

Caring for caregivers: An exploratory study to assess institutional support provided by medical schools to caregiving students

Kaitlyn Butzin¹, Jamie Vassel, Ed.D.¹, Brianne Lewis, Ph.D.²

¹ Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine

² Central Michigan College of Medicine

Introduction

A caregiver is a person who helps with either the physical and/or psychological care for another person in need [1]. The dual role of being both a caregiver and a future healthcare provider presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities. Approximately 3.1% of medical students in the United States report having at least one dependent at the time of matriculation, and 7.3% report having at least one dependent at the time of graduation [2]. Recently, the lack of support for caregiving students has been acknowledged by the AAMC, and medical students themselves have urged institutions to implement caregiving policies and parental leave [3, 4, 5]. Adequate leave policies are a solution to this complex challenge. However, to promote and retain diverse professionals within academic medicine, institutions may need to implement additional strategies to support caregiving students. Current research on caregiving support in academia has been focused on the retention of faculty and staff. To our knowledge, there is no available research that examines how medical students are or could be supported by their institutions outside of an analysis of parental leave policies [6,7]. Therefore, to address this gap in research and provide data to guide administrative support of medical students, we generated our research aim.

Aims and Objectives

This study aims to identify and quantify the current landscape of support provided by medical schools to caregiving students. The purpose of this work is to identify gaps in support for caregiving medical students to inform future work. We will address our research aims through the following objectives:

1. Determine how many AAMC medical schools offer support to caregiving students from the perspective of a potential student
2. Describe and generate categories of the current support offered by AAMC medical schools

Methods

To evaluate the current climate of caregiving support in medical school, we conducted an exploratory study. We searched 170 MD-granting AAMC accredited medical schools. We used the search function on the publicly available websites of each institution. Both the medical school and the associated university websites were searched to identify resources as they may be shared. If a search function was not available, we manually searched through relevant website pages.

The authors documented the observed resource types and added a description of the resource type. For a resource to be included in this study, the following inclusion criteria were used:

1. Must be a resource or service provided by or at the medical school or associated university.
2. Must be publicized via a Google or school website search such that a prospective student can access the information.
3. Must be at a current AAMC-accredited MD-granting medical school.
4. Must be listed and described in English.

The purpose and target population of each resource were interpreted by two researchers based on publicly available descriptions of the given resource on the respective school's website. Authors iteratively assigned a code to determine similarities in caregiving support strategies and identify gaps in aid. Two researchers determined which resources met the criteria for inclusion, and if any discrepancies were encountered, a discussion was held with a third researcher to resolve the discrepancy. Types of resources were further sorted into categories based on the target student group.

Final data are reported as N (total number of schools with each type of resource) and % (percentage of the 170 medical schools with at least one resource in a given category), calculated by the following:

$$\% = \frac{\text{number of schools with a resource in a given category}}{\text{total \# of AAMC accredited medical schools}} \times 100$$

