THE ESSENTIAL WORK OF DOUBLE-DUTY CARERS

2021

THE ESSENTIAL WORK OF DOUBLE-DUTY CARERS DURING COVID-19

Research Brief

Why It Matters

The term 'double-duty carer' (DDC) refers to the healthcare workforce who provide unpaid care to family members or friends outside of work. In providing care during COVID-19, DDCs are increasingly vulnerable to a blurring of boundaries and poor health outcomes.

Unpaid caring is globally known to be a women's health issue, resulting in women shouldering greater physical, social and emotional costs. COVID-19 has exacerbated these costs by increasing the care load, made it more difficult to access support, and resulted in many DDCs reaching the point of burnout. Especially during COVID-19, it is in employers' best interests to support DDCs to help prevent outcomes such as poor work performance, absenteeism and employee turnover.

Study Methods

This mixed-methods study involved a survey for employers (n=29) and interviews for DDCs (n=16). Using perspectives of both employers and DDCs, the study investigated how DDCs' caring experience, supports and use of coping strategies had changed with the COVID-19 pandemic. Triangulation of both perspectives was then used to create evidence-based recommendations to enhance DDC supports.

Research Questions

1 Given the perspectives of employers and DDCs, how has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted double-duty caring and supports?

2 What is needed to better support DDCs during the COVID-19 pandemic?

PAID CARING — DDCs — UNPAID CARING
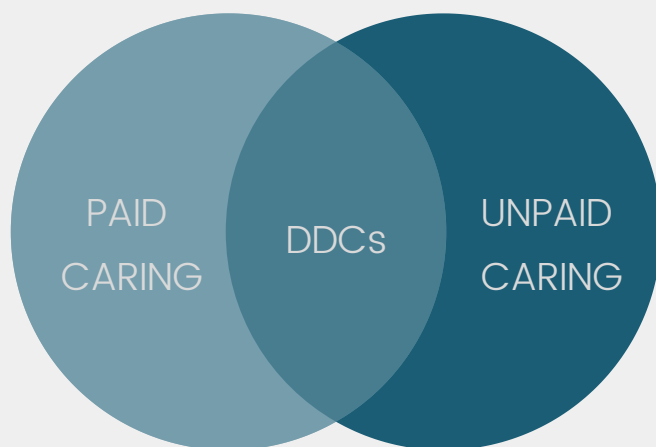
Researchers

Sakshi Mehta, MSc. in Global Health, McMaster University
Allison Williams, Ph.D., McMaster University
Bharati Sethi, Ph.D., University of Western Ontario
Andrea Rishworth, Ph.D., McMaster University
Li Wang, Ph.D., McMaster University
Catherine Ward-Griffin, Ph.D., Western University
Gavin Andrews, Ph.D., McMaster University

Gender Health and Caregiver Friendly Workplaces

CIHR IRSC
Canadian Institutes Instituts de recherche
of Health Research en santé du Canada

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
Canada

McMaster University

What Does the Research Say?

Employers

Less than half of the employers added support for their DDCs despite recognizing their poorer wellness during COVID-19

A **lack of awareness** on DDCs or what supports are needed may be barriers to implementing support

Employers may not recognize **accessibility barriers** (stigma, reluctance to share needs) that DDCs face in accessing support

DDCs

DDCs are experiencing an increased care load, working greater hours and have increased fears of safety, resulting in **physical and emotional strain**

DDCs feel distrust towards their employers, and feel **uncomfortable and unsupported** at work, despite communicating their DDC needs

Due to COVID-19, DDCs are unable to access support networks and services that supported their care tasks. **Reduced support** contributes to high care load, stress and burnout of DDCs.

New coping strategies: contacting unions or authorities for work support, staying away from home during outbreaks, increased safety precautions and reducing personal time to time manage care work

Recommendations
and Desired Support by DDCs

EMPLOYERS

01. Improve employers' understanding of the DDC role

Improving employers' understanding of: what the DDC role entails, its consequences, and the importance of supporting DDCs.

02. Increased employers' involvement

Employers being present on frontlines of care, engaging in conversation with DDCs on specific needs during COVID-19.

03. Implementing DDC-specific support

Identifying DDCs to gauge specific needs. Make appropriate support available. Collaboratively plan in advance for care emergencies during COVID-19.

DDCs

04. Connecting DDCs

Implementing ways for DDCs to connect both at and outside work to enable sharing of lived experience and supports/resources.

05. Improving support awareness and accessibility

Ensuring DDCs are aware of public and work supports relevant to self-care, carer-employees, COVID-19, and caring responsibilities.

School of Earth, Environment and Society, McMaster University | CIHR Healthy and Productive Work Grant