MIDDLE-AGED CAREGIVERS KEEP THEIR JOBS ACCORDING TO SAGE PUBLICATIONS’ RESEARCH ON AGING ARTICLE

Indiana University study finds unpaid leave the most useful employee benefit

Thousand Oaks, California, London, United Kingdom, and New Delhi, India (April 25, 2006) – In a workforce that is increasingly female and aging, middle-aged women who become caregivers for ill or disabled family members 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. An article in the most recent issue of SAGE Publications’ Research on Aging summarizes the data.

The article, titled “Combining Care Work and Paid Work: Do Workplace Policies Make a Difference?” is published in the May issue and explores research funded by the National Institute on Aging, by sociologists Eliza Pavalko and Kathryn Henderson.

The study, which drew from the responses of over 2,000 women, over a six-year period, sought to determine whether midlife female workers were more likely to leave the labor force once they began care work and whether workplace policies really mattered to them. It was found that, while access to family-friendly benefits such as flexible hours and paid vacation and sick days helped middle-aged women remain employed, only unpaid leave made a significant difference for caregivers. None of the benefits, Pavalko notes, eased the caregivers’ psychological distress.

"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 interested to find that the relatively inexpensive benefit of unpaid family leave is so effective for reducing employee turnover."


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