

Supporting unpaid carers to stay in employment

Outline of a research project
funded by the NIHR School
for Social Care Research



Improving the evidence base for
adult social care practice

What type of social care interventions help working carers stay in employment and what are the cost implications of these interventions?

There is increasing emphasis in social policy on helping people who become carers during their working lives to combine paid work and unpaid care. However, many carers face barriers to remaining in employment. A key barrier is the difficulty many carers face in obtaining support and services for the person they care for.

Revised eligibility criteria mean that there is a new onus on local authorities in England to support carers in employment by providing social care services to the cared-for person.

However, little is known about the social care interventions that enable working carers to remain in employment. Moreover, it is not clear what the cost implications would be if local authorities were to intervene systematically to sustain carers in employment by providing services to the cared-for person. Considerable resources might be required, but the costs might be offset by gains elsewhere in the public sector, for example from reduced benefits claims and improved carers' health

This project

- will identify social care interventions by local authorities, which would support working carers to remain in employment, and evaluate the costs of these interventions and their potential savings to the wider public sector.

It aims to

- review interventions to support carers in employment, focusing on support for the cared-for person
- review current practice and innovations by local councils to support carers in employment
- identify the relationships between unpaid care provision, employment status, health status and receipt of benefits, using large-scale survey data
- carry out an initial economic evaluation of costs and savings of interventions
- identify interventions that merit evaluation through further research.

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WHAT IS THE CONTEXT?

Millions of people in England are unpaid 'carers'. They provide care to family, partners or friends who are ill, frail or have a disability. Many unpaid carers are of 'working age', that is, adult women aged under 60 years or men under 65 years. The 2001 Census identified 4.27 million carers of working age in Britain, of whom 2.83 million were in paid employment.

Governments in this country and elsewhere are keen to ensure that as many people as possible of working age are in employment. A key to improving the employment rates of people of working age is to improve the employment rates of carers. Therefore, there is currently an emphasis in social policy in England on enabling carers to participate in paid employment.

Many people who provide unpaid care in England are currently in paid work but face barriers to remaining in employment, particularly where long hours of care are provided.

A number of interventions have been shown to help working carers to remain in employment, including carer-friendly employment policies and flexible working practices. Indeed, the right to request flexible working is now enshrined in law.

It is also clear, however, that a key barrier to remaining in employment is the problem many carers face in accessing adequate social care resources for the person cared for. In a recent study, only about a quarter of working carers felt they had adequate support from formal services to enable them to combine work and care.

In England, recently revised guidance puts a new onus on local authorities to address the barriers faced by carers in employment by providing services to the cared-for person (see box). However, relatively little is known about the social care interventions that best enable working carers to remain in employment. Studies of working carers suggest that they are rarely in touch with social services and that the person they care for is rarely the recipient of local authority support. From the local

Guidance to support carers in employment

In 2010, the Department of Health revised the obligatory guidance for local authorities on the eligibility criteria for adult social care. If a carer's employment is, or will be, at risk, the local authority is now likely to be required to provide services. The guidance states that:

- 'a critical risk to sustainability of the caring role arises when ... involvement in employment or other responsibilities is, or will be, at risk'
- 'the categorising of a risk to the sustainability of a caring role as 'critical' is likely to require a response from the local authority in terms of provision of services to the cared-for person. This is because such a risk is likely to equate to the indicator of 'vital social support systems and relationships cannot or will not be sustained' which is used to denote a critical need of the cared-for person'

authorities' point of view, there is often a difficulty in identifying carers, many of whom do not identify themselves as such. Moreover, the limited available evidence suggests that those cared for by working carers are likely to have relatively low levels of need and therefore social care support to the cared-for person is likely to take the form of early interventions or be preventative in nature.

There are likely to be considerable costs if local authorities are to intervene systematically to sustain carers in employment by providing services to cared-for people. However, there could also be wider financial gains, for instance through reduced claims for Carers' Allowance, lower NHS expenditure on carers' health and higher tax and national insurance contributions from carers in employment. In this context, concepts arising from 'place-based initiatives' are potentially relevant, particularly 'social impact bonds', whereby one public sector organisation invests in a long-term initiative that yields financial benefit elsewhere in the public sector. This study seeks to investigate such issues and lay the groundwork for further research.

Research project outline

HOW WILL THE PROJECT WORK?

