included assisting with pet care (for example walking a person's dog), assisting with transport to medical appointments or the supermarket, preparing and delivering food and providing mental health support.

A higher proportion of unpaid carers than non-carers stated that they were disabled (32% compared with 23%) (refer to [glossary](#) for definition of disability). Although unpaid carers were older than non-carers, Figure 4 shows that there were more disabled unpaid carers than disabled non-carers in the following age groups:

- 16 to 24 years (32% of unpaid carers were disabled compared with 17% for non-carers)
- 25 to 34 years (36% compared with 16%)
- 45 to 54 years (32% compared with 19%)

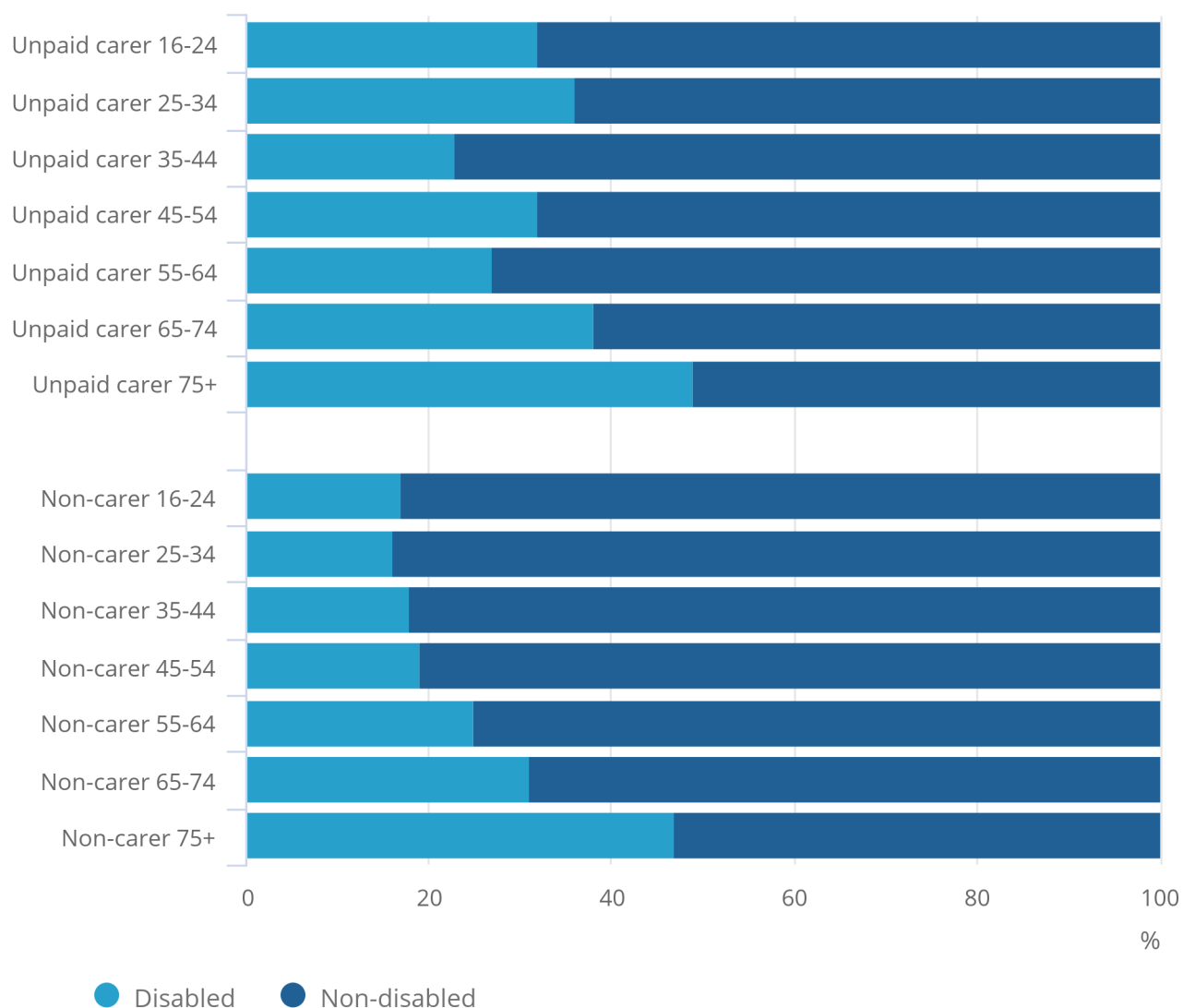
There were no statistically significant differences in disability for carers and non-carers for the other age groups.

