

Why is This Topic Important?

Julia, age 55, works full-time for a non-profit organization located in a large metropolitan area in the Upper Midwest. She also provides care for her 84-year-old widowed mother. A little over a year ago, Julia's mother fell, breaking her hip and fracturing a wrist. Subsequent rehabilitation was slow. The end result was that her mother will likely never regain the level of independence she had prior to the fall. Because her mother now requires more care, Julia has had a difficult time doing both her work and helping her mother. Julia reduced her hours, but that adjustment was not enough. She also finds it increasingly more difficult to stay focused on work, and has often had to coordinate care management by making phone calls from her office. The gap between work and caring for her mother has widened, to the point where Julia is experiencing adverse impacts on her own health, and is seriously considering leaving her job to care for her mother on a full-time basis.

It is estimated that one in six Americans who work full- or part-time report assisting with the care of an elderly or disabled adult family member, relative, or friend. As illustrated in the vignette above, these caregivers do not abandon their caregiving responsibilities because of work. Instead, they cope as best they can to balance what are often conflicting sets of responsibilities.

As family caregiving demands increase, however, there is a higher likelihood of adverse impacts on work performance, as well as negative effects on the well-being of the caregiver; particularly for women. Findings from both international and domestic studies indicate that family caregivers reduce hours of paid work more than is the case for the general population, and those persons with the most intense caregiving responsibilities – mostly women – are significantly more likely to withdraw from the labor market entirely.

In July 2011, Gallup released data from 2,805 persons who self-identified as employed caregivers. The majority reported that caregiving has impacted their performance at work. Caregivers in the 2010 Gallup survey reported missing an average of 7 days each year due to caregiving. This magnitude of missed work translates into an estimated loss of 120 million workdays each year, and the equivalent of \$25.2 billion in lost productivity. If caregivers who work part-time were to be included in this estimate, the cost of absenteeism due to caregiving responsibilities would be much higher.

There are several reasons why employers should consider providing family-friendly work-based supports. Among them are the following:

- to increase the attractiveness of the organization to prospective applicants, improving the overall recruitment of employees, especially during tight labor markets;
- to have more loyal and happy employees; and
- to help employees better manage the stress that they experience from competing demands, leading them to be more effective employees.

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