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)
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

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

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

Publications related to this research


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).