## Figure 4: Unpaid carers were more likely to be disabled than non-carers

Unpaid carers and non-carers split by age and disability status, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021

### Figure 4: Unpaid carers were more likely to be disabled than non-carers

Unpaid carers and non-carers split by age and disability status, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics - Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

#### Notes:

1. Base population for percentage: unpaid carers and non-carers.
2. A disabled person is defined as having a self-reported long-standing illness, condition or impairment that reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. This definition of disability is consistent with the [Equality Act 2010](#) and the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\)](#) harmonised definition.



## 4 . Unpaid carers and employment during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

There was no statistically significant difference between the number of unpaid carers (61%) and non-carers (64%) who stated that they worked. A working adult is someone who had a paid job, either as an employee or self-employed, did any casual work for payment or did unpaid voluntary work in the previous week (refer to the [glossary](#) for definition). Similarly, there were no significant differences between unpaid carers and non-carers working at each age group. Further breakdowns of age and employment can be found in the [associated datasets](#).

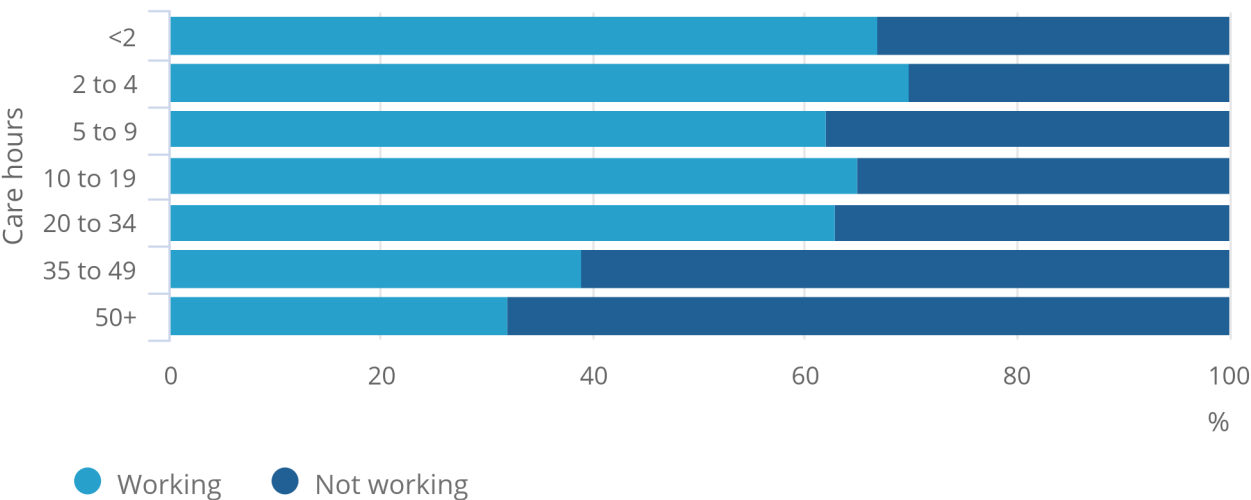
Figure 5 shows as care hours increase, unpaid carers are less likely to work. Among unpaid carers providing more than 50 hours of care a week, over two-thirds (68%) were not working - this figure was considerably higher than unpaid carers providing less than 2 hours (33%), 2 to 4 hours (30%), 5 to 9 hours (38%), 10 to 19 hours (35%), and 20 to 34 hours (37%). Further breakdowns of working by care hours and age are available in the [accompanying datasets](#).

**Figure 5: The higher the number of hours of care provided, the less likely unpaid carers are to be working**

Percentage of care hours per week by working status for unpaid carers, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021

Figure 5: The higher the number of hours of care provided, the less likely unpaid carers are to be working

Percentage of care hours per week by working status for unpaid carers, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics - Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Notes:

1. For this survey, a person is said to be a "working adult" if: they had a paid job, either as an employee or self-employed; they did any casual work for payment; or they did any unpaid or voluntary work in the previous week.
2. Base population for percentage: unpaid carers.

Of the people who stated they were not an employee or self-employed, a similar percentage of unpaid carers (91%) and non-carers (89%) were not looking for work. Being retired was the main reason stated for not looking for work, although there were no statistically significant differences in the proportion of unpaid carers (66%) compared with non-carers (64%) who were retired.

