



Socio-demographic context for family/ friend caregiving and employment

Summary

Family/friend caregivers' world is changing in ways that will likely have profound implications for their need, and ability, to balance care and employment demands. Using Statistics Canada 2002 General Social Survey data and a review of the academic literature we identified the social, economic and political trends that may impact work-life balance for family/friend caregivers.

Socio-demographic trends:

- Increased demand for care
- More women in the paid labour market
- Later retirement
- More men providing care
- Changes in family composition and structure
- Later marriage and childbearing
- More geographic mobility
- More seniors will have a living spouse; fewer will have living children
- Less access to formal services

Implications for the future:

- More family members and friends will face the challenge of trying to meet simultaneously the demands of employment, caring for dependent adults and in some cases, caring for dependent children.
- Care demands are likely to be heavier— more complex and shared by a smaller care network.
- Caregivers will bear a bigger burden in terms of reduced employment opportunities and income as well as negative impacts on health and social well-being.
- More employees with competing care demands means more tardiness, absenteeism, turnover and distractions at work, which translate into lower productivity and profitability for employers.
- Today's middle-aged caregivers may be the poor and sick seniors of tomorrow, relying more heavily on public income security and health programs.

Strategies needed before the demographic crunch hits:

- Flexible working arrangements
- Paid and unpaid leaves
- Pension measures such as a CPP/QPP dropout provision or pension points
- Systematic assessment of caregiver needs accompanied by coordinated service access

Caregivers' world is changing in ways that will likely have profound implications for their need, and ability, to balance care and employment demands. Recent and projected socio-demographic trends may (a) increase the demand for care; (b) reduce the supply of family member/friend caregivers; and/or (c) reduce the supply of formal care.

Research Objectives

- To review the social, economic and policy trends that may impact work-life balance for caregivers.

Data Sources

- 2002 Statistics Canada General Social Survey
- Review of the academic literature

Increased demand for care

Between the years 2000 and 2020 the percentage of Canadians over the age of 65 is projected to increase by 43%. Population aging is driven by increased longevity and below replacement birth rates.

While future Canadian seniors will reach later life in better health than in the past, aging often is associated with frailty. It is the oldest-old age cohort that

is most likely to experience health and physical limitations and is increasing in size at the fastest rate. As a result, demand for eldercare is projected to rise.

In addition, the same improvements in public health and safety, nutrition, and medical knowledge and technology that has increased life expectancy, generally also have increased survival rates and life expectancy for those experiencing catastrophic disabilities at birth, or illness or injury at any age. As a result, there are more children and adults with disability in our population who need care and support.

More women in the paid labour market

One of the most profound socio-demographic shifts in recent history is the increase in women's labour force participation rate. Between 1976 and 2003 the proportion of women aged 15 and older who were in the labour force rose from 46% to 62% and has continued to climb. The biggest increase has been among women in their prime working years (aged 25-54), whose labour force participation rate now stands at over 80%.

In contrast, men's labour force participation rates have declined

slowly for the last 30 years such that the gender gap is shrinking.

Women are also more likely than men to provide care to family members and friends, and more likely to help with tasks that are more difficult to balance with paid work demands.

In combination, these factors have increased the likelihood that both men and women will occupy family care and paid work roles simultaneously. In 2002, 1.4 million Canadians over the age of 45 combined paid employment and eldercare; almost all men and 70% of women were employed full-time.

Later retirement

After a long, slow decline in the average age of retirement, it began to rebound in the late 1990s. As a result, more Canadians aged 55 and older are still in the labour force. This trend increases the chances that those caring for older family members and friends will also be employed. It also may cause care demands to interfere with retirement plans, either by forcing caregivers to delay retirement to make up for lost income and benefits or additional care-related expenses, or by forcing early retirement to meet intense care demands.

More men providing care

Men are increasingly involved in caring for family members and friends and as a result, the gender gap is narrowing. Men, however, still tend to help with tasks that can be done on their own time (home maintenance, yard work and transportation). This means that men and women are increasingly likely to be trying to balance paid work and care demands, but that care demands are more likely to interfere with women's paid work than men's.