Results

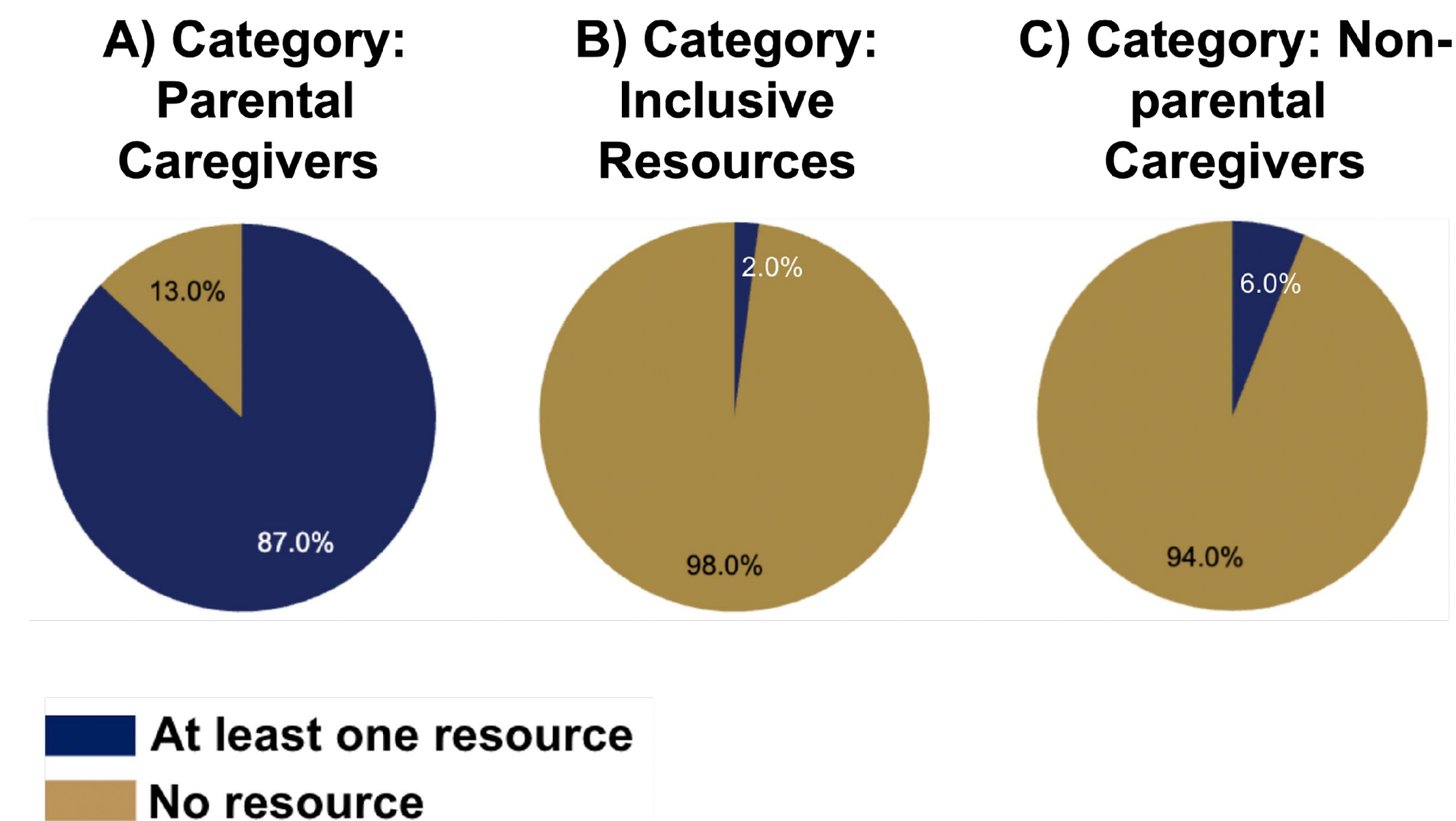


Figure 1: Overview of caregiving resources. As shown in (A), 87% of AAMC medical schools have at least one resource to support parental caregivers. In contrast, only 2% of AAMC medical schools have at least one resource for non-parental caregiver support (B). Finally, 6% of AAMC medical schools have at least one inclusive resource (C).