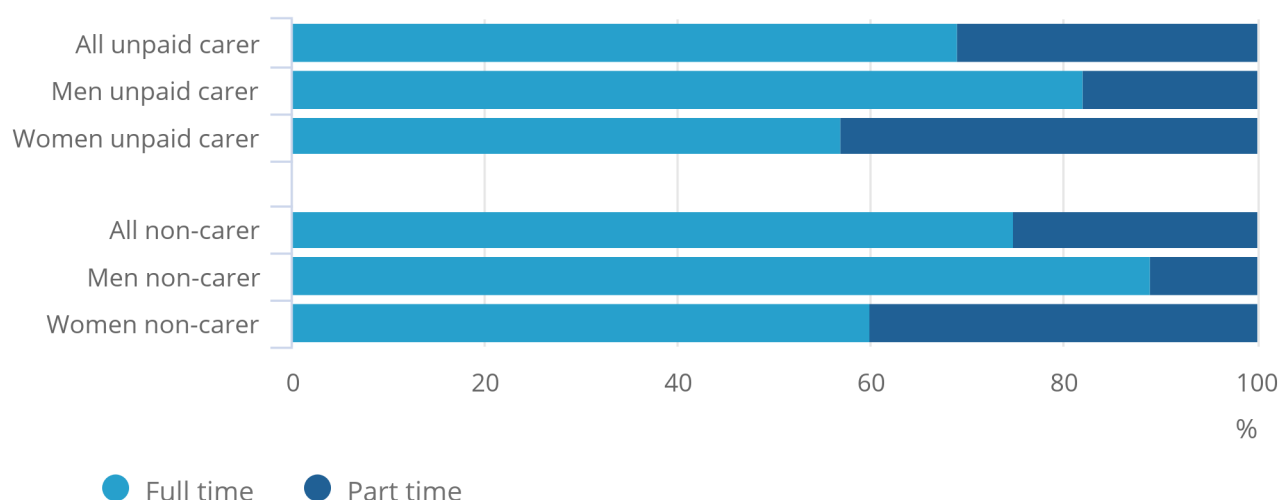
Among all respondents who stated that they were either an employee or self-employed, those who were unpaid carers were more likely than non-carers to work part-time (31% compared with 25%) (Figure 6). Unpaid carers who were women (43%) were more likely to work part-time than unpaid carers who were men (18%); the same pattern is evident in non-carers.

### Figure 6: Unpaid carers are more likely to work part time than non-carers

Percentage of unpaid carers and non-carers working full-time or part-time, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021

#### Figure 6: Unpaid carers are more likely to work part time than non-carers

Percentage of unpaid carers and non-carers working full-time or part-time, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics - Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

#### Notes:

1. Question: "was this job full-time or part-time" was asked to people who responded, "Yes" to the question "did you have a paid job, either as an employee or self-employee in the week previous?"
2. Base population for percentage: unpaid carers and non-carers.

## 5 . The impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the lifestyle of unpaid carers

Approximately one third of unpaid carers (31%) lived with someone who was sick, disabled or over the age of 70 years who they looked after or to whom they gave special help (compared with just 4% of non-carers). Nearly all unpaid carers who provided more than 50 hours of care per week (90%) lived with someone who was sick, disabled or over the age of 70 years - a higher percentage than for all other weekly hours of care.

Unpaid carers were more likely to avoid physical contact with others when outside the household (92%) compared with non-carers (88%), although a lower proportion (65%) of unpaid carers stated that they had avoided contact with older people or other vulnerable people because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic compared with non-carers (71%). Of the people who stated they had avoided contact with others, a higher proportion (29%) of unpaid carers stated that they had caring responsibilities for the people with whom they had avoided contact, compared with non-carers (3%).

The majority of unpaid carers (63%) were worried ("very worried" or "somewhat worried") about the effects that the coronavirus pandemic was having on their life; this proportion was higher than non-carers (56%).

