

Preventing working caregivers to reduce working hours by employer interventions

Aim

Contribute to the evidence base of what helps working caregivers to combine work and informal care so they do not reduce work hours, focusing specifically on the role of supervisors.

Theoretical background

One in four employees in the Netherlands combine their job with informal care, that is care provided to a relative or friend because of health problems. As assumed by role conflict model, combining multiple roles can be difficult because of time and strain conflicts. As a result, previous studies showed that reducing work hours or exiting the labour market are strategies used by working caregivers. Such strategies may have negative long-term consequences for caregivers (e.g., reduced career opportunities or lower pension income) and challenge policy aims directed at increasing labour supply to counter labour shortages. This project will be part of The *Meer uren werkt!* program, funded by Nationaal Groeifonds. The program investigates how people who would like to work more hours can actually do so, or in case of working caregivers, how those who do not want to reduce work hours, can continue working the same hours. You will test interventions directed to facilitate combining work and informal care, with a special focus on the role of the supervisor, which are implemented in a pilot phase in childcare, healthcare, and education.

Theoretically, understanding from the supervisor may result in practical solutions, such as tasks being reallocated or flexible work arrangements, and can provide emotional support and acceptance of (temporarily) lower productivity levels due to the care role. This acceptance is likely to reduce feelings of guilt and stress in the caregiver. Because supervisors are not always aware of their employee's caregiving situation and are often reluctant to open a conversation on this, this project evaluates employer interventions, such as training supervisors to open the discussion with their employees about the combination of work and informal care.

Research design

The intervention will be implemented by an external partner in healthcare, education, and childcare among at least 750 part-time employees. You will scientifically evaluate the intervention using an experimental design with an intervention group and control group and multiple measurements. Additionally, in-depth interviews or focus groups will be conducted with participants and stakeholders about the intervention and the number of hours worked. Own ideas can be incorporated in the project. Proficiency in Dutch is required for the data collection in this project.

Literature

- Hammer, L. B., Kossek, E. E., Yragui, N. L., Bodner, T. E., & Hanson, G. C. (2009). Development and validation of a multidimensional measure of family supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSB). *Journal of Management*, 35(4), 837-856.
- Verbakel, E. & Boot, C. (2024). Combining work and informal caregiving: workplace support to reduce work-care conflict. Pp. 53-60, in P. Kruijven, S. Andriessen, & B. van der Heijden (Eds.), *Maintaining a sustainable work-life balance. An interdisciplinary path to a better future*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited. <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap-0a/book/9781803922348/book-part-9781803922348-17.xml>

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