Who’s Minding the Parents?
Featured Article in the October 2014 Retirement Options Newsletter
WestNewsmagazine October 8, 2014
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Daughters devote twice as much time as sons to caring for aging parents, according to research presented at the American Sociological Association’s annual meeting.

Using data from the University of Michigan Health and Retirement Study – a national, longitudinal study that surveys more than 26,000 Americans older than age 50 every two years – Princeton University researcher Angelina Grigoryeva found:

- On average, daughters provide care for their elderly parents 12.3 hours per month, and sons provide 5.6 hours of monthly care.

- When elderly parents have both sons and daughters, gender is the main determinant of how much parental care each sibling provides.

- Sons reduce the amount of care they provide if they have a sister; daughters increase caregiving time if they have a brother.

- The amount of elderly parent care provided by daughters is associated with factors such as employment or childcare; the amount of care provided by sons depends on the availability of others helpers, such as a sister or a parent’s spouse.

According to Grigoryeva, caring for aging parents can result in significant consequences.

“Numerous empirical studies report negative mental and physical health consequences, including a higher mortality rate, for people who provide care for elderly family members,” she said. “In addition, these caregivers often have to balance elder care with employment, potentially resulting in career sacrifices and lower earnings. Providing care for elderly relatives can also impose significant financial burdens on caregivers in the form of direct expenses, as they often pay for goods and services for their care recipients.”