

Employed carers and family-friendly employment policies

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First published in Great Britain in September 2002 by

The Policy Press
34 Tyndall's Park Road
Bristol BS8 1PY
UK

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Fax no +44 (0)117 973 7308
E-mail tpp@bristol.ac.uk
www.policypress.org.uk

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Published for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation by The Policy Press

ISBN 1 86134 480 5

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The **Joseph Rowntree Foundation** has supported this project as part of its programme of research and innovative development projects, which it hopes will be of value to policy makers, practitioners and service users. The facts presented and views expressed in this report are, however, those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation.

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Front cover: image supplied by EyeWire
Cover design by Qube Design Associates, Bristol
Printed in Great Britain by Hobbs the Printers Ltd, Southampton

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Joseph Rowntree Foundation for their sponsorship of this research. Thanks are also due to the local authorities, and 'Shopwell' and 'Cellbank' who generously agreed to participate. As always, however, our major thanks must go to the individuals within these organisations who helped us in so many different ways, from agreeing to be interviewed themselves, to taking part in focus groups and providing essential background information for our case studies. In the two localities, service providers of all kinds as well as employee representatives provided us with invaluable information. Our thanks also go to our advisory group both for their support and their very useful comments on a draft version of this report, and to Louise Ritchie for additional research assistance.

Introduction and background

Changing social and demographic conditions have brought with them recognition of the fact that those in paid employment – both men and women – are also increasingly likely to have caring responsibilities. Most women now expect to be in employment throughout their adult lives and mothers with young children have become the fastest growing section of the labour force (Thair and Risdon, 1999). It is estimated that, in total, 10,650,000 employed people (men and women) live with their dependent children (Yeandle, 1999). At the same time, the population is ageing; care and services for older people (as well as for people with long-term sickness and disability) are increasingly being delivered ‘in the community’ – very often in parallel with family support. In 1995, 13% of adults were providing care for a sick, disabled or older person and, within this group, two thirds were in full- or part-time employment (Rowlands, 1998).

The government has responded to these changes with a wide range of policy developments, which are outlined in Chapter 5. There can be little doubt about the immediate policy relevance of this research, since the issues involved affect such large groups within the population, and have such diverse economic and social effects. This policy relevance partly explains why work on family-friendly employment and work–life balance issues has expanded so rapidly in recent years (for example, Bevan et al, 1999; Bryson et al, 1999; Dex and Sheibl, 1999; DETR, 2001; Hogarth et al, 2001; Dex and Smith, 2002).

Our research sought to investigate how carers with all kinds of responsibilities manage their employment and family lives. It asked the crucial question, ‘How can employers, community and private service providers assist carers in their

efforts to achieve a work–life balance?’. To address this, the research focused on employees with all types of caring responsibility and, thus, identified those with multiple care responsibilities as well as those with only childcare responsibilities or those caring only for older people or disabled people. The research considered the ways in which individuals enact these caring responsibilities by using a combination of resources: private and personal arrangements, the family-friendly policies available in their employment and locally available services (both public and private).

The research

Our research investigated these questions through a comparison of employers, employees and service providers in two very different localities: Sheffield and Canterbury. It also contrasted three different sectors of employment: local government, supermarkets and retail banking.

The research design incorporated different strands of new data collection, which were carried out in both localities. These included:

- comparison of localities and description of local care provision;
- a self-completion questionnaire for all employees, returned by 945 individuals;
- case studies of the ‘family-friendly’ policies offered by each organisation;
- interviews with managers with responsibility for implementing family-friendly policies;
- interviews with trades unions and employee representatives;
- interviews with care service providers in each locality;

- focus groups and/or in-depth interviews with different categories of employed carer: staff with childcare responsibilities, those caring for older people and disabled people, and people with multiple caring responsibilities.

The questionnaires were distributed and returned during 2000, while interviews (including managerial interviews) and focus groups were carried out during the second half of 2000 and the first half of 2001. Immediately before and during this period, the government introduced a series of new policies and legislation relating to work-life balance (these policies and their impacts are discussed in Chapter 5). All data collection and analysis was carried out by members of the research team.

