Work and informal caregiving: challenges and opportunities

Conference Item

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Work and informal caregiving: challenges and opportunities

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Ageing in Europe: Beyond the work-centred life course,
ESA Mid-term conference, Goethe-University Frankfurt
14-16 September 2016
Work and informal caregiving: challenges and opportunities

Work – a concept and set of practices

- Multi-faceted in nature & range of categories
- Importance of work is shaped by class, gender, ethnicity and age (Watts 2015)
- Connection between work as occupation and individual identity (Grint, 2005)
- Can be enjoyable, satisfying & fulfils individual potential (Noon and Blyton, 2007)
- Also a source of inequality and reflection of wider social divisions (Mooney, 2004)
- Now recognised as central to some people’s (mainly men!) identity
- Position for women is seen as different (Morris, 1999)
Women's position connected to traditional values that have placed women in the home focusing on caring responsibilities (Evans, 2003).

Providing care involves men as well as women - a cross-generational commitment.

Balancing care for children and older family members with paid work.

Decisions carers make regarding work shaped by interplay of factors.

Carers’ health, finances, work-related issues and matters related to the care recipient (Aldridge and Hughes, 2016; Brimblecombe et al, 2016).

Happens in both active and post-caregiving phases.
Balancing work and care

- Part-time work is principal means by which many people manage the dual responsibilities of paid work and providing care.
- This is mainly the case for women with childcare commitments (Wattis and James, 2013)
- For many carers option of part-time work may not be feasible
- Work can be ‘contained’, caregiving often cannot be
- Post-caregiving, re-entering paid workforce may not be realistic for former carers
- Following long period of caregiving, entry to labour market requires up to date knowledge and skills.
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Former carers

- Individuals for whom caregiving has come to an end
- 2 million people in UK each year become former carers (Carers UK 2014)
- Increasingly large section of the population
- End of caregiving may be due to death or care home admission
- Former carers had to amend working practices to accommodate caregiving
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Former Carers Study

- Exploratory study co-produced with former carers
- Part 1: Systematic literature review (Cavaye & Watts, 2016)
- Part 2: Online web-based questionnaire
- Part 2: In-depth qualitative interviews
- Self-selected sample
- Selection criteria – end of caregiving more than 6 months ago but less than 5 years
- Ethics approval from OU HREC committee
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Participant profile

- 90% female and 10% male
- Ages ranged from 37 – 72 years
- 68% caring for a parent
- 19% caring for a partner
- 8% had looked after a sibling
- 3% had looked after a grandparent
### Duration of caregiving

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Employment Status on becoming and while being a carer

- 65% full-time employment
- 35% part-time employment
- 25% said the being a carer affect their ability to work a little
- 71% said the being a carer affect their ability to work a lot
- 31% continued working
- 18% reduced their working hours
- 23% gave up their job
- 14% were retired
- 10% were not in paid employment

I had to take a part-time job so I could be available as carer

My work commitments were flexible and could be worked round to care for mother

Gave up a teaching career as Mum’s care needs increased
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Employment Status after the end of caregiving

- 31% full-time work - same job as prior to caregiving
- 14% full-time work – but in a different job
- 9% employed part-time work - in the same job
- 14% employed part-time work - but in a different job
- 33% voluntary or unpaid work
- 20% doing voluntary work for the first time

I had a very supportive employer and work that could be done remotely, without this I don’t think I could have coped.

I have increased my voluntary working at a school where I love working with the children and feel valued by the staff.

I am now working with people who have a diagnosis of dementia. I feel the experience I gained through caring for mum had a direct bearing on me getting this job.
I left my job, with a redundancy payment, to look after my wife full time. Stretching the redundancy with the help of carers’ allowance for 4 years. Then took a part time job for 6 months, after which we had to move.

I lost 6 years pay. I worked only 1-2 days per week… I put my pension lump sum and as much pension as possible into cash to pay my mortgage so I would not lose my home. Before I left work I had cut down my hours to care and this affected my pension as this was based on my last 2 years salary.

I gave up a well paid job 4 years ago. Loss of income, loss of pension, now cannot live on the income I have so going back to work at age 60.

I left work and moved house to look after my Father. My loss of earnings would be about £250,000 gross. I have no pension. I am dependent upon my husband’s pension.
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New opportunities

- 59% derived satisfaction from caregiving
- 94% had learned something from being a carer
- 79% had gained new knowledge and skills
- 65% continue to use this new knowledge and skills

Happily, I am working with people who have dementia. I feel the experience I gained through caring for mum had a direct bearing on me getting this job.

I never liked my job but stayed in it so I could support mum financially... so I have left that job since she died and am pursuing the things I’d rather be doing.

I have now found different work. Although still part-time, it is better paid, I can travel with this job and commit to meetings, which I found difficult before.
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Conclusions

- Importance of work is shaped by class, gender, ethnicity and age
- Opportunities after caregiving - many return to work
- Others take up new jobs and voluntary work
- Role of work in former carers lives depends on number of factors
- Duration of caregiving
- Financial status
- Physical and mental health and wellbeing
- Policy in UK should address the needs of older former carers and support them to re-engage in commodified work
References


Carers UK (2014) Need to know; Transitions in and out of caring: the information challenge, London, Carers UK.


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