

Abstract

This study explores how exposure to a natural disaster impacts caregiving burdens, focusing on the provision of informal care and caregivers' health outcomes. Despite the pivotal roles of informal caregivers in the aftermath of a disaster when formal systems are disrupted, the effects of disaster exposure on their caregiving burdens remain underexplored. Using a difference-in-differences approach and taking advantage of regional variations from the Great East Japan Earthquake, we analyze the effects using a unique administrative dataset from Japan. We differentiate between two types of caregivers: actual caregivers, who were providing care before the disaster, and potential caregivers, who had the capacity to assume caregiving roles. Our findings show that informal care provision increases in disaster-affected areas for both actual and potential caregivers, with care time rising by 8.5 hours per week and the probability of providing care increasing by 2.3% points, due to a 12% point increase in property damage ratio. Additionally, mental health deteriorates exclusively among potential caregivers, while self-rated health and physical health remain unchanged. The effects are more pronounced among female or less-educated caregivers. We also identify potential mechanisms, including reduced labor force participation among potential caregivers and decreased availability of formal at-home care services.

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Keywords: natural disaster, informal care, caregiver health, difference-in-differences, formal care availability