Outline of the report

The rest of this report is organised as follows. The next chapter examines the two localities in which the research was conducted and details the employment and caring responsibilities of respondents to the questionnaire survey. Chapter 3 explores the employers' perspectives and presents information about how managers implement the various family-friendly options available in each organisation. In Chapter 4, evidence about employees' knowledge of their employer's policies is given, and information about how caring responsibilities were managed alongside employment is presented. Chapter 5 outlines the care infrastructure available in each locality and considers some of the examples of good practice, which were collected as part of the study. This shows that overall changes in the national policy context have been mainly positive. However, the chapter also reveals that there is considerable scope for further service development and that, to date, little has been done to bring service providers and employers together to achieve a better integration of work and caring responsibilities. The main conclusions of the study and an assessment of its policy implications are presented in Chapter 6.

Caring and employment in two localities

This chapter provides contextual information on the localities and organisations studied. Also, the survey evidence on the extent to which employees in the three sectors have care responsibilities and on how they manage these is summarised. As will be seen, locality differences have a direct impact on patterns of care management among the respondents.

The localities

The recent history of the two localities is very different. While Canterbury is a relatively affluent and long-established service centre in the South East, Sheffield has suffered deindustrialisation, particularly with the decline of the steel industry.

The social and economic contrasts between these two very different localities are reflected in nationally gathered data. As is demonstrated in Figure 1, while the population of Canterbury has been increasing at a rate above the national average, that of Sheffield has declined. However, the reputation of Canterbury (and the nearby seaside towns) as a leisure area makes it an attractive destination for retirees and there is a higher proportion of people of pensionable age (and, correspondingly, a lower proportion of under-fives) in Canterbury than in Sheffield (Figure 2). Nevertheless, as can be seen from Figure 3, economic activity rates are considerably higher in Canterbury than in Sheffield and the claimant count for unemployment is lower (Figure 4). During 2000-01, the working-age employment rate for women was 67.4% in Sheffield and 73.4% in Canterbury (Labour Force Survey estimates).

At the start of our research (2000), the unemployment rate in Canterbury, at 3.8%, was

lower than the national average of 4.3%; in contrast, Sheffield's unemployment rate was 6.3%. While Sheffield is ranked 25th on the Index of Local Deprivation, Canterbury is much lower at 190 (see DETR, 1998)¹.

These locality differences have an impact on the caring arrangements made by our respondents. As we shall see, in Canterbury, employees had less access to family networks because of greater population mobility, whereas in Sheffield, with its more stable population, more use was made of kin for help with caring. This greater population stability was also associated with longer service among employees in all the organisations studied.

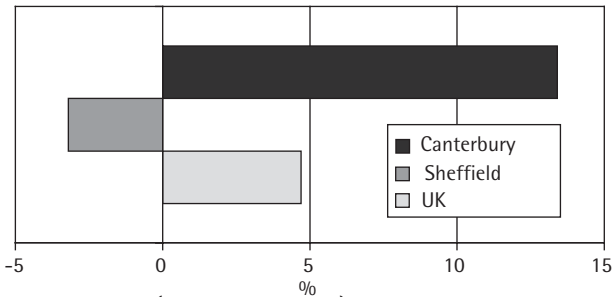
The family life course, employment and caring

Caring responsibilities vary over the family life course. The age structure of an organisation's labour force, therefore, is a key indicator and predictor of the types of support and assistance most needed from employers and the community. For example, a young workforce is most likely to need support with childcare, while middle-aged workers are more likely to be caring for older people.