Figure 7 shows that more unpaid carers than non-carers indicated that coronavirus had affected:

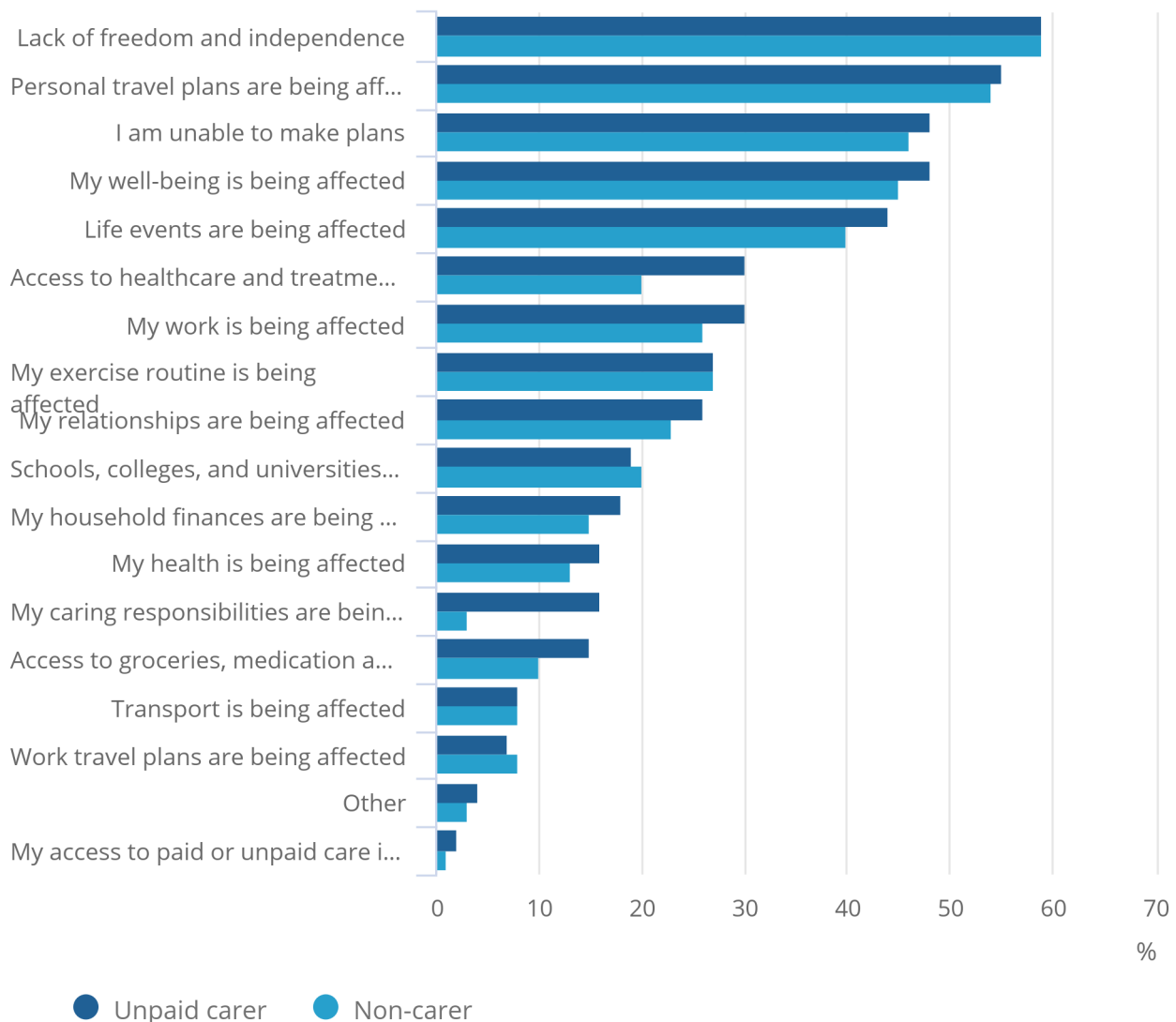
- life events (for example, weddings and funerals) (44% unpaid carers compared with 40% non-carers)
- work (30% compared with 26%)
- access to healthcare and treatment for non-coronavirus-related issues (30% compared with 20%)
- health (16% compared with 13%)
- caring responsibilities (16% compared with 3%)
- access to groceries, medication and essentials (15% compared with 10%)

**Figure 7: Unpaid carers were more likely than non-carers to state that life events, work, access to health care and treatment, and their health had been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic**

Life impact of the coronavirus, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021

## Figure 7: Unpaid carers were more likely than non-carers to state that life events, work, access to health care and treatment, and their health had been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic

Life impact of the coronavirus, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics - Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Notes:

1. Question: "In which ways is the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) affecting your life?"
2. Respondents were asked to select all that apply.
3. Base population for percentage: unpaid carers and non-carers.
4. "Other" ways in which the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) affected life (4% unpaid carers, 3% non-carers) were missing socialising with family and friends, grieving and being with loved ones when they died, and mental health.

