

The Impact of Adult Caregiving on County Government Employees

Research Paper submitted to the Department of Family Development
May 13, 2009

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Date approved by Department of Family Development Research and Studies Committee: April 13, 2009

Abstract

One in four adults is a caregiver, and caregivers who are in the workforce cost employers over \$34 billion annually. To address the growing needs of employees who are also caregivers, UW-Extension educators in six counties, along with the Program Specialist in Aging, developed a brief on-line assessment tool and piloted this survey with county government employees. Over half of all county employees who responded to the survey were in a caregiving role. Sixty-six percent of caregivers indicated they had to miss work in order to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities, while many caregivers used lunch hours and break times to arrange appointments and provide other assistance for the care receiver. County employees responding to the survey wanted to learn about caregiving benefits offered through county government and information about planning for future caregiving needs, including legal, financial, and healthcare issues, and available community resources for caregivers. Survey data was shared with county employees, department heads and administration, county boards of supervisors, and community partners to raise awareness of the impact of caregiving on the county government workforce and to bring needed educational resources to assist employed caregivers.

Situation Statement

Cooperative Extension Family Living Educators regularly assess and address the needs of families in their communities. With county, state, and national demographic data demonstrating a notable increase in the age 65 and older population, recent attention by Extension Educators is focused on adult caregiver needs. The needs of employed caregivers are of particular interest since they have increased challenges with balancing family life and work responsibilities.

Family caregivers comprise 13% of the workforce (Neal & Wagner, 2002). Fifty-nine percent of family caregivers who care for someone over the age of 18 either work or have worked while providing care. Sixty-two percent of employed caregivers have had to make some adjustments to their work life, from reporting late to work to giving up work entirely (National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, 2004). The 2008 National Study of Employers (Galinsky, Bond, Sakai, Kim, & Giuntoli, 2008) found that more employers provided information about services to older adults today (39%) than in 1998 (23%). This increase is associated with an increase in the number of employees providing care.

As part of a national employed caregiver pilot project¹, University of Wisconsin-Extension Family Living Educators and the Program Specialist in Aging identified the need for an employee caregiving assessment instrument. This tool was developed to provide a statistical look at the extent of caregiving and the need for caregiving outreach in each county. Since county government is often the largest employer in rural counties, and because UW-Extension Educators have a close partnership with county government employers and employees, these connections were a feasible starting point for the survey pilot. The survey was distributed to

¹ *The Prepare to Care Workplace Project* was a two-year grant awarded to Cooperative Extension in four states (New York, North Carolina, Oregon, and Wisconsin) through the AARP Foundation.

county government employees in six Wisconsin counties via an online link; data and outcomes from that pilot are presented here.

Objective

The objective of the employed caregiver survey instrument was to assess the impact of caregiving on employed caregivers in county government. By determining the scope and needs of employed adult caregivers in each county, UW-Extension Educators could provide a solid foundation for future caregiver education efforts.

Methodology

A survey instrument was developed and used to determine the number of employed adult caregivers in each county, personal demographic characteristics including age and gender, the employee's scope of caregiving responsibilities, and the effects of caregiving on work responsibilities. Caregivers were asked to define specific kinds of information that would assist them in balancing their work and caregiving responsibilities. The survey utilized both quantitative and qualitative questions to provide a mixture of comparative numerical data as well as anecdotal information that would tell a powerful story to employers and policy makers.²

The confidential survey was developed in a web-based format. Human-subjects protection approval was obtained through the UW-Extension Institutional Review Board. The Family Living Educators in six Wisconsin counties (Bayfield, Calumet, Green Lake, Manitowoc, Taylor, and Washburn) selected their respective county executive, administrator, and/or personnel director as the employer contact person. Each pilot county received prior approval through their respective county administrative structure to disseminate the electronic questionnaire. Time was spent in each county to determine exactly which employees could receive the survey via e-mail as there were some employees, by the nature of their jobs, who did

² To receive a copy of the Employed Caregiver Survey questionnaire, contact molly.spaulding@ces.uwex.edu.

not have computer access (i.e., highway department personnel and, in some cases, law enforcement). The question of whether to include contracted personnel, part-time, or limited-term employees was also taken into consideration with each county deciding who would be considered a “county employee.” If employees did not have computer access, a hard copy of the survey was provided.

