

Who cares? Employer and employee responses to employee eldercare responsibilities

Alexandra Heron & Marian Baird

Women and Work Research Group
University of Sydney Business School

<http://sydney.edu.au/business/research/wwrg/>

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To build on previous research including [*Taking Care: Mature age workers with elder care responsibilities* \(Page, Baird, Heron and Whelan, 2009\)](#)

Arising from the literature in the report:

- › It's to be expected that there will be similarities with childcare and other adult caring re employer & employee responses, particularly with respect to line managers as gatekeepers to access. This came out clearly in our interviews.
- › But there are also likely to be significant differences given the different age and employment profiles of those taking on these responsibilities and the different care provided.

Please note that data on slides 2-10 are from existing materials and sources, setting the context and need for this research project

- › To investigate employer & employee responses at work to workers' elder care responsibilities, within a gender analysis
- › To outline the drivers facilitating or frustrating employer support for workers with elder care responsibilities
- › To identify directions for further research
- › NB: organisations are identified by their sector for ease as there was one in each of the public and private sectors, but comparisons are not intended to be drawn on such a small sample

Funding: Business School research grant for small preliminary study

- › Literature
- › Background: Govt policies, who cares and how
- › Legal entitlements for time to care
- › Methodology
- › Project findings:
 - HR drivers for workplace provisions for eldercare
 - The interviewees, their work and care
 - Accommodations available, accessed & impact on employees' work
 - Factors influencing positive and negative employer responses
 - Impact of responses on work & career
 - Organisational dilemmas

- › Increase in employee adult caring to be anticipated (TOCC 2007)
- › Caregiving for adults is a gendered issue (AIHW, 2004; Gray et al., 2008)
- › Caregiving for older people differs to that provided to children (HREOC, 2007)
- › Caring by older workers adversely impacts on labour force participation (Bittman et al., 2007; Gray et al., 2008)
- › Only a minority of those of working age not in the labour force as carers re-enter when they are no longer carers (Bittman et al., 2007)
- › Research shows that job satisfaction, permanency and the availability of carer friendly provisions is associated with employees being able to continue working and caring (Thomson et al. (2008))
- › The extent of employee eldercare responsibilities as opposed to other caring for adults is a knowledge gap (Page et al., 2008)

Employee eldercare responsibilities = increasingly an issue:

- › for employees & employers: 23% of employees expect to take on care for an older adult in the next 5 years (TOCC, 2007)
- › for govt: policy aims of
 - increasing mature age workers and
 - care in the communitydraws on same pool of workers

Work + adult care: extent of the issue

- › 13% women + 11% men involved in caring for adults
- › Women more than twice as likely to be a primary carer
- › 23% of women + 16% men in 45-54 age group (ABS SDAC 2009)
- › 17% of Australian workers surveyed provided adult care (TOCC, 2007)
- › 13% of NSW women employees cared for an adult
 - 14.1% of part-timers
 - 12.3% of full-timers (OFWP, 2010)

- › Overall: men and women predominantly used paid leave and flexible working hours:
 - Men were more likely than women to use paid leave (58% cf 47.5%) or a rostered day off (19% cf 13.5%)
 - Women were much more likely to use part-time work than men (17% cf under 2%), casual work (12.5% cf 4%) and unpaid leave (17% cf 11%)

- › 21% of employees wanted to increase their use of work arrangements to care:
 - more men (25%) than women (19%) in the private sector, &
 - more women and than men in the public sector(23% cf 16%) (ABS Managing Care and Work, 2006, NSW)

Permanent staff only:

- › 10 days pa paid personal leave accumulates & available as carer's leave
- › Available for defined CRs eg family & household
- › To provide care or support to someone who requires care or support (illness, injury and emergency)
- › Compassionate leave

All staff – 2 unpaid days leave per occasion

Carers of adults:

No right to request flexible work under the *Fair Work Act*

Some rights to work hours adjustments

- › *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* (NSW)
- › *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cw)

Broader rights

- › The *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* (Vic)
- › UK & NZ

- › Research conducted in cooperation with 1 public & 1 private organisation
- › Qualitative: 8 employees & 1 HR Manager in each organisation, 2 line managers in one (public) (19 interviews, 40-60 mins in duration, taped & transcribed with interviewees' permission)
- › Examination of organisational entitlements and policies
- › Drew on Phillips et al. (2002), UK & Davey & Keeling (2004) NZ, Yeandle et al., (2006), UK

The employees interviewed for the project

- › 11 women, 5 men
- › 3 were NESB
- › With current/recent care responsibilities for parents/parents-in-law/grandmother(1)
- › Aged between 23-60, in Co1 mainly in their 40s in PS 1 in their 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)

- › In Co 1 (private):
 - 6 interviewees were in more senior/managerial roles though not all managed staff (1 was PT)
 - 2 were more junior & both PT
- › In PS 1 (public):
 - 5 were more senior managers, 3 with 10-40 staff
 - 3 were more junior but 2 were supervisors
 - All were full-time
- › All 16 were permanent staff, 13 FT
- › 11 women (3 PT); 5 men

Ageing workforce & internal workforce planning –

Co 1:

- › history of encouraging women & MAWs – specific eldercare policies in parts of Co 1
- › positioning as employer of choice to attract the ‘best people’
- › flexible & PT hours: ‘it’s something everybody does’

PS 1:

- › emerging issue – ideas ‘fairly rudimentary’, issue ‘has come up in passing’ re workforce planning
- › MAW policy is to extend mature age workers’ working life by helping balance work/personal/family
- › flexible hours – emphasising it’s for specific groups

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 CG & CRs 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

- › **"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"**
- › (Employee)

- › 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

- › Most employees were positive/reasonably so; a few were lukewarm/critical:
- › All viewed line managers' attitudes as critical to accessing accommodations
- › Nature of the organisational culture viewed as important
- › Colleagues' attitudes

- › Line managers who took ‘pastoral care’ of employees seriously/had valued employees
- › Line managers with personal experience of eldercare responsibilities
- › Employee autonomy/access to various working time flexibilities
- › Good colleagues

- › Failure to provide information about paid leave entitlements
- › Inflexibility regarding working time
- › Inflexible application of caring entitlements
- › Pressure to be present at work
- › Turning a blind eye to ostracism

"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"

(Employee)

What other assistance would employees like?

- › Increased access to reduced hours including for temporary periods of time
- › More access to accumulated paid carer's leave
- › Blocks of unpaid leave
- › Workload adjustments
- › Working from home
- › Provision of information about finding aged care/dealing with government agencies etc
- › Counselling/employee interest groups

› Fatigue

› “I don't think you ever sleep properly when you have elderly people in your home because they get up a few times during the night and I think you're waiting for them to fall or whatever.”

› (Employee)

› Unpleasant work environment

› The problem of targets

- › Managerial discretion v accountability and equity between employees
- › How to support line managers to facilitate elder care
- › Which employees ‘deserve’ accommodations?
- › Can caring be prevented from impacting on career progression?

- › 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
- › Both male and female employees are affected by eldercare responsibilities but differences need examination
- › Being able to access well understood entitlements appears to assist employees
- › Policies matter giving employees/line managers a formal platform for making and managing requests
- › Current policies need examining for relevance to eldercare
- › Line managers are at the ‘frontier of control’ over flexibility
- › Careers can be impacted by ‘too visible’ elder care responsibilities

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