There was no difference in the proportions of unpaid carers and non-carers who stated that they had left the house in the past seven days (96% for unpaid carers, 95% for non-carers).

Figure 8 shows unpaid carers more frequently reported leaving their home for the following reasons:

- to go shopping for food or medicine (78% for unpaid carers, 73% for non-carers)
- to provide care or to help a vulnerable person (34% for unpaid carers, 1% for non-carers)
- to meet people in a support bubble (31% for unpaid carers, 20% for non-carers)
- for a medical need, including vaccination (20% for unpaid carers, 15% for non-carers)

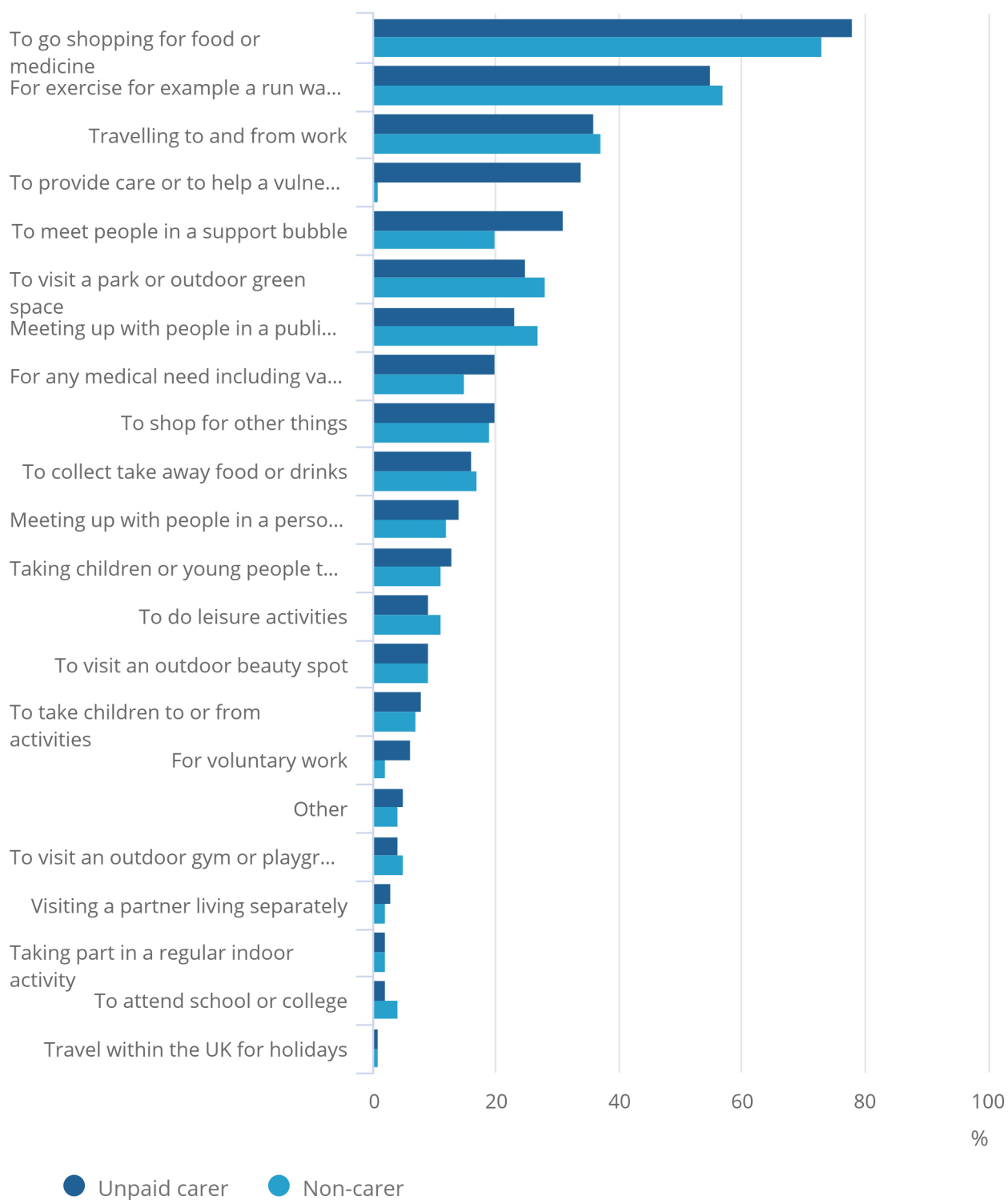


**Figure 8: Unpaid carers were more likely to leave the house to go shopping for food or medicine than non-carers in the last seven days**