The electronic questionnaires were distributed with an explanatory e-mail regarding the importance of collecting information about the workforce. Questionnaires were typically sent out early in the week and remained active for three weeks. Reminders to complete the questionnaire were sent via e-mail to employees at the beginning of the second and third weeks. Reminders were found to be vital to the overall success of respondent totals. During the three week time period, arrangements were made to distribute and collect hard copy surveys from those departments that did not have computer access. Hard copy data was entered into the computerized survey instrument by UW-Extension Educators. Results were tabulated automatically through a web-based process; at the close of the survey, overall data collection from the web-based survey instrument was compiled at the state level. The overall pilot study examined the collective data from all six counties. Secondary analysis of the six-county survey data was completed with the assistance of a graduate student from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

As part of the pilot study, executive summary sheets were developed and used to share local survey data with county administrators and county boards, department heads, human resource personnel, and employees. The results from the survey were also shared with County Extension Committees, Aging Units, and in some cases, community service organizations such as Rotary, Kiwanis, and Optimists.

Results and Findings

Of the 676 employees who responded to the survey (response rate of 48%), 378 were identified as caregivers (62%), having responded that they have provided at least one of the following caregiving responsibilities for an adult family member or friend in the preceding six months: driving to appointments, assisting with home maintenance, grocery shopping, preparing meals, completing forms, assisting with bill payment, arranging meals or appointments, providing personal care, or arranging services for a long-distance friend or family member. The variety of caregiving responsibilities performed by these caregivers included driving to the doctor (41%); home maintenance (38%); grocery shopping (31%); legal, financial, and healthcare documentation (31%); arranging meals (24%); paying bills (22%); arranging for services (11%); and personal care (10%).

Caregiver Characteristics

Of the 378 total caregivers, 106 identified themselves as the main caregiver, while 272 stated others were involved in assisting with caregiving responsibilities (this group will subsequently be referred to as *other caregivers*). Among the main caregivers (n=106), 83 were female and 22 were male. Twenty-six percent were 36-45 years old, 43% were 46-55 years old, and 26% were 56-65 years old. Fifty-nine percent of main caregivers were providing care for one adult, 33% were providing care for two adults, and 9% were providing care for three or more adults. Among other caregivers, 53% were caring for one adult, while 37% were caring for two adults, and 10% were providing care for three or more adults. In addition, 25% of other caregivers were male, compared to 21% of main caregivers who were male. See Table 1 for more caregiver characteristics.

Care Receiver Characteristics

Parents or in-laws were the largest group of care receivers among both main and other caregivers (65% and 72%, respectively). The majority of care receivers lived in their own residence within 100 miles of the caregiver (61% among main caregivers and 70% among other caregivers). However, 26% of main caregivers reported they lived in the same household as the care receiver, while only 3% of other caregivers lived in the same household as the care receiver.

Impacts of Caregiving on Employment

The majority of main and other caregivers (61% and 87%, respectively) reported spending up to seven hours per week to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities. A smaller percentage, 25% of main caregivers and 10% of other caregivers, spent eight to 14 hours per week on caregiving responsibilities. The remaining caregivers (13% and 3%, respectively) reported spending 15 or more hours per week completing caregiving responsibilities (see Figure 1).

Among all caregivers, 226 individuals (66%) had to miss work due to their caregiving responsibilities. As the hours spent providing care per week increased, there was an associated increase in the need to miss work due to caregiving. Additionally, as hours of care increased, there was a greater likelihood of caregivers using sick leave, vacation days, personal time, working from home, or taking unpaid leave to fulfill caregiving responsibilities. Finally, when caregivers who spent up to 7 hours per week caregiving were compared to those who spent 8 or more hours per week, there was an associated increase in the likelihood that caregivers spending more time on caregiving arrived at work late, left work early, were unable to concentrate while at work, used breaks or lunch time to arrange for services for the care receiver, and had to respond to calls or emergencies during work hours.

