

What are the Primary Needs of Working Caregivers?

“Managing both work life and family life has become a major issue for a large and growing number of family caregivers and their employers. With the aging of the Baby Boom generation will come a dramatic increase in the long-term care needs of our population. As policy-makers consider our options for meeting these needs, supporting working caregivers takes on national importance.” – Margaret Neal and Donna Wagner

There are four areas of need that have implications for structuring workplace settings and providing support for caregivers: (a) flexibility, (b) information and assistance, (c) emotional support and (d) tangible assistance. Each area is described below.

Flexibility

Employed caregivers routinely note the importance of both flexible work hours and being able to take unscheduled time off to handle caregiving responsibilities when needed. A recent study of working **“sandwich generation” couples (e.g. those raising depending children and caring for aged parents)** found that couples who felt they had work schedule flexibility experienced less work-family conflict. Work schedule flexibility and other work-based supports offered by employers to their employed caregivers have generally been perceived positively on the part of the caregivers. This, in turn, has led to increased loyalty and satisfaction with those employers.

Information and Assistance

The needs of employed caregivers vary according to the care situation and the needs of the care recipient. Regardless, however, just as do their non-employed counterparts, employed caregivers need information on the community services that are available to support the needs of elders. Most caregivers of elders have had little or no previous experience either with providing care to an elder or with negotiating the aging services system. Thus, information about caregiving, health conditions, and where to turn for help is a critical need for employed caregivers. Because of the complexity of **many elders’ health care situations, employed caregivers, like other caregivers**, can find it difficult to know even what is needed, let alone decide which service approach is best for their elder. **Professional expertise can be invaluable for assessing the elder’s needs, providing referrals and advice**, determining eligibility and payment options, and packaging the needed services.

Emotional Support

Emotional support for employed caregivers can come in the form of support from co-workers and supervisors at the workplace, support from other family members, and support from friends. A recent study found that, not surprisingly, lower levels of family-related supervisor support were associated with higher levels of work-family conflict. Similarly, a less supportive workplace culture was also associated with work-family conflict.

Tangible Assistance

Employed caregivers need help with legal, financial, and health insurance matters and the paperwork associated with these. Helping an elder manage the paperwork associated with his or her medical care is a daunting task. Similarly, securing and completing the legal forms for durable power of attorney, wills, reverse mortgages, and the like can be frustrating and time-consuming

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