



## Reworking work: The experiences of employed caregivers of older adults

### Summary

Employed caregivers' ability to balance the competing demands of paid employment, unpaid caregiving, and other life roles often results in scheduling conflicts, time pressures, and workplace compromises. Knowledge of the factors that precipitate workplace compromises will inform the development of public and private sector policies which enable employed caregivers to remain in the paid labour force while continuing to provide the bulk of care to seniors in Canada. Using Statistics Canada's 2002 General Social Survey (GSS) on caregiving and social support, we determined the prevalence of work-place adjustments made by employed caregivers over 45 years of age and identified characteristics that put employed caregivers' jobs and incomes at risk. We found that:

- In 2002, more than 1.4 million Canadians over the age of 45 combined paid employment and care to older adults, and most caregivers worked full-time.
- Most employed caregivers cared for more than one older adult, and had been providing care for more than two years.
- Overall, employed women caregivers made more workplace adjustments than men.
- Changing work patterns and reducing work hours were the most common workplace adjustments; less than 3% of employed caregivers declined a promotion and less than 2% quit a job because of their caregiving responsibilities.
- Men who provided personal care, or who lived close to the care receiver, were more likely to report both changing their work patterns and reducing their work hours than those who did not. Men who cared for a close family member were more likely to reduce their hours of work, while men who cared for more than one senior were more likely to change work patterns than those who did not.
- Women caregivers who provided personal care, cared for more than one older adult, or cared for a close family member were more likely to report both changing work patterns and reducing work hours to provide care than those who did not. Women who lived with the care receiver were more likely to report changing their work patterns to provide care than those who did not.
- Women are at greater risk than men because providing personal care is a strong predictor of making workplace adjustments and employed women caregivers provided four times as much personal care as men. Better access to Homecare would likely make the balancing act easier.
- Although providing end-of-life care was not a significant predictor of changing work patterns or reducing work hours for employed caregivers, the EI Compassionate Care Leave may help maintain employed caregivers' attachment to the labour force.
- The lack of a caregiving drop-out provision in the Canada Pension Plan leaves the over 240,000 employed caregivers who reduced their hours of work and the 20,000 who quit their job to provide unpaid care facing profound income and benefit losses.

The majority of Canadians who provide assistance to an older adult with long-term health problems are employed. Balancing the competing demands of paid employment, unpaid caregiving, and other life roles such as parent, spouse, or volunteer, often results in scheduling conflicts and time pressures. In their *'struggle to juggle'*, employed caregivers may make accommodations in their paid work.

Knowledge of the factors that precipitate workplace adjustments will help public and private sector policy makers develop strategies to enable employed caregivers to remain in the paid labour force while providing unpaid care to family and friends. In this study, we investigate the factors that make it more likely that employed caregivers will make workplace adjustments.

### Research objectives

- To describe employed caregivers;
- To examine the extent to which employed caregivers make workplace adjustments;
- To identify characteristics that predict the likelihood that employed caregivers will make workplace adjustments.

### Data

We analyzed Statistics Canada's 2002 General Social Survey (GSS) on caregiving and social support. The GSS sample included persons over age 45 who lived in private households. Telephone interviews were conducted; the response rate was 86%.

From the total sample of 24,870 respondents aged 45 and older, we drew a sub-sample of 2,352 people who had provided assistance to a senior with long-term health problems and participated in paid employment in the 12 months preceding the survey. Men made up slightly more than half the sample (52.8%).

### Analysis

We first described the characteristics of employed caregivers and the prevalence of four workplace adjustments:

- changed work patterns (arrived late/left early or worked from home part-time)
- reduced hours of work
- declined a promotion, and
- quit a job.

We then used logistic regression analyses to determine the importance of the characteristics of the caregiver and the caregiving situation on workplace

adjustments. Analyses were conducted separately for women and men.

### Who are employed caregivers?

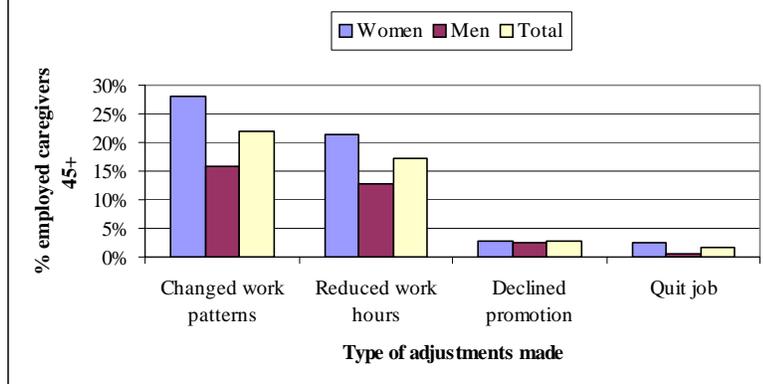
In 2002, more than 1.4 million Canadians over the age of 45 combined paid employment and elder care provision, and almost all men and 70% of women were employed full-time. The majority of employed caregivers over the age of 45 were well-educated, married or living common-law, and had no children under the age of 15 living at home.