Changes in family composition and structure

For seniors who are parents of the baby boom generation, the proportion who have no surviving children has been falling. However, because subsequent cohorts have had fewer children, the proportion of seniors without surviving children will increase.

In addition, higher rates of divorce and remarriage have altered traditional two birth-parent family structures and made family ties and obligations more tenuous. For example, it's not clear what obligation former spouses, in-laws and children from previous marriages feel toward care for dependent adults.

Later marriage and childbearing

Canadians are marrying and having children later in life. As a result, the chances that they will be responsible for caring for older family members and their own children simultaneously, in addition to holding down paid jobs, are greater.

More geographic mobility

Canadians are moving more frequently and further away from other family members and friends, often for economic reasons. For example, adult children may have to move away from their home towns in order to find employment, or older family members may move away from more expensive retirement centers to communities where the cost of living is more manageable on a reduced and fixed retirement income. As a result, relatives and friends often live at greater distances from each other when care needs arise. Long distance caregiving is difficult and costly to maintain.

More seniors will have a living spouse

Increased longevity and a narrowing of the gender gap in life expectancy means that older men and women will be less

likely to be widowed in the future. This decline in rates of widowhood is even expected to offset the effect of increasing divorce rates. As a result, the likelihood will be greater that seniors will have a spouse to support them should the need arise.

Less access to formal services

Changes in the health and continuing care systems are making it more difficult for seniors and their family/friend caregivers to access formal services when needed. According to the 2001 Canada Census, fewer than 10% of senior women and 5% of senior men were in residential long-term care and this proportion has declined since 1981. Shortages of residential long-term care spaces are widely reported. Waiting lists for a subsidized space in a residential care facility can be 18 months or more and costs are substantial (between \$3000 and \$5600 per month for a private pay, long-term care bed in Edmonton for example).

Access to formal Home Care services is also severely (and increasingly) limited. According to the 2002 Romanow report, only 17% of Canadian seniors receive such services and those also get far too few hours to allow for any meaningful labour

force attachment for caregivers. According to a study of caregiving conducted for Health Canada by Decima Research in 2002, 25% of caregivers reported they were providing care because home care services weren't available, 1/3 of those receiving home care reported needing more help, and another 10% said their family member would be better cared for in a residential care setting.

In addition, expectations about the type and complexity of care family/friend caregivers can and should perform are increasing. Service providers increasingly emphasize training for unpaid care providers to perform even highly medicalized tasks such as intravenous therapy, catheterization, medication administration, dialysis and the like. Such complex and recurring tasks are much more difficult to accommodate to employment demands.

Policy Implications

Collectively these trends mean one thing: in the future more family members and friends will face the challenge of simultaneously trying to meet the demands of employment, caring for dependent adults and in some cases, caring for dependent children.

Care demands also are likely to be heavier—more complex and

shared by a smaller care network. Since heavy care demands are known to result in more employment consequences for family/friend caregivers, we can also expect caregivers to bear a bigger burden in terms of reduced employment opportunities and income, as well as psychological, emotional, physical and social consequences.

Implications for employers, the labour market and the economy in general, flow directly from implications for individual caregivers. More employees with competing care demands means more tardiness, absenteeism, turnover and distractions at work, all of which translate into lower productivity and profitability for employers.

These same employment consequences mean less income security—in present and future—for caregivers. Lower income caregivers pay lower taxes and may rely more heavily on income security programs and social services. The combined effect of caregiving demands and resulting economic insecurity can translate into poorer mental and physical health for caregivers.

Today's middle aged caregivers may be the poor and sick seniors of tomorrow.

Now is the time, before the peak of the demographic crunch hits, for the public and private sectors to consider a coordinated, comprehensive approach to supporting Canadians with competing care and employment demands. Strategies for consideration include:

- Flexible working arrangements
- Paid and unpaid leaves of a few days to a year or more to attend to urgent and extreme care responsibilities
- Pension measures such as a CPP/QPP caregiver dropout provision similar to the child care dropout, or pension points that allow caregivers to continue to accumulate pension benefits while performing unpaid caring labour instead of paid employment
- Systematic assessment of caregiver needs accompanied by coordinated service access.



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