

One in four working carers considering quitting their job, research shows

June 24 2020, by Sophie Armour

A quarter of working carers are considering giving up their jobs and nearly 1.6 million struggle to combine employment with caring responsibilities, according to new research by the University of Sheffield and released in collaboration with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

The study, based on a representative sample of unpaid carers in paid employment in England and Wales, found that one in three – approximately 1.2 million people – provide 30 or more hours of care per week, the equivalent of a full-time job on top of their paid work. Around 700,000 people combine full-time employment with full-time care.

The team of experts from the University of Sheffield's Sustainable Care: connecting people and systems research programme, led by Professor Sue Yeandle, are calling on employers to offer paid carers' leave, flexible working hours and mental health support. Their research showed that working carers with a carer-friendly employer are less likely to have taken unpaid leave or sick days to provide care, or to have considered leaving their role due to caring responsibilities.

The study showed that almost half (46 per cent) of carers had used their annual leave to provide care, and 15 per cent had used sick leave. Nearly a third (30 per cent) had reduced their working hours, while 36 per cent had refused a job offer or promotion, or decided against applying for a job, because of their role as a carer. Women were more likely than men to find it difficult to combine caring with their job.

However, more than a quarter (28 per cent) of working carers had not told anyone at their job about their additional responsibilities – with 39 per cent of these thinking it would not change anything.

Among working carers who said their [employer](#) provided no form of support, paid leave was the most commonly desired policy, followed by flexitime and the ability to work at home on some days.

Professor Sue Yeandle, Director of the Centre for International Research on Care, Labour and Equalities at the University of Sheffield, said: "This report addresses a vital issue of our time. Growing numbers of employees provide regular care for relatives or friends who need their support because of serious illness, a disability or problems that affect them in [daily life](#).

"In recent months, as working lives have been disrupted by a global pandemic and the support needs of older people and those with chronic health conditions and disabilities have been drawn to everyone's attention, the crucial importance of working carers' dual role has come into sharper focus.

"Evidence from around the world has previously shown that, without support, the challenges employees face in combining work and care are stressful and debilitating, and can lead workers to quit their [jobs](#), with lifelong consequences for incomes and careers. Working life, and the circumstances of employees, organisations and businesses, can all be improved by responding to the evidence-based recommendations in this report."

Claire McCartney, Senior Resourcing and Inclusion Adviser at the CIPD, said: "Conversations about health conditions and vulnerable household members during the coronavirus crisis mean that employers, some for the first time, are gaining a true understanding of just how

many of their employees have caring responsibilities. Others may still be in the dark. We are urging employers not to miss this opportunity to talk to staff about their caring commitments.

"When working carers feel well supported by their employers, they are more likely to experience better wellbeing and are less likely to consider reducing their hours or quitting their job. Employers can address these issues by making sure they have a clear carer policy or guidance, by supporting flexible working and providing paid carers' leave. Line managers need to feel supported to help empower carers to manage their work and caring commitments with simple and practical adjustments. This will not only benefit carers, but also their employers who may otherwise struggle to retain staff or see a drop in productivity.

"The government is consulting on unpaid leave for working carers, but the CIPD is calling for the introduction of an annual entitlement to five days' statutory paid carers' leave. Unpaid leave would leave some workers unable to meet financial obligations, and this will go a long way to addressing some of the issues presented in this new report."

The report, *Supporting Working Carers: How Employers and Employees can Benefit*, was written by Dr Annie Austin and Professor Jason Heyes as part of the Sustainable Care: connecting people and systems research programme based at the University of Sheffield. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, the programme is a multi-disciplinary project exploring social care arrangements in the UK and around the world.

The findings follow research last week from the University of Sheffield that found unpaid carers are twice as likely as the general public to have relied on a foodbank during the Covid-19 pandemic.

More information: The report is available online:

[circle.group.shef.ac.uk/wp-con...ing-carers_WEB-1.pdf](https://circle.group.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020-06-24-one-in-four-working-carers-considering-quitting-their-job-research-shows-2020-06-24.pdf)

Provided by University of Sheffield

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