Who cares? Employer and employee responses to employee eldercare responsibilities

Alexandra Heron
Women & Work Research Group University of Sydney Business School
Keynote Address to NSW Carers Association Conference on 22 May 2015
The presentation will cover:

1. The extent of informal eldercare
2. Why it is a growing issue
3. What work rights employee-eldercarers have & what they may need
4. Research on eldercare – Women & Work Research Group, University of Sydney
5. Some few ideas about change.
2012 ABS - Disability, Ageing and Carers Survey (ABS 2013)

› 12% of entire population involved in caring for adults
45-64 age group – those caring
› 23% of women + 16% men involved in caring

2014 Australian Work and Life Index: employees (Skinner & Pocock 2014)

45-64 age group – support help or care to older person
› 30% of women & 26%

2012-2015 Two large employers: 18-28% employee-eldercarers
Public policy dilemmas

› Women’s increasing labour force participation esp in older age groups (ABS 2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2015</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>63%</td>
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<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>56%</td>
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AND

› Ageing of the population
  - A need for more informal care
  - A need for more workers (Page et al 2009)
Workplace arrangements which have been found to be useful for employee-eldercarers

- Counselling provided through workplace EAP schemes
- Eldercare resource and referral systems
- Help with eldercare planning
- Financial assistance with care costs, workplace e’care facility
- Flexible work arrangements, leave programs (US: Dembe et al 2011)
- Access to better & cheaper support services
- More flexible working, ability to reduce hours, to take blocks of leave, working from home
- Increased employer awareness of the issue (Australia: TOCC 2007)
Carers’ statutory workplace entitlements

A right to request flexible work – to provide personal care, support and assistance to someone who is frail and aged or has a disability

› 12 months service/regular casuals
› Request to be in writing
› Can be turned down on reasonable business grounds w/in 21 days
› No external appeal possible in most cases

Carers’ leave

› 10 days pa paid personal leave: accumulates (with same employer) and available as carer’s leave
› To provide care or support to family/household member who needed that due to illness, injury or an emergency

(Fair Work Act 2009)
Exploratory research with 2 large employers on employee eldercare needs (Baird & Heron 2013)

- 1 private employer (Co1), 1 public employer (PS1)

- 8 employees from each organisation & 1 HRM in each, 2 nine managers in one
  - 11 women, 5 men eldercarers (or recently so)
  - 3 were NESB
  - Aged 23-60: in Co1 mainly in 40s, in PS 1 in 50s
  - Varied educational background but largely in professional/managerial/supervisory roles
  - Nearly all viewed themselves as primary carers
  - CRs lived in their own home (8), in aged care (6), or with CG (2)
What care was provided?

- Main types of care: administrative; management of health care issues; emotional and social support; occasional household tasks

- None provided personal care such as washing and dressing, even where care giver (CG) & care recipient (CR) lived together (2/3)

- ‘Remote’ care: 4 (had) cared from a distance (PS 1)

- Most spent up to 10 hours pw, often less but involvement felt high to CGs

- Transition from independent living from the point of high stress/time commitment
What accommodations were used?

› Telephone calls: either use of worktime &/or work phone – monitoring and admin
› Paid carer’s leave
› Informal hours adjustments for more senior staff, work made up later
› Blocks of unpaid/paid leave of up to 6 months (2 each in Co1 & PS1)
› PS 1: formal flexitime for less senior staff
Employees’ responses to employer assistance

Most employees were positive/reasonably so; a few were lukewarm/critical – but a lot of guilt as these quotes form interviews show:

› ‘didn’t want to take time off because I felt like [I] was letting my job down as well. So of course you try to do everything you possibly can, you try to fit everybody in’

› ’the most, traumatic day for me ever... I probably should have taken time off, but I didn't because the nature of my job doesn't allow that. There is no, I mean [work commitments] don't wait’
What would have helped?

1. Increased access to reduced hours incl temporarily ‘That would have been fantastic, now that I look back on it… It would have just been really good to have found an extra day a week [for three months]’
2. More access to accumulated paid carer’s leave
3. Blocks of unpaid leave
4. Workload adjustments
5. Provision of information about finding aged care
6. Counselling/employee interest groups
7. Positive organisational culture
8. Colleagues’ attitudes
Employees’ views of their line managers

All viewed line managers’ attitudes as critical to accessing accommodations, one said:

‘I think it’s just the types of managers that I’ve worked through while this has happened. Like, I had managers previously where I don’t think I would have been confronted with the amount of pushback that I have been, recently, on this.’
Managerial discretion (Kelly & Kalev 2006)

Is accommodating care a reward to the ‘deserving’ employee? (Yeandle et al 2003)

Are demands on line managers when facilitating eldercare recognised? (Earl and Taylor 2015)

How do the other demands on a line manager interact with their response to an employee’s eldercare duties? (Todd & Binns 2013)
Conclusions

› Elder care needs differ from childcare needs in a number of respects
› Access to flexible working and various forms of leave is very important for employees undertaking eldercare
› Being able to access well understood & publicised entitlements appears to assist employees
› Line managers are at the ‘frontier of control’ over flexibility
› Erratic application of policies can undermine their value esp with regard to keeping careers on track
Further policy responses needed?

› A **right** to flexible/part-time work except in exceptional circumstances AND a cheap speedy way of resolving employer/employee disagreements

› New rights for eldercarers? (HREOC 2008)
  - Right to unpaid leave similar to unpaid parental leave
  - Dedicated carers leave

› Implications of consumer directed care & HACC changes for informal carers

› Should there be more Government financial assistance for employers of carers?
References


Taskforce on Care Costs (TOCC) 2007, *The hidden face of care: Combining work and caring responsibilities for the aged and people with a disability*, viewed on 20 September 2013, [http://tinyurl.com/nc4lt5w](http://tinyurl.com/nc4lt5w)
