

Informal care is difficult to combine with work

June 25 2024



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Informal care has a huge impact on your working life. Informal caregivers earn less per hour and are less satisfied with their job. This is the conclusion reached by sociologist Klara Raiber, who will defend her Ph.D. dissertation at Radboud University on 2 July. With more people becoming informal caregivers, the researcher says it is high time for structural support to be provided.

In our aging society, many people are informal caregivers—especially as more and more professional care has been replaced by informal care in recent years. "Caring for friends or family with [health problems](#) is placing more and more demands on people," explains researcher Klara Raiber. "This means that informal care is having a bigger impact on other aspects of life, such as work."

Raiber studied the extent of this impact on work by conducting multi-year surveys among broad sections of the Dutch, British and German populations. The results are clear: a relatively large number of informal caregivers find caretaking obligations difficult to combine with their work.

Some informal caregivers have had to reduce their hours or even stop working altogether to care for a relative or friend. Others have changed jobs or become self-employed in order to have more flexibility in their working hours. In addition, it seems that informal caregivers earn less and are less satisfied with their jobs than their non-care-giving colleagues.

Men benefit

The sociologist was able to compare different types of informal caregivers. For all these groups, providing informal care seemed to have a negative effect on work. "However, we can see that people who have been informal caregivers for many years experience slightly more benefits," explains Raiber.

"This may be because they learn from providing informal care, for example about time management and empathy. For this group, the pay gap with other colleagues is smaller, probably because they have found a way to combine work and informal care better."

Using data from Statistics Netherlands, Raiber was able to investigate how providing informal care affects pay. According to the researcher, the fact that informal caregivers earn less may be because employers feel that informal caregivers are less productive. As a result, they are less likely to be promoted. And some informal caregivers take time off work or work less, so their pay doesn't keep pace.

For one group of men, however, providing informal care was found to be more beneficial. Raiber states, "Men sometimes even get a [higher salary](#) during or after a period of caregiving. This could be because men who are informal caregivers become more empathetic and better at managing their time. Those qualities in men are especially valued by employers, while women are already expected to have those skills."

Aging

More support needs to be offered to informal caregivers, says the researcher, especially in the face of an aging society. "The problems experienced by informal caregivers are sometimes dismissed as being an individual's problem, but they're not. More and more people are having to deal with them. There are things like informal care leave, but that doesn't solve the problem of lower pay."

Policymakers should also continue to invest in professional care, thinks Raiber. "Informal care can be a great help to caregivers and dependents, but what happens to grandpa if his informal caregiver falls ill? There has to be an alternative.

"Also, professional care doesn't have to be more expensive than informal care. If you look at how much less time a family caregiver works, it might only be a few minutes on average per week. That may seem little, but if one-third of the population does that, a total of hundreds of thousands of hours less per week is worked. That also costs society

money."

Provided by Radboud University

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