STAGE 1: Literature review and consultation

The project will review information already available, primarily through searching the academic and practice literature. The review will cover such topics as:

- the effectiveness of interventions provided to working carers, focusing on support for the cared-for person
- methods for combating the 'invisibility' of carers in research and practice, particularly around carers in employment
- innovative methods for exploring the impact of interventions on the income and time available to working carers, in particular the 'capability approach'.

The research will also look at relevant practice and innovations initiated by public authorities in England, including:

- existing practice by councils in supporting carers in employment
- recent pilot interventions involving carers, in particular the Carers Strategy Demonstrator Sites
- preventative strategies in relation to disabled and older people with carers
- the potential application of 'place-based initiatives' to the economic evaluation of social care interventions.

Consultation will take place with a wide range of stakeholders, including organisations of carers and users and service providers, to gather further information about existing practice and promising new interventions.

STAGE 2: Analysis of secondary data

The study will undertake new analysis of two secondary data sources in order to obtain a better understanding of the relationships between provision of care, employment status, health and well-being and receipt of benefits.

First, the study will use the NHS Information Centre's 2009/10 Survey of Carers in Households in England. The data will be utilised to examine the following issues: the relationship between

employment status and intensity of unpaid care, controlling for key socio-demographic factors; the characteristics of people cared for by employed and non-employed carers; the cut-off points at which increased intensity of care affects employment; and the potential role of access to services for the cared-for person in decisions that carers make about employment.

Second, an analysis of data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing will explore the transitions among working carers between different intensities of care, employment states, health states and benefit receipt. The main aim will be to use information on changes in status over time to examine the impact of caring on employment. Given the importance of gender in the provision of unpaid care, men and women will be examined separately. The impact of changes in employment on benefit receipt by carers will also be examined.

STAGE 3: Synthesis and proposals for further research

This stage will draw together the results from the first two stages and explore the potential for further research. The synthesis will include an initial economic evaluation, focusing on the analysis of potential costs and savings of interventions and identifying organisations likely to incur costs or benefit from savings.

The study will then develop specific hypotheses that could be tested in further research, and investigate methodologies and tools for a further research programme. Ideas for further research currently include a study in which working carers, providing long hours of care, whose employment may be at risk, are offered support from a local authority for the cared-for person to help sustain the carer in employment.

Project publications

The study will publish an accessible 'Findings' document, two peer-reviewed articles aimed at academic and policy audiences and at least one article in *Community Care* aimed at practitioners. The key results will be widely disseminated, for example through *Research in Practice for Adults* and the SSCR and PSSRU websites. Three presentations are planned, reaching carers, practitioners and academics. A key output will be proposals for further research.

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HOW DOES THE PROJECT FIT THE AIMS OF THE SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH?

The study addresses issues directly relating to the SSCR's Care and Work programme area. It considers how social care practice can 'ensure that ...carers are enabled and supported in paid work'. It aims to improve practice by bringing together evidence, derived from existing literature and practices, about the effectiveness of interventions provided to working carers, focusing on support for the cared-for person. It will also generate new knowledge, based on original analyses of secondary data, on the cut-off points at which social care interventions might be needed to support carers whose continued employment is at risk. Finally, by identifying interventions that merit further evaluation, the study will form the basis of a further research proposal.

The study is therefore of direct relevance for carers, users and practitioners: for working carers, especially those who combine long hours of unpaid care with paid employment; for cared-for adults, who are potential users of services accessed via local authorities; and for practitioners, who are faced with the difficulty of identifying carers, many of whom do not identify themselves as such.

The NIHR School for Social Care Research

The School for Social Care Research was set up by the National Institute for Health Research to develop and improve the evidence base for adult social care practice in England. It officially launched on 1 May 2009 with funding of £15 million over five years.

The School conducts and commissions high-quality research across five overlapping programme areas:

Prevention and reduction – How can we best prevent or reduce the development or exacerbation of the circumstances that lead to the need for social care?

Empowerment and safeguarding – How can we best empower and safeguard people who use social care services?

Care and work – How can we best equip and support people – practitioners, volunteers, informal carers – to provide optimum social care? How can we ensure that people who use social care and their carers are enabled and supported in paid work and other types of meaningful activity?

Service interventions, commissioning and change – What interventions, commissioning and delivery arrangements best achieve social care outcomes?

Resources and interfaces – How can social care and other public resources best be deployed and combined to achieve social care outcomes?

Further information about the NIHR School for Social Care Research is available at www.sscr.nihr.ac.uk

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Overcoming barriers: unpaid care and employment in England

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