



**CIPRIANI COLLEGE**  
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

**QUIET SACRIFICES: THE INVISIBLE  
EMOTIONAL LABOUR OF CARING  
FOR OTHERS**

# **WORK MATTERS**

**FEBRUARY 2026**

**COLUMN**

# Quiet Sacrifices: The Invisible Emotional Labour of Caring for Others

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Although emotional labour may not appear to be “work,” it does take skill, effort, and self-control. Emotional labour is sometimes the least acknowledged components of caregiving. Often when caregiving is mentioned we tend to focus on the physical aspects such as feeding, bathing, transporting, or administering medication. While these are easily noticed because of its visibility the emotional effort behind caregiving often remains hidden. This emotional labour includes providing comfort, managing the different moods of the care recipients, showing empathy and not to mention having to suppress one’s own emotions to maintain stability for others. Caregivers play a very important role in society as they deal with the wellbeing of care recipients, family dynamics, and the healthcare facilities. However, the importance of this is often unseen due to the undervaluation as well as the unpaid and underpaid nature of the care workers.

Many caregivers feel like their emotional and physical health is not prioritized in the workplace. Much less for the unpaid caregivers, such as persons caring for a family member or friend. This can lead to burnout and have negative effects for both the caregiver and the person they are providing care to. The caregivers may feel caught between multiple roles, balancing employment, family life, and caregiving responsibilities, often without an adequate support system. Feelings of guilt are also common; caregivers sometimes feel as if they should be doing more, even when they are already doing everything possible, particularly because of the expectations that they, their loved ones, and other family members have of them. Even though providing care is a very selfless and fulfilling act these individuals tend to put less priority on their wellbeing. This is often the reality for some women that play the role of caregivers for a family member or a loved one.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that most of the unpaid care work is performed by women, which significantly restricts their ability to participate and advance in the paid labour force. Without proper acknowledgment or compensation, caregivers face persistent inequality and increasing emotional demands. This invisibility not only affects individual caregivers but also perpetuates broader social and economic inequities. Often it is an expectation for women especially mothers, daughters, and wives to take up the responsibility of being the caretaker with no regards to their professional or personal lives. These women describe being the first to respond to crises, the central source of comfort, and the default managers of household emotions.

While the physical workload is substantial, many report that the emotional labour is far more exhausting and far less acknowledged. Although the notion that “women are the heart of the home” is a widely held belief that stems from traditional gender roles, modern viewpoints stress that the strength and well-being of a home come from the shared contributions and mutual support of all those within it, regardless of gender. The caring of any family member should be a joined effect. The saying “It takes a village to raise a child” and its extension, “it takes a community to care for our elders,” are significant because they serve as a reminder that providing care is a shared duty rather than one person’s job. Elderly people and children both thrive in environments of group support, benefiting from the variety of connections, camaraderie, and emotional connection that only a community can offer. The quality of care improves, caregivers feel supported rather than overwhelmed, and the wellbeing of vulnerable people are better safeguarded when families, neighbours, and social networks band together.

Recognizing the emotional labour of care is essential for

building supportive and equitable systems. Emotional caregiving is real work, it is complex, demanding, and vital to the functioning of families and communities. Policies that provide financial support, expand respite care, offer mental health services, and challenge gendered expectations can help ensure caregivers are not left emotionally depleted or economically disadvantaged. Bringing this invisible labour into the public conversation is a crucial step toward valuing caregiving in all its forms. It is also important for caregivers to develop a proper work-life balance, which allows them to be more productive at work and not neglect their personal well-being; as the adage says, “you can’t pour from an empty cup”. Take care of yourself first.