

Q) I have a busy career but often get calls at work for emergencies to help my aging father. How can I make sure my dad get the help he needs and reduce my stress over lost work?

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Caring for an aging parent is never an easy task, but this task is made much more difficult when trying to juggle caregiving with a career. Family members are often forced to choose between one and the other: "Do I go to my 3 o'clock meeting or take my mother to the doctor?" Managing both these tasks can often increase stress while decreasing your capabilities on one or both of these.

According to a national study conducted by MetLife and AARP, employees caring for family members aged 50 or older are widespread and increasing. Nearly 25 percent of all households have at least one adult who has provided care for an elderly person in the last 12 months. In addition to their caregiving responsibilities, about 64 percent of these family caregivers are employed, creating a 'juggling' act between work and caregiving.

Unfortunately, most family caregivers often underestimate the time required for caregiving and the impact of their obligation on their work. Listed below are some of the effects caregiving can have on employee relations in the workplace, along with suggested solutions:

PROBLEMS EMPLOYED FAMILY CAREGIVERS FACE:

- Career Stands Still
Responsibilities at home can mean missing out on promotions and training at work, opportunities for job transfers or relocations, and acquiring and keeping up with necessary job skills.
- Loss in Wages
Income can drastically be cut as a result of caregiving obligations. In the national MetLife and AARP study, nearly two-thirds of respondents said that caregiving had a direct impact on their earnings. As a result of caregiving, the average loss in aggregate lost wages, Social Security and lost pension benefits reported was \$659,139 over a lifetime.
- Reductions in Savings and Spending
Caregiving for a loved one can cause significant limitations to personal savings and spending, home improvements, vacations, and/or investments.
- Toll on Health
Caregiving responsibilities can often take a toll on the health of a family caregiver leading to increases in absenteeism in the workplace, early retirement, and job turnover. This can lead to a loss in employee productivity and overall workplace morale.
- Economic Loss for Employers
Employers also lose money due to employees' caregiving responsibilities. A previous MetLife study estimated that absenteeism, partial absenteeism, workday interruptions, eldercare crises, and costs associated with supervising employed caregivers conservatively averages \$11.4 billion per year.

SOLUTIONS FOR EMPLOYED CAREGIVERS:

- Employee Assistance Programs
A growing trend in caregiving options that employers around the country are embracing to help employees out at work are programs like "Work Options Group" (WOG), a national employee assistance program that allies itself with centers and caregiving agencies to provide backup care in case of an emergency.

In order to alleviate this problem, major corporations often offer WOG to their employees in order to keep down the number of absentees due to caregiving. As soon as an employee realizes they are in need of backup care for a child or senior, they call the national WOG hotline to

arrange for a local caregiver to come to the home, allowing the employee to go to work. Employed caregivers should contact their human resources department to determine if this support program is already available or perhaps a program their company should look into.

- *National Caregiving Agencies*

A second solution for caregiving support is to hire a national caregiving agency, such as Comfort Keepers. Comfort Keepers provides in-home care at a fraction of the cost of moving into an assisted living facility or nursing home. Services offered included companionship, meal preparation, light housekeeping, grocery and errand services, incidental transportation, personal care assistance, and more. Best of all, Comfort Keepers is available 24/7, catering to an employee's varied work schedules.

While there is no one solution to the caregiving epidemic in the workplace, these steps can help workers balance their career and their caregiving responsibilities while alleviating stress for both the family caregiver and the person being cared for.