Nationally, there has been a substantial fall in the proportion of the workforce who are young (aged under 24): from 23% in 1986 to 15% in 1996. Labour Force Survey (LFS) data² demonstrate that

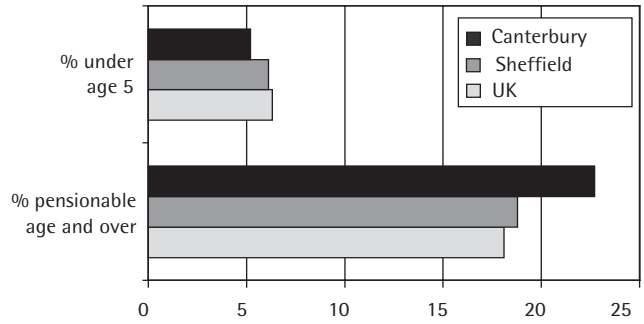
¹ A total of 309 local authority districts are ranked and a further 45 are ranked tied at 310 (apparently because data about the various indices of deprivation are missing).

Figure 1: Population change 1981-97



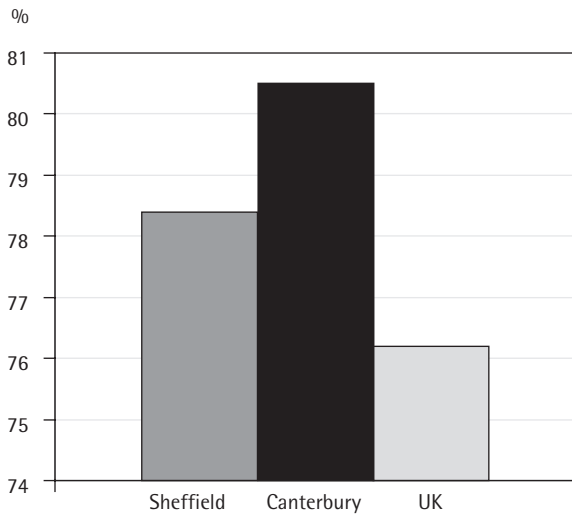
Source: ONS (1999, Table 14.1)

Figure 2: Population aged under five and of pensionable age and over (1997)



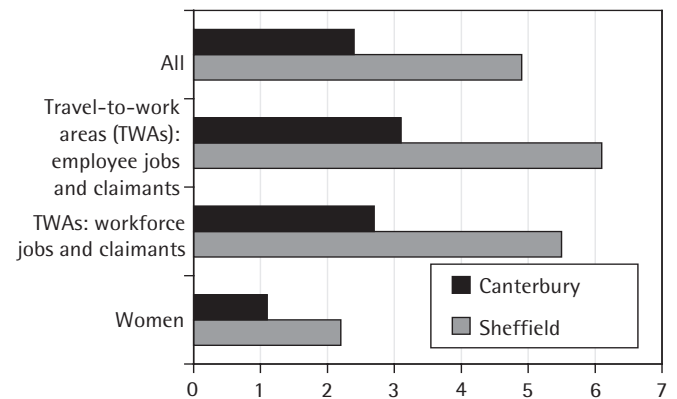
Source: ONS (1999, Table 14.1)

Figure 3: Economic activity rates



Source: Labour Force Survey 1998

Figure 4: Unemployment: claimant count data for Canterbury and Sheffield (%)



Notes: 'All' = male and female unemployed claimants as a percentage of the estimated total workforce; 'Women' = female unemployed claimants as a percentage of the estimated female workforce, both for April 2001. 'Travel-to-work area' data is for the 'Sheffield and Rotherham' and 'Canterbury' travel-to-work areas and estimates claimant unemployed persons as a percentage of all employees plus claimants, and as a percentage of the entire workforce plus claimants.

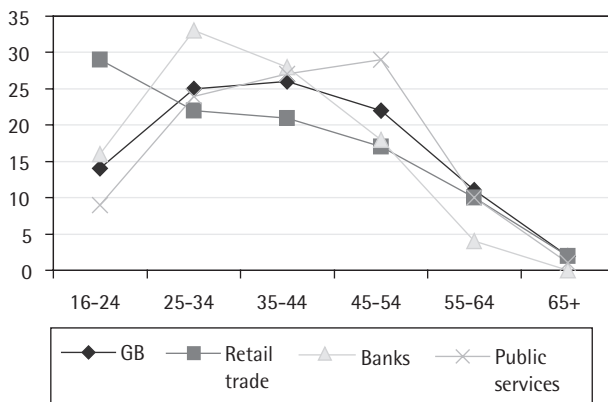
Source: Labour Market Trends September 2000 and NOMIS

there are substantial differences in the age profiles of different employment sectors.