Reasons for leaving the house in the last seven days, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021

Figure 8: Unpaid carers were more likely to leave the house to go shopping for food or medicine than non-carers in the last seven days

Reasons for leaving the house in the last seven days, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021





Notes:

1. Question: "In the past seven days, for what reason have you left your home?"
2. Respondents asked to select all that apply.
3. Base population for percentage: Unpaid carers and non-carers who answered "yes" to the question "in the past seven days have you left your home for any reason?"
4. Percentages less than one have been removed from the chart.
5. "Other" reasons for leaving the house (5% unpaid carers, 4% non-carers) included looking after animals (for example, walking a dog or caring for horses), gardening at an allotment, for car maintenance, and to move into or view a house.

## 6 . Attitudes of unpaid carers to a coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination

In April 2021, 93% of the whole sample (age 16 years and over) reported they had either received the first dose or the second dose of a coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine, had been offered a vaccine and were awaiting it, or would be likely (very or fairly likely) to have a vaccine if offered.

This "positive vaccine sentiment"<sup>1</sup> is made up of those who either reported that they:

- had received the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine (57% unpaid carers, 44% non-carers)
- had received the second dose of a COVID-19 vaccine (20% unpaid carers, 16% non-carers)
- had been offered a vaccine and were awaiting it (3% unpaid carers, 2% non-carers); this difference is not significantly different between carers and non-carers.
- had not yet been offered a vaccine but were likely (very or fairly likely) to have one when offered (16% unpaid carers, 31% non-carers)

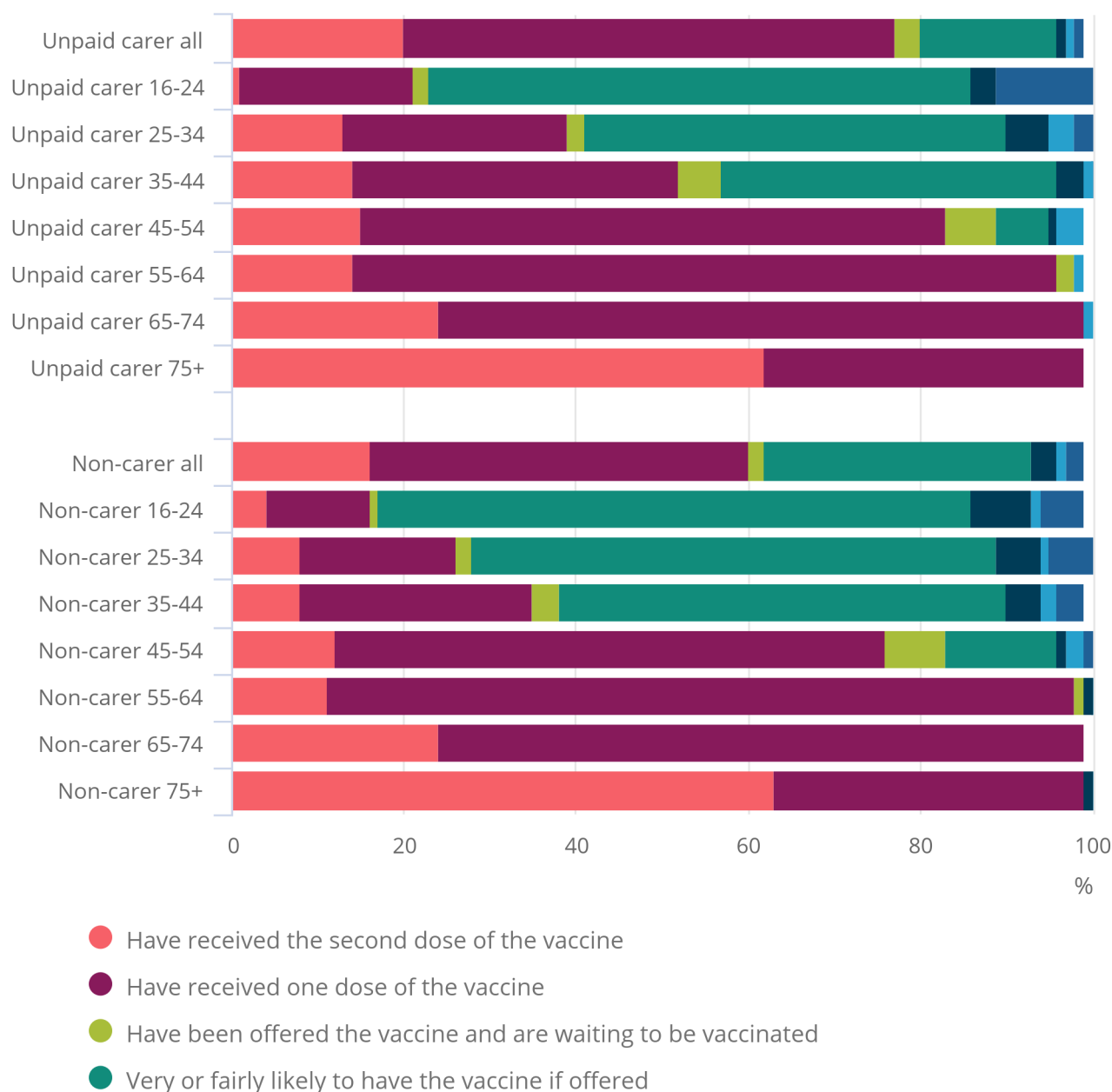
Further exploration of vaccination sentiment by age group shows that unpaid carers aged 35 to 44 years were more likely to have had one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine than non-carers (38% unpaid carers, 27% non-carers) and non-carers were more likely (very or fairly likely) to have a vaccine if offered than unpaid carers (39% unpaid carers, 52% non-carers). Similarly, non-carers aged 45 to 54 years were more likely to have a vaccine if offered than unpaid carers (6% unpaid carers, 13% non-carers). There were no further significant differences between unpaid carers and non-carers for age and vaccine sentiment breakdowns. These breakdowns can be found in the [associated datasets](#).