At least 75% of employed caregivers provided care to close kin (spouse, parent, or parent-in-law), and most lived close to the care receiver. Over 70% of employed caregivers provided care to more than one older adult, and most had been providing care for more than 2 years. Twelve percent of care receivers had died during the 12 months preceding the survey.

### Caregivers adjust paid employment to care

Overall, employed women caregivers reported making more workplace adjustments than men (see Figure 1). The most common workplace adjustment was changing work patterns

Figure 1: Prevalence of Workplace Adjustments



followed by reducing work hours. More than 1 in 4 employed women caregivers arrived late, left early, or worked at home part-time compared to 16% of employed men caregivers. Similarly, more than 1 in 5 employed women caregivers reduced their hours of paid work while nearly 13% of employed men did so.

In comparison, the least reported adjustments were declining a promotion or quitting a job because of caregiving demands. While less than 3% of currently employed caregivers reportedly made these difficult sacrifices, the economic impact of such actions can be profound. Over 38,000 employed caregivers, mostly women, turned down a promotion and its associated pay increases; slightly more than 20,000 quit a job, sacrificing employment income and

benefits, and future pension income for unpaid care work.

### Who's at risk of changing paid work patterns?

Over 308,000 employed caregivers, many of them women, changed their work patterns to provide care to older adults with long term health problems in 2002. That is, their caregiving responsibilities caused them to arrive late, leave early, or work from home part-time.

Employed women caregivers who provided personal care, cared for more than one older adult, cared for an immediate family member, or lived in the same building as the care receiver were more likely to report changing their work patterns to provide care than those who did not. Caring for a close family member (spouse, parent, or in-law) was the strongest predictor of changing work patterns for women: those caring for

close kin were almost 2-1/2 times more likely to change their work patterns than those who cared for extended family members or friends.

As with women, men who provided personal care, cared for more than one older adult, or who lived with the care receiver were more likely to report changing their work patterns to provide care than those who did not. For men, geographic proximity to the care receiver was the strongest predictor of changing work patterns: men who lived with the care receiver were more than 3 times as likely to report changing their work patterns as those who did not co-reside.

### Who's at risk of reducing hours of paid work?

Nearly a quarter million employed caregivers, many of them women, reduced their hours of paid work, and hence their current income, employment benefits, and future pension income, to provide care to older adults with long term health problems in 2002.

Employed women caregivers who provided personal care, cared for more than one older adult, or cared for an immediate family member were more likely to reduce their paid work hours than those who did not.

Helping more than one older adult was the strongest predictor of reduced hours of paid work for women: those who did were more than twice as likely to reduce their paid work hours as those caring for only one person.

Similarly, employed men caregivers who provided personal care, cared for an immediate family member, or lived with the care receiver were more likely to report reducing their hours of paid work than those who did not. As with changing work patterns, living with the care receiver was the strongest predictor for men of reducing hours of paid work: men living with the care receiver were 3 times more likely to reduce their paid work hours than those who did not co-reside with the care receiver.

### **Policy Implications**

The evidence demonstrates that many employed caregivers made workplace adjustments, and some forfeited paid employment altogether, because of their caregiving responsibilities. Public and private sector policies that maintain employees' ties to the paid labour market while enabling them to provide care to family members and friends with chronic health problems will pay off for

both employees, by reducing economic consequences, and for employers by reducing absenteeism and turnover, and increasing productivity.

Identifying risk factors can help target policy initiatives. For example, providing personal care puts employed caregivers at greater risk of changing work patterns and reducing paid work hours. Employed women caregivers are at even greater risk because they provide 4 times as much personal care as their male counterparts. Better access to Homecare for assistance with personal care may alleviate the need to change work patterns or hours.

Similarly, providing for Family Responsibility Leaves in provincial labour codes and flexible workplace policies may allow employed caregivers to change their work patterns without placing their jobs at risk or affecting their productivity.

Other strategies are needed for employed caregivers who reduce paid work hours or quit a job because of their caring demands. These caregivers sacrifice current income, employment benefits, and future pension benefits to provide unpaid care. The Compassionate Care Leave

program protects employed caregivers' jobs and provides up to 6 weeks of Employment Insurance benefits to those caring for a gravely ill family member. Our finding that providing end-of-life care did not predict changing work patterns or reducing work hours for currently employed women and men caregivers suggests that the program may not target the most at-risk caregivers.

The Canada Pension Plan allows parents to drop years of low or no earnings out of the calculation of their pension benefits. No similar provision exists for those caring for dependent adults. As a result, the over 260,000 employed caregivers aged 45 and older who reduced their paid work hours or quit their job in 2002 to provide care may have compromised their future pension benefits.

In sum, amendments to Canada's labour and income security policies could help employed caregivers maintain full participation in the paid labour force while supporting family members and friends with chronic health problems.

This fact sheet is based on Jason Walker's (2005) unpublished MSc thesis titled: Still work-life 2002: A portrait of employed eldercare providers in Canada.

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