A greater percentage of the main caregivers (32%) than other caregivers (24%) reported that caregiving somewhat or definitely made their employment more difficult. Among all caregivers (n = 378), there was a greater likelihood of having to miss work due to caregiving responsibilities among caregivers who said caregiving had made their employment more difficult versus those caregivers who said caregiving had *definitely not* or *not really* made their employment more difficult. Also, there was an associated increase in the number of times the caregiver arrived at work late, left work early, was absent from work, was unable to concentrate while at work, used breaks or lunch time to arrange for services for the care receiver, and had to respond to calls or emergencies during work hours.

Among all caregivers, those who had been employed by county government for a greater length of time were more likely to have used vacation time to fulfill caregiving responsibilities. Those long-term employees were also more likely to have reported leaving work early, being absent from work, or having to respond to calls or emergencies due to their caregiving responsibilities.

Resources Requested by Employed Caregivers

All employees who responded to the survey (n=676) were asked about their interest in receiving educational information about caregiving on a variety of topics (see Table 2). Responding to the affirmative with “very interested” or “somewhat interested” in learning about caregiving topics, employees wanted to learn about caregiving benefits offered through county government and information about planning for future caregiving needs, including legal, financial, and healthcare issues. In addition, employees wanted to learn about available community resources for caregivers, financing caregiving, and making tough caregiving decisions.

Among all employees who responded to the survey, the preferred methods to receive educational resources and information were through fact sheets, employee newsletters, and lunchtime seminars. Other options, such as before and after work group educational sessions, support group meetings or individual appointments with a support person, ranked very low among employees.

Summary and Implications for Extension

Overall, the employee caregiver survey demonstrated the dramatic impact of caregiving on county government employees. Much like other employers nationwide, over half of county government employees who responded to the survey were caregivers. Caregiving's impact on employers is significant now and will only increase in the next ten years as the workplace continues to age and more employees face caregiving responsibilities. Demographic trends show a rapidly increasing aging population who will need care from family members, friends, neighbors and others in the community.

Findings from this survey indicate that caregiving had a greater effect on long term employees, who should be valued by employers for their expertise and experience. These employees often have more accrued vacation and sick leave, which they were using to complete their caregiving responsibilities. This would lead to a decreased amount of time spent at work along with decreased time to care for personal needs. This information is important to employers since employees need work/life balance to reduce their stress and be productive employees.

The employee caregiver survey was an essential component in defining the target audience and their needs. The survey responses also provided an opportunity for UW-Extension Educators to more fully clarify the economic impact of adult caregiving on county government. The financial implications to employers are directly related to time spent away from work on

caregiving as well as being focused and engaged on work when in the workplace. Survey results also reinforced that caregiving responsibilities are challenging for employees who must also balance work and family.

The findings of the pilot survey demonstrated that most employed caregivers were in the early stages of caregiving and preferred brief and applicable resources like: fact sheets, newsletters, resource directories, and in some instances, lunchtime seminars. Employees may have selected these delivery methods to compliment their busy life schedules. UW-Extension Educators can respond by utilizing traditional methods, such as written communication, and electronic methods, including eXtension³, rather than the face-to-face educational methods familiar to most extension educators.

While the pilot survey was conducted in rural Wisconsin counties with a population range of 15,000 to 82,000 residents, the web-based delivery method makes it feasible to distribute with employers in both rural and urban settings. The survey was beneficial to UW-Extension Educators to raise awareness of caregiving in the workplace, to market caregiving resources, and to educate local policy makers, county department heads, county board supervisors, elected officials, and ultimately county employees. The survey results provided UW-Extension Educators with an assessment of the county government workforce and led to opportunities to offer educational programs and resources to employers and employees in their county. The use of an electronic employee caregiving survey may be the first step in initiating employed caregiver outreach programming by extension educators.

Additional outcomes of the pilot survey distribution, including the development of educational teaching tools, evaluation efforts, and impacts will be shared with the UW-Extension Department of Family Development in subsequent publications.