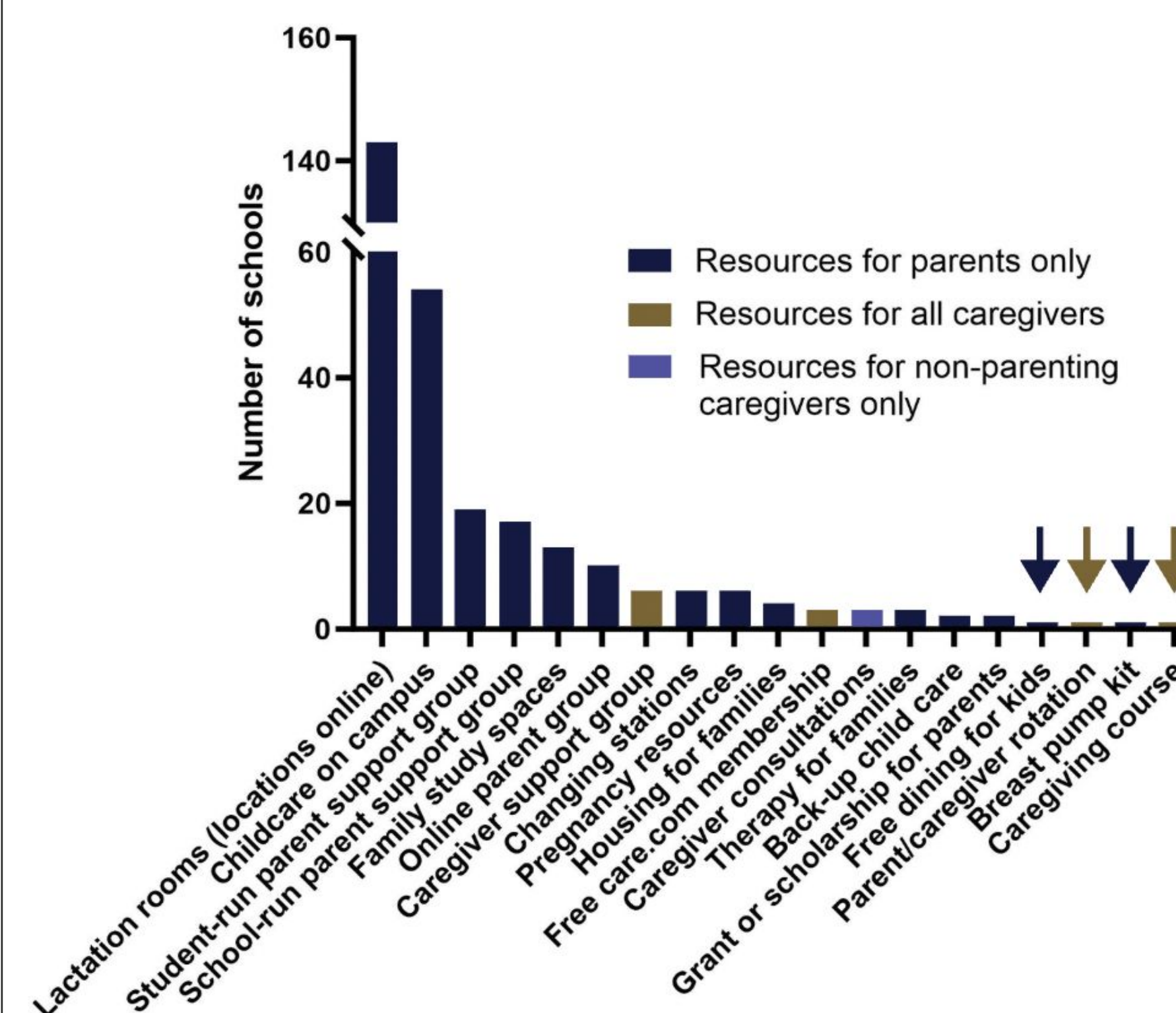


Figure 2: Distribution of caregiving resources by type. Types of support offered for caregivers at AAMC medical schools. There are 17 types of resources available at AAMC medical schools, with lactation rooms, childcare on campus, and both student-run and school-run support groups being the most common.

Conclusions

Overall, there are more resources available for parenting medical students than for non-parenting caregiver medical students. This difference is due to the visibility of the parenting population. AAMC collects data on medical students with a dependent, but the number of students with other caregiving roles is undetermined. It should be noted that non-parenting caregivers have unique needs compared to parenting students, so the resources provided for this population should be separate and specific to their needs. The discrepancy in available resources may be due to a lack of awareness and/or funding stemming from the limited data on the caregiving population. When resources are available to caregivers, accessibility and cost remain an obstacle to utilization. Further, several resources were open to all graduate students, all students, or students, faculty, and staff. As such these resources may not always be fine-tuned to medical student needs. Our data show that there is an overall lack of support for caregiving medical students, especially those who hold a non-caregiving role. This is further complicated by a lack of data on how many students are caregivers and the burden of caregiving. Lack of support for caregiving students may be a current barrier in recruiting and retaining diverse medical students.

Resources



Acknowledgements

Medical student author(s) completed this work through the Embark program at Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine.

In response to our data, OUWB has launched a new resource for caregiving students

