

ELDERLY WORKERS IN NORWAY COMBINING WORK AND CARE OF OLD PARENTS

The study

In Norway, as well as in other Nordic countries, little systematic knowledge has been collected on how common it is for elderly employees to experience a squeeze between work and care obligations for their parents. Some research has been undertaken in other western countries that maintain welfare models other than the Nordic one.

Herein, we present results from a pioneer study conducted in Norway in 2007, that has investigated this care/work squeeze.

Research questions

How often does such pinches occur?

How is workplace behaviour affected?

Do publicly provided care services increase work output?

How can the workplace facilitate the situation for employees in such pinches?

The researcher

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Method

A questionnaire-based survey undertaken on a nationwide, representative sample of 2000 persons aged 45-65, who had one or both parents alive as of 1 January 2007.

50 per cent of this age group had one or both parents alive.

The response rate is 47 per cent

Results

Informants in paid work who help their parents. Past 12 months:

70% have given practical assistance and/or nursed while taking part in paid work.

57% report a twin pressure between work and care obligations

Most frequently reported effects : Irregular presence at work, concentration problems and being prevented from participating actively in social or career-promoting activities

31% Used holidays

20% Unpaid or paid leave, or sickness insurance

15% Rearranged working hours

2% Permanently reduced working hours

Very few have chosen to leave the labour market completely.

Positive effect on employment output amongst young elderly, when welfare state services are given to the very old

Institutions for elderly ease the burden

Hours worked increase among children when old parents receive home help assistance from the welfare state.

Accept and support from management and fellow workers

More than half report that increased flexibility is desirable i.e.:

- reduced work-hours

- changed work schedule

- work from home

Further research

More knowledge is needed on differences between the various parts of the labour sphere with regard to factors that impinge on how difficult this squeeze is perceived, and also in terms of facilitations that could make it easier to cope for those involved.

Workplaces differ with regard to their gender composition, level of education, labour relations (collective agreements and unionised staff, cooperation agreements with public authorities), degree of individual freedom and productivity strains.

Identifying variations will be crucial for formulation of labour and welfare policies which are adapted to the needs among various groups of employees. Employees are not a homogenous group, and the response is unlikely to be found in a standard



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