³ To learn more, visit extension.org/family+caregiving

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Table 1
Employed Caregiver Characteristics

| Characteristic | Main Caregiver n=106 | Other Caregiver n=272 |
|--|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Male | 22 (21%) | 67 (25%) |
| Female | 83 (78%) | 199 (73%) |
| 36 – 45 years old | 28 (27%) | 67 (25%) |
| 46 – 55 years old | 45 (43%) | 110 (40%) |
| 56 – 65 years old | 28 (26%) | 57 (21%) |
| Caring for One Adult | 62 (59%) | 143 (53%) |
| Caring for Two Adults | 35 (33%) | 100 (37%) |
| Caring for Three or More Adults | 9 (9%) | 26 (10%) |
| Providing Care For: | | |
| Parent or In-Law | 69 (65%) | 195 (72%) |
| Spouse | 14 (13%) | 3 (1%) |
| Adult Child | 7 (7%) | 5 (2%) |
| Aunt or Uncle | 6 (6%) | 8 (3%) |
| Grandparent | 4 (4%) | 24 (9%) |
| Friend | 2 (2%) | 18 (7%) |
| Caregiving Responsibilities * | | |
| Driving to Appointments | 86 (81%) | 176 (65%) |
| Completing legal, financial, or healthcare forms or documents | 78 (74%) | 121 (45%) |
| Home Maintenance | 67 (63%) | 175 (64%) |
| Grocery Shopping | 65 (62%) | 133 (49%) |
| Bill Payment | 57 (54%) | 85 (31%) |
| Arranging Meals | 55 (52%) | 95 (35%) |
| Arranging Services | 27 (26%) | 42 (15%) |
| Providing Personal Care (assisting with ADLs) | 27 (26%) | 38 (14%) |

* Respondents were instructed to choose all responsibilities that apply; therefore, multiple responsibilities could be checked.

Figure 1
Time Spent in a Caregiving Role by Employed Caregivers

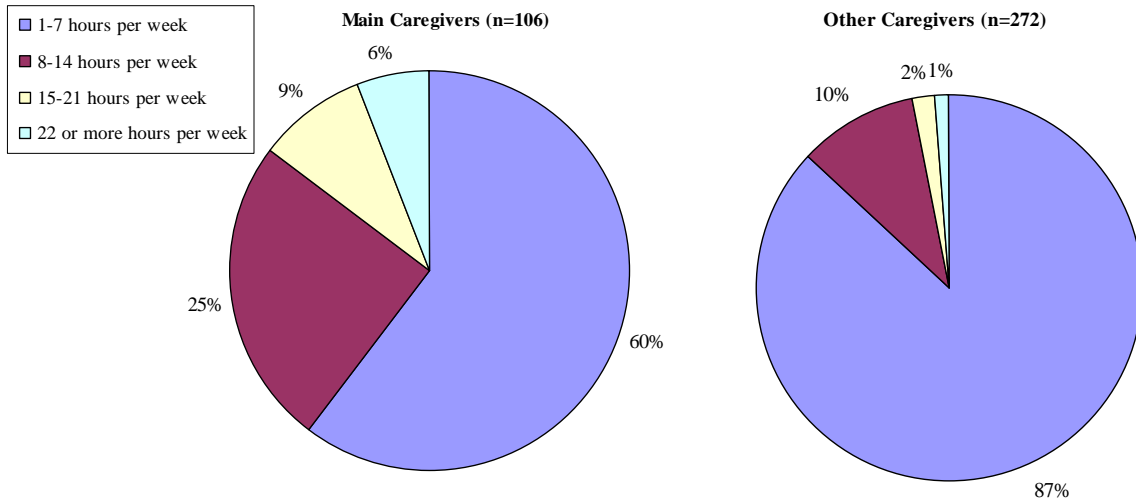


Table 2
 Caregiving Resources Requested by Employees

| Caregiver Resource, Education, or Information | Among all survey respondents (n = 676) | |
|---|--|----------------------------|
| | <i>Very interested</i> | <i>Somewhat interested</i> |
| Caregiving Benefits Offered through Employer | 26% | 46% |
| Legal, Financial, or Healthcare Planning | 24% | 48% |
| Available Community Resources for Caregivers | 22% | 46% |
| Financing Caregiving | 21% | 41% |
| Assisting With Tough Decisions Planning for Future Caregiving Needs | 19% | 40% |
| Stress Management | 17% | 42% |
| Long Term Care Insurance | 17% | 41% |
| Identifying Solutions to Caregiving Problems | 15% | 48% |