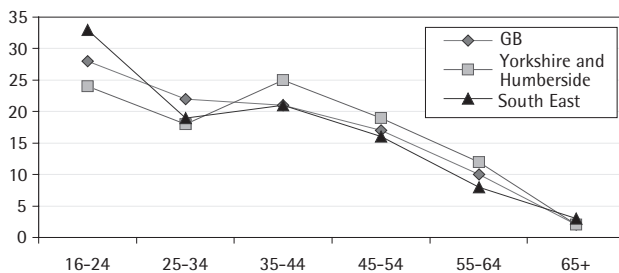
All three sectors covered in our research differ somewhat from the average age profile of all those in employment in Great Britain (Figure 5). The retail sector is dominated by younger people and employment falls off rapidly in the older age groups. Employment in banking peaks in the 25-34 age group and declines steeply thereafter. Indeed, in contrast to the other two sectors and the national average, in banking there is a virtual absence of employees over the age of 50. In contrast, public service employees tend to be older than average. Comparative regional data indicate that, in the retail sector, the South East has an even younger age distribution than the

national average, whereas in Yorkshire and Humberside the age distribution in retail is somewhat older than the national average (Figure 6). It is likely that this variation reflects the contrasting employment opportunities in the two regions, with lower demand in Yorkshire and Humberside resulting in higher take up of low-skilled jobs in retail among older members of the labour force.

² We are grateful to SPSS Ltd for supplying these data.

Figure 5: Age profile of employees by sector

Source: Labour Force Survey Spring 2000, age by industry (SIC 3-digit)

Figure 6: Age profile of employees in the retail sector

Source: Labour Force Survey Spring 2000, age by industry (SIC 2-digit)

The organisations

Access to the retail company (a major supermarket which we have renamed ‘Shopwell’) and the bank (renamed ‘Cellbank’) was negotiated at the national level. In the case of Shopwell, research was carried out in a large store in each locality. In Cellbank, retail units were dispersed over a relatively wide area and, thus, while we refer to ‘Canterbury Cellbank’ and ‘Sheffield Cellbank’, these respondents may not actually be based centrally in these locations but spread over a broader surrounding area centering on these towns. Policies in Cellbank and Shopwell were largely determined nationally.

Since Sheffield City Council (SCC) is so large (18,000 employees), interviews and questionnaires were undertaken in one service-providing department, and we found more of an emphasis on providing direct services to

customers among the SCC respondents. In contrast, interviews and questionnaires were carried out across all departments of Canterbury City Council (CCC) and, therefore, a lower proportion of respondents was providing direct services to customers. SCC, as a metropolitan authority, provides a wider range of services – including social care services – than CCC, which is a district council. In Canterbury, Kent County Council (KCC) provides social care services and our interviews with local authority service providers (Chapter 5) are with KCC staff³.

All of the organisations researched were in the business of providing a service, but variations in the nature and manner of service provision shaped family-friendly policy options and implementation in different ways. When services are supplied directly to the consumer – as in the bank, supermarket and, to a considerable extent in the SCC department – there will be a level of staffing below which service provision will be impossible. On a practical level, this puts some limits on the implementation of family-friendly policies. Another factor shaping family-friendly possibilities is the location and substitutability of the employees providing the service. In Shopwell, employees can be moved to different parts of the store with relative ease and new employees can be trained fairly quickly. In Cellbank, retail banking employees are also highly interchangeable but, in practice, this substitution would often mean working in a different branch, causing travel difficulties. As Cellbank employees also take longer to train, the limits of substitutability are soon reached.

Within the two councils, SCC and CCC, more diverse services are provided. However, even where services are not being provided directly and, thus, immediate pressures may be less, the non-substitutability of particular staff puts limits on the extent to which some kinds of family-friendly policies can be used, especially those allowing periods of leave.

³ At the time of the research KCC also faced specific and unusual difficulties relating to the social services budget, stemming from its statutory responsibility for unaccompanied child asylum seekers. These responsibilities put a considerable strain on the social service budget, affecting the level of service provision.