**Figure 9: Unpaid carers were more likely than non-carers to have received their coronavirus vaccine**

Vaccination status of unpaid and non-carers, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021

## Figure 9: Unpaid carers were more likely than non-carers to have received their coronavirus vaccine

Vaccination status of unpaid and non-carers, Great Britain, 31 March to 25 April 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics - Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

### Notes:

1. Question: "Have you received a vaccine for the coronavirus (COVID-19)?", "Have you been offered the vaccine for the coronavirus (COVID-19)?" and "If a vaccine for the coronavirus (COVID-19) was offered to you, how likely or unlikely would you be to have the vaccine?"
2. Base population for percentage: unpaid carers and non-carers.
3. Totals may not sum to 100% because proportions of less than 1% are not included in this chart.

## Survey coverage and COVID-19 vaccination data

The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) does not include people living in care homes or other establishments, so will not capture vaccinations that have occurred in these settings. Because of small sample sizes, the percentage of adults who have declined a vaccine should be treated with caution.

As such, interpretation of the proportions of different groups of people who have received at least one dose of the vaccine should be treated with caution and may not always reflect information available in other [administrative data](#). More information can be found in [Section 9: Data sources and quality](#).

### Notes for: Attitudes of unpaid carers to a coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination

1. Totals for the combined category of “positive vaccine sentiment” may appear to be different than if combining the individual category estimates shown in Figure 9 because of rounding.

## 7 . Social impacts on unpaid carers data

[Coronavirus and the social impacts on unpaid carers in Great Britain](#)

Dataset | Published 10 June 2021

Indicators from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey to understand the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on unpaid carers in Great Britain.

## 8 . Glossary

### Unpaid carer

Unpaid carer is defined using the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\) harmonised “core” definition](#): identifying an unpaid carer if they provide support/care to an individual who has needs because of physical or mental health condition(s) or illness(es), or problems related to old age. Unpaid carers status is self-reported.

### Non-carer

A non-carer is defined as someone who answered “no” to the following question:

“In the past seven days, did you look after, or give any help or support to, anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses, or problems related to old age? Exclude anything you do as part of your paid employment.”

### Working adults

For this survey, a person is said to be a "working adult" if:

- they had a paid job, either as an employee or self-employed
- they did any casual work for payment
- they did any unpaid or voluntary work in the previous week

## Disabled person

A disabled person is defined as having a self-reported long-standing illness, condition or impairment that reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. There are an estimated 13.7 million disabled people in Great Britain according to the [latest available estimates](#). This definition of disability is consistent with the [Equality Act 2010](#) and the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\) harmonised definition](#).

## Vaccination for COVID-19

The first coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine given in the UK was 8 December 2020. COVID-19 vaccinations are now being provided in various locations across the country.

