

Cluster: Families in transition

Project 6: Long-term employment consequences of informal caregiving: a life-course perspective

Aim

To describe and explain the long-term employment consequences of informal caregiving for caregivers in different life stages

Theoretical background

Life expectancy rises, the population is ageing, and more people have long-term illnesses. Hence, our society faces an increasing need for care, while budgets and care workers are limited. In response to this societal challenge, the Dutch government increasingly emphasizes informal care. This is care provided by relatives, friends, or neighbours to people in need due to health problems and includes domestic help, personal and nursing care, and emotional and practical support. An important societal question is whether the increased demand for informal care is sustainable and does not conflict with the greater demand for labour. For that, we need to understand the full impact – which includes long-term effects - of informal caregiving on caregivers' employment careers. Moreover, we need to understand whether these consequences depend on the life stage of the caregiver. Traditionally, caregiving was taken up primarily by women in late adulthood. The increasing emphasis on informal care likely results in more variety in the timing of caregiving over the life course as 'everyone' will become a caregiver sooner or later, also in young adulthood or in the stage of young parenthood.

Research so far has not reached consensus about the impact of informal caregiving on employment outcomes, and long-term employment consequences have been largely overlooked. Role strain theory predicts that the combination of informal caregiving with paid employment produces time conflict and strain. Potentially, informal caregivers reduce their paid employment to accommodate their informal caregiving role. Role enhancement theory, on the other hand, posits that combining roles is beneficial, because skills developed in one role may enhance performance in another, or because one role can provide an escape from strain in another. Because of the cumulative nature of employment careers, the impact of informal caregiving on employment could have long-term consequences, even long after caregiving ends. The first research question examines to what extent informal caregiving has long-term consequences for the employment career of the informal caregiver.

Also lacking are comparisons of employment consequences of informal caregiving between caregivers' life stages. Accumulation predicts that caregiving's effects on employment are strongest if caregiving occurs in early career stages. In addition, it can be argued that role conflict is greatest for caregivers in the young-family stage, as they bear a "triple burden": employment, informal care, and care for young children. At later life stages, role conflict emerging from informal caregiving can enhance early retirement decisions. The second research question addresses whether the long-term employment outcomes of informal caregiving depend on the caregiver's life stage.

Research design

Unique retrospective data will be collected within the Family Survey Dutch Population specifically for this project: we will record to whom, when and how long respondents once provided informal care, so that complete informal caregiving careers can be reconstructed. Whether and how earlier informal care provisions affect employment outcomes later in life (both in terms of labour market participation and success), as well as differences therein between life stages, will be assessed with event history models.

Literature

Henz, U. (2004). The effects of informal care on paid-work participation in Great Britain: A lifecourse perspective. *Ageing and Society*, 24(6): 851-880.

Lee, Y. and F. Tang (2015). More caregiving, less working: Caregiving roles and gender. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 34(4): 465-483.

Project initiators

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Location

Nijmegen