The respondents

Our employee questionnaire results reflected both organisational and locality factors. Most respondents (67%) were women. In both Sheffield and Canterbury, Cellbank respondents were overwhelmingly female, reflecting the female-dominated nature of Cellbank employment at the retail level. The patterns of response to the questionnaire tend to reflect the gender distributions of the survey organisations, although, in general, the response rate was rather lower among men than women. As a result of these variations in gender distribution and response rate, 226 of the 310 male respondents are local government employees⁴. Across all the organisations, the Sheffield respondents tend to be older and, in Cellbank and Shopwell (in particular), there are comparatively more older

women. There are also striking variations in length of service among the respondents in the different organisations in the two localities (Table 1), reflecting these age differences.

Respondents to the survey were mostly married or cohabiting (71%), predominantly white (over 95%) and mainly considered themselves to be permanent employees (96%). Less than 1% were registered disabled and only 5% had other paid jobs.

Working hours also varied between respondents in the four organisations, although there were regional differences in the Shopwell patterns, reflecting the differences between the Shopwell employees in the two regions. Part-time working was lowest in the local authorities (around 15%) and around 30% in Cellbank. Two thirds of Sheffield Shopwell respondents worked part time (67%), compared to 42% in Canterbury.

⁴ Questionnaires were distributed to a total of 2,437 employees in the organisations and 945 completed forms were returned (response rate 39%). Response rates were highest in SCC (60%) and lowest in Canterbury Shopwell (25%). Respondents were distributed as follows: local authority employees 534 (56%); Shopwell 229 (24%); Cellbank 182 (19%).

Almost half our 945 respondents (47%) had caring responsibilities of some kind (Table 2). A total of 323 employees had some kind of responsibility for a child aged 16 or under (almost all the children lived in the same household as the respondent); 130 people were responsible for at least one adult over 65 (only 13 of these adults

Table 1: Length of service (%)

	SCC	Sheffield Cellbank	Sheffield Shopwell	CCC	Canterbury Cellbank	Canterbury Shopwell	Total
Over ten years' service	82	83	33	38	69	11	57

Table 2: Employees with caring responsibilities (%)

	For anyone (including children)	For sick or disabled adults (aged 16–64)	For older people (aged 65+)	For children (aged 16 and under)
Sheffield				
Local government	55	8	19	39
Retail banking	42	4	15	33
Supermarket	51	4	9	38
Canterbury				
Local government	41	8	12	29
Retail banking	49	12	14	36
Supermarket	36	6	8	24
All (n=945)	47	7	14	34

lived in the same household as the respondent); 23 respondents cared for a disabled adult and 20 for a disabled child.⁵

Over two thirds of these self-identified carers were women, and this does not vary between people with childcare responsibilities and those caring for older people. There is, not surprisingly, an age difference between the two categories and, whereas a third of those with childcare responsibilities were aged 34 or under, this is true of only 8% of those caring for older people. Staff with children were also more likely to work part time (41% as compared to 31% of those caring for older people) and both carer groups were more likely to work part time than those without care responsibilities (only 18% of non-carers work part time). Across all the respondents, 66% of those who work part time had care responsibilities, compared with 38% of those in full-time work. The organisational and age distribution of the carers reflects the differences between the two localities discussed above and, as we shall see, these factors also feature in the patterns of care arrangements made by the respondents. Women were more likely to report care responsibilities than men (51% compared with 41%), although this gender gap is narrower than might have been expected.

In Canterbury, the proportion of carers in the council and in Shopwell was lower than in Sheffield, which reflects the younger age distribution of the respondents in Canterbury⁶. Nevertheless, there is not a huge variation by organisation in the proportion of staff with school-age children; the difference is greatest between the two councils (in Canterbury, 29% of the council employees were parents who live with their dependent children, compared to 40%

in Sheffield). SCC, with the oldest respondent profile, also reported the highest level of caring responsibilities for adults (23%), whereas Shopwell Canterbury, with the youngest profile, reported the lowest (12%).

