

Women sacrifice careers for aging parents

By Dionne Searcey, New York Times

Tracy Murphy was managing a nonprofit agency five years ago when her mother became seriously ill with heart problems. She promptly left her job to care for her, a task that has consumed Murphy ever since.

“For me, it was a no-brainer,” said Murphy, who lives in Syracuse. “When I was growing up she sacrificed for me.”

Murphy, 54, set aside her career aspirations, drained her savings account and eventually sold her gold jewelry to help make ends meet while shuttling her mother, who is 85, to doctors’ appointments and running errands.

“I always felt like I can find another job eventually – but I only have one mother,” she said.

Murphy is part of a small but economically significant group that is bucking a powerful decades-long movement of women of all ages into the labor market. In the years since the last recession began, many women like Ms. Murphy, in their late 40s and early 50s, have left the work force just as they were reaching their peak earning years.

The demands on middle-aged women to care for their parents, particularly during difficult economic times that force many families to share resources, are not the only reason for the shift. Some economists also attribute the unexpected phenomenon to extensive budget cuts by state and local governments, which employ women in large numbers and were hit harder during this recession than in previous downturns.

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