Home-based services must be strengthened

The care many adult children provide for their elderly parents interfere with their regular jobs. A new study shows that strengthening home-based services is necessary to avoid that the care-giving efforts of adult children affect their work attendance.

It is well documented that public services and adaptations at work have made it easier for both fathers and mothers to combine employment and care for their children. However, less Norwegian research has been done on the situation of many adult children providing care for their elderly parents.

In a new study researchers Heidi Gautun from Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences and Christopher Bratt from the University of Kent, have studied the correlation between public care for the elderly and the work participation of their adult children.

The study focuses on different forms of absence from work and irregular attendance in order to assist parents. Furthermore, the study investigates the correlation between the form of the care the parents receive and their adult children’s level of concentration when at work and their ability to participate in social and career-enhancing activities.

Home-based services are not adequate

The researchers find that there is a positive correlation between work participation and having a parent dependent of nursing at a nursing home, especially for the daughters.

The situation is different when it comes to home-based services. The study shows a negative correlation between home-based services to a parent dependent on nursing and their children’s participation in the workforce.

According to the researchers this might be due to the fact that only those most dependent on care receive assistance from home-based services, and that this assistance in many cases is less than adequate.

"It seems like adult children must fill the gap between what the public home-based assistance services offer and what the elderly parent has need of, and that this is what negatively affects work participation," Bratt comments.

Social challenges

There is more than one good reason to keep an eye on the situation of adult children who provide care for their elderly parents. The demographic development with an ageing population means that the economically active population gradually have to support ever more old-age pensioners.

On the one hand this means that it is important to ensure that as many as possible of the potentially working population are actually gainfully employed, and preferably in full-time employment. At the same time one
must take into account that with the share of elderly people growing steadily, so will the demand for health-and care services.

Furthermore, the researchers point to the growing trend in Europe in general, and especially in Norway, to reduce the number of institutions for the elderly. Such a reduction may cause another obstacle of full employment among adult children who provide care for their parents.

"Home-based services must be expanded if they are to be a realistic alternative to institutionalized care," Gautun emphasizes.

About the project

The preceding text is based on an article in the European Journal of Ageing, Springer Publishing Company, published online October 31st 2016.

The article is based on analysis of the survey data in the project “Participation in the Labour market among women and men, aged 45-67, to what degree does it depend on public care services for their elderly parents.”

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