Caring for children

As noted above, women are the major carers and 65% of women identified themselves as the 'main carers' of children. More than half of the women caring for a child were mainly responsible for daily activities, such as getting children ready for school and taking them to school, whereas only a minority of men with childcare responsibilities identified these tasks as mainly their own responsibility (Table 3).

In our survey, all those with responsibility for children were employed and thus necessarily reliant (to varying extents) on some sort of childcare. The most frequently used form of childcare was grandparental care: 77% of those with a child aged 16 or under in the household report using grandparental care either regularly or occasionally, while 41% said they call on other relatives. However, there are interesting differences between the two localities in the use of informal services (that is, the support provided by friends and family). As is illustrated in Table 4, Sheffield parents were more likely to use grandparents and other relatives than were parents in Canterbury. Conversely, parents in Canterbury were more likely to use bought-in childcare, particularly day nurseries and babysitters. These locality differences are also apparent in relation to the care of older children

Table 3: Employees with childcare responsibilities (%)

Mainly responsible for:	Men	Women	All
Getting children ready to go out	10	70	50
Taking children to school	17	53	41
Collecting children from school	9	42	31
Taking children to doctor/dentist	13	71	52
Caring for children when sick	5	61	42
Number with childcare responsibilities	102	221	323

⁵ Not all respondents fully completed the questionnaire. Where there are missing values in the data set, the numbers quoted may not add to the totals given. Note also that the study found some examples of 'multiple caring', for example, where someone with responsibility for children aged 16 or under also cared for an older person or a disabled adult.

⁶ SCC had both the highest proportion of carers (55%) as well as the best response rate (60%). The aggregate figures, therefore, disproportionately reflect the views of SCC employees.

Table 4: Use of services by respondents with child aged 16 or under in household, by locality (%)

	Sheffield	Canterbury	Total
Grandparents (if not living with you)	80	70	77
Friends	44	49	46
Other relatives (if not living with you)	45	34	41
Babysitter	32	41	35
Day nursery/crèche	20	29	23
Out of school hours club	18	29	21
Holiday club	15	24	18
Childminder	17	13	16
Nanny or au pair	2	0	1
Number of responses	188	97	285

Note: respondents could answer 'yes' in all relevant categories, so percentages should not be added.

Table 5: Employees with adult care responsibilities (%)

Mainly responsible for:	Men	Women	All
Taking to doctor/hospital/dentist, etc	35	56	50
Preparing meals for	25	39	35
Washing/ironing for	17	55	44
Providing financial help for	18	20	19
Number of carers of older adults	24	106	130

and there was greater use of after-school clubs and holiday clubs in Canterbury. This probably reflects differences in access to kin because of the higher mobility of the population in the South East compared with Sheffield.

The widespread use of substitute childcare is not, however, matched by the use of other household services such as domestic cleaners and gardeners. In fact, only 8% of those with childcare responsibilities ever employed domestic cleaning services, while 9% employed gardeners.

Caring for older people

Women were also the major carers of adults over 65, and 74% of women with caring responsibilities for adults described themselves as the 'main carer'. However, 10 of the 24 men who cared for an adult described themselves as the 'main carer'. Table 5 shows gender differences in

relation to some common caring tasks. As with those caring for children, women more frequently had the main caring responsibility, although the gender gap was narrower among those caring for adults. Only a small minority of cared-for older people lived in the same household as the respondent (13 in total), although, in both Sheffield and Canterbury, 66% of cared-for older people were reported as having a permanent illness or disability.

Half of those respondents caring for adults reported that they used care services. As with childcare, the most striking difference between the two localities is that Sheffield respondents were much more likely than those in Canterbury to be able to call on relatives – 60% of the Sheffield respondents compared to only 26% of those in Canterbury (see Table 6).

Table 6 also shows that carers in Canterbury were, to some extent, able to make up the 'shortfall' in informal care provided by relatives by drawing on the help of friends and neighbours. However, (and this is perhaps surprising given that Sheffield has a rather greater level of local authority care provision than Canterbury) data in this table suggest that the use of formal or statutory services – district nurses, home helps, day centres and so on – varies little between the two localities.