More information on the [number of people who have received a COVID-19 vaccine to date](#) and [National Health Service \(NHS\) guidance on the COVID-19 vaccines](#) is available.

## Statistical significance

The term “significant” refers to statistically significant changes or differences. Significance has been determined using the 95% confidence intervals, where instances of non-overlapping confidence intervals between estimates indicate the difference is unlikely to have arisen from random fluctuation. See our [statistical uncertainty](#) page.

## Confidence intervals

A measure of the uncertainty around a specific estimate. It is expected that the interval will contain the true value on 95 occasions if repeated 100 times. As intervals around estimates widen, the level of uncertainty about where the true value lies increases. See our [statistical uncertainty](#) page.

## Positive vaccine sentiment

“Positive vaccine sentiment” refers to adults who:

- have received a vaccine
- have been offered a vaccine and are waiting to be vaccinated
- report being very or fairly likely to have a vaccine if offered

Our survey does not include adults living in care homes or other establishments so will not capture vaccinations in these settings. Because of small sample sizes, the percentage of adults who have declined a vaccine should be treated with caution.

## 9 . Data sources and quality

## Measuring the data

The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) is a monthly omnibus survey. In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we adapted the OPN to become a weekly survey used to collect data on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on day-to-day life in Great Britain.

To enable more detailed analysis, such as the care hours breakdowns, four waves of this weekly OPN data have been pooled together and reweighted to create a larger dataset.

Throughout this article, April 2021 refers to data collected between 31 March 2021 and 25 April 2021, a period in which some easing of lockdown restrictions began. Survey responses were collected using an online self-completion questionnaire or over the phone.

Some survey questions asked for people's responses in reference to "the past seven days". These results have been presented as representing people's views during March and April 2021, even though attitudes may have changed slightly between the four waves included.

Where differences between groups are presented in this article, [confidence intervals](#), which are included in the [associated dataset](#), indicate their significance.

Estimates in this article are rounded to whole numbers. Where individual answer categories for a question have been combined to provide an estimate, the total may not sum to the total of individual categories because of this rounding.

## Sampling

For each wave, a sample was randomly selected from those that had previously completed the Labour Market Survey (LMS). From each household, one adult was selected at random but with unequal probability. Younger people were given higher selection probability because of under-representation in the sample available. The survey also includes a boosted sample for England, to allow more detailed analysis at a regional level, which is available in the [datasets](#) of the [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain](#) publications.

## Weighting

The responding sample in the four waves contained 16,362 individuals (68% response rate). Survey weights were applied to make estimates representative of the population.

Weights were first adjusted for non-response and attrition. Subsequently, the weights were calibrated to satisfy population distributions considering the following factors: sex by age, region, tenure, highest qualification and employment status. The resulting weighted sample is representative of the adult population of Great Britain by several socio-demographic factors and geography.

## Strengths and limitations

Strengths of the OPN include:

- it allows for timely production of data and statistics that can respond quickly to changing needs
- the questionnaire is developed with customer consultation, and design expertise is applied in the development stages
- robust methods are adopted for the survey's sampling and weighting strategies to limit the impact of bias
- quality assurance procedures are undertaken throughout the analysis stages to minimise the risk of error

Limitations of the OPN include:

- analysis of estimates in Wales and Scotland are based on low sample sizes, and therefore caution should be used with these estimates
- comparisons between periods and groups must be done with caution as estimates are provided from a sample survey; as such, [confidence intervals](#) are included in the datasets to present the sampling variability

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain](#) and the [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey QMI](#).

## 10 . Related links

### [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain](#)

Article | Weekly

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on people, households, and communities in Great Britain.

### [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) latest data and analysis](#)

Web page | Updated as data become available

Latest data and analysis on the coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK and its effects on the economy and society.

### [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) roundup](#)

Blog | Updated as data become available

Catch up on the latest data and analysis related to the coronavirus pandemic and its impact on our economy and society.

### [Coronavirus and vaccine hesitancy, Great Britain: 28 April to 23 May 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 9 June 2021

Hesitancy towards the coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine, based on the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey covering the period 28 April to 23 May 2021.

### [Coronavirus and vaccination rates in people aged 70 years and over by socio-demographic characteristic, England: 8 December 2020 to 11 March 2021](#)

Article | Released 29 March 2021

Linking data from the National Immunisation Management Service (NIMS) to the ONS Public Health Data Asset (PHDA), we analyse how the rates of vaccination vary by socio-demographic groups.