

NEWSROOM

Study: Female Caregivers Prefer Unpaid Leave From Work

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LISTEN  **IU Sociologist Eliza Pavalko says as the nation ages, so does the psychological distress endured by both men and women caregivers.**

A six-year study conducted by sociologists at Indiana University looking at the best workplace benefits for middle-aged women who are caregivers shows that the majority of the women prefer unpaid family leave.



The study shows that flexible hours, paid vacation and sick days helped, but unpaid leave made the most significant difference. IU Sociologist Eliza Pavalko says as the nation ages so does the psychological distress endured by caregivers.

Source: Inside INdiana Business

Press Release

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. -- Middle-aged women who become caregivers for an ill or disabled family member are more likely to leave their jobs altogether than reduce their hours, according to a new Indiana University study, which found that unpaid family leave, of all family-friendly benefits, proved most useful in helping caregivers keep their jobs.

The study, by sociologists Eliza Pavalko and Kathryn Henderson, sought to determine whether working midlife women were more likely to leave the labor force once they began care work -- answer: they were -- and whether workplace policies made any difference. While access to family-friendly benefits such as flexible hours and paid vacation and sick days helped middle-aged women in general remain employed, only unpaid leave made a significant difference for caregivers.

None of the benefits, Pavalko notes, eased the psychological distress endured by the caregivers.

"Prior studies have consistently found that caregivers have higher levels of psychological distress," Pavalko said, "but workplace policies do not appear to help reduce that stress."

Pavalko and Henderson's research, which was funded by the National Institute on Aging, appears this week in the May issue of the journal *Research on Aging*. The article is titled "Combining Care Work and Paid Work: Do Workplace Policies Make a Difference?" and is available at <http://roa.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/28/3/359>.

These findings comes in the face of two trends, a workforce that is both increasingly female and aging, meaning that more and more working men and women will encounter the challenges of caring for parents and other loved ones. During the six-year study period, 13 percent of the employed women surveyed provided substantial levels of care for ill or disabled family members at least once. Caregivers who leave the workforce not only experience the immediate loss of their income and other employment benefits but face the prospect of reduced Social Security benefits later in life.

"Despite growing attention to family-friendly policies in the workplace, we know surprisingly little about whether they help families manage the burden of care work," Pavalko said. "Employers may be particularly interested to find that the relatively inexpensive benefit of unpaid family leave is so effective for reducing employee turnover."

The study drew from the responses of 2,021 women involved in the 1995 to 2001 waves of the National Longitudinal Survey of Young Women. Here are additional findings:

A woman's likelihood to remain in the workforce once caregiving begins is reduced by 50 percent. Of the sample, 71 percent reported access to unpaid family leave, 79 percent reported access to health insurance, almost

75 percent reported having six days or more of paid vacation or sick leave, and 37 percent reported access to flexible hours.

Employees who had access to flexible hours were 50 percent more likely to remain employed regardless of whether or not they were caregiving.

Source: Indiana University