

## RESEARCH BRIEF

# Balancing the Business of Health Care with Staff Care

## What is the topic of this research?

We know very little about the availability of **Caregiver Friendly Workplace Policies** (CFWPs) in the Canadian health sector. CFWPs, often termed family-friendly workplace policies, are workplace supports, strategies, and/or policies for employed caregivers. **Caregiver-employees** (CEs) are paid employees who also juggle unpaid (familial) caregiving.

The goal of the case study research was to explore the availability of CFWPs for caregiver-employees **working in the health care sector** throughout Grand Erie, Ontario. With a population of 237,339, Grand Erie consists of the City of Brantford, and well as the more rural counties of Brant, Haldimand, and Norfolk.

## How was the study done?

Conversational interviews were used to gather information about the availability of CFWPs for CEs from twenty (N=20) managers and/or employers working in the health care sector in Grand Erie. The health sector was defined broadly to include: nursing homes; hospitals; long-term care facilities; social services, and; services provided by physiotherapy, public health & pharmacies.

## Research Question

What are the CFWPs available to help CEs manage their paid employment and unpaid (familial) caregiving roles?

## Key Points to Consider

While the creation of fair and supportive work environments is important for all staff, CEs must be recognized as a specific group of employees that may have needs for work flexibility or other arrangements to sustain their health & employment.

## Key Research Findings

- Most participants were **not familiar** with CFWPs (n=13), but all participants expressed a **sincere desire** to support CEs
- Of those workplaces that offered arrangements to **employees who needed help in managing both work & family life**, the most common arrangement was *unpaid leave of absence* (11/20), followed by *flex time/flexible work hours* (8); *Employment Assistance Program* (EAP) provisions (6); *job sharing* (2); *stress leave* (1); *stress management courses* (1); *family medical leave* (1); use of *overtime hours to cover absences* (1), and; *paid caregiver leave* (1)

## RESEARCH BRIEF

# Balancing the Business of Health Care with Staff Care

## Key Research Findings continued...

- Participants agreed that paid caregiving work was largely gendered (i.e. Personal Support Workers & Nurses continued to be mostly female & men are a minority)
- Participants recognized that CEs would be **more likely** to experience absences related to their unpaid caregiving tasks, illness or disability, as well as be **more likely** to reduce their hours of work or quit their job
- Participants message was clear: **the business of health care must be balanced with staff care**; while the high cost of losing good employees was recognized, policies to support CEs must not compromise quality of care & business profitability

## Where do we go from here?

Given that the need for both paid and unpaid caregiving will increase in the future as a result of an aging population, more research is needed to examine the economic and social impact of CFWPs on CEs and the health care sector in which they work.

## Who are the researchers?

**Bharati Sethi**, Ph.D. Post-Doctoral Fellow,  
McMaster University

**Allison Williams**, Ph.D. Professor and CIHR  
Research Chair in Gender, Work & Health,  
McMaster University

## Key Messages

- Workplaces need to **better promote** available arrangements, such as work flexibility, to assist CEs in managing work & family life
- **Recognizing & accommodating** the increasing unpaid caregiving demands of employees – through offering CFWPs, would allow employers to retain good staff as well as attract new staff
- Promoting a **work-family friendly culture** is the first step in moving toward a caregiver-friendly workplace

## Publications related to this research

Sethi, B. & Williams, A. (in progress). Balancing the Business of Health Care with Staff Care: Employers perspectives on Unpaid (familial) Caregiving and Caregiver Friendly Workplace Policies. For submission to Health Policy.

## Funding Acknowledgements

This project has been funded by a CIHR-IGH Research Chair in Gender, Work and Health, titled “Chair in Gender, Health and Caregiver-Friendly Workplaces” (Award Reference Number CIHR-P 60484).