As with those with childcare responsibilities, carers of older people did not make extensive use of cleaners, gardeners and so on, and the major purchased facility in the 'commercial' category was convenience and takeaway meals (62%).

Table 6: Use of services by respondents caring for persons aged 65 and over, by locality (%)

	Sheffield	Canterbury	Total
Other relatives	60	26	48
Friends	33	39	35
Neighbours	24	39	29
District nurse	24	26	25
Care assistant/home help	21	22	22
Day centre	12	13	12
Respite care	14	9	12
Residential services	12	13	12
Meals on wheels	5	0	3
Number of responses	42	23	65

Note: Respondents could answer 'yes' in all relevant categories, so percentages should not be added.

Concluding summary

- Sheffield has a higher level of unemployment and a more stable population than Canterbury. Aggregate level data also suggest that the average age of the workforce is older, particularly in retail.
- At the national level, there are variations in the age distribution of employees between different sectors of employment. In aggregate, local government employees tend to be older and retail employees younger.
- Organisational variations in the nature of business constraints and of jobs have an impact on the implementation of family-friendly employment policies.
- Sectoral and locality age differences are reflected in the age and length of service distribution of our respondents in the organisations studied.
- Women are the major carers of both children and older people, although, proportionately, men are more likely to describe themselves as the 'main carer' of older people than of children.
- In both localities, relatives are the main source drawn on for help with caring. However, employees in Sheffield draw more on family resources for assistance with caring (probably reflecting the greater stability of the Sheffield population).
- Employed people with childcare responsibilities in Canterbury make greater use of paid babysitters, day nurseries, after-school clubs and so on. Carers of older people in Canterbury report a similar level of use of health service and local authority provision as those in Sheffield. This is despite the fact that, as is shown in Chapter 5, the absolute level of local authority care provision, particularly for elderly people, is higher in Sheffield than in Canterbury.
- With the exception of takeaway meals, there was little use of commercially provided household services among our respondents.

Employers and family-friendly employment policies

Chapter 2 described the care responsibilities of the employees we surveyed and outlined the sources of support on which they draw. This chapter looks at the extent to which employees have access to services, support and flexibility within the workplace to support them in carrying out their caring roles. The chapter focuses on how family-friendly employment policies are operated by employers and draws on qualitative data from interviews with 36 line managers across the six workplaces. Four main issues are explored: formal policies, managers' awareness, implementation and the business case for family-friendly policies.

Formal policies

A summary of the formal policies of the organisations is provided in Table 7. This refers to policies in place at the time the empirical research was conducted, during 2000/01. As a result of shifts in government policy, alterations in statutory requirements (see Chapter 5) and internal reorganisations, this policy arena is constantly changing. As Table 7 shows, all the organisations had formal policies for (extra statutory) maternity, paternity, adoption, parental and carers' leave, as well as for part-time working and job sharing. At the time of the survey, most of the leave options were available only on an unpaid basis. Cellbank additionally offered some leave options on a paid basis, including carers' leave, emergency leave and compassionate leave. SCC and Shopwell employees were both entitled to paid adoption and paternity leave, and the former also offered paid compassionate leave.

SCC has a written policy that states that "flexible patterns of work must be available to employees

with care responsibilities and to persons with disabilities". Formally, SCC has a broad range of policies that the other organisations do not have, including: 'V-time' (voluntary reduced work-time options), annualised hours, home/teleworking and leave for religious observance. In contrast, CCC has a less extensive range of 'non-standard' working arrangements included in its formal organisational policy.

At Shopwell a shift-swap scheme and a managerial rota (the 'friends and family' rota) form part of the company's formal policy and are central to employee flexibility (Shopwell is also a member of the government-led Employers for Work-Life Balance. The rota gives managers one long weekend off a month and ensures they get at least 11 hours off between shifts. In addition, flexi-place working is available, primarily for students, and up to three months' unpaid leave is available for older workers during the winter months.

Carers' leave is unpaid in all the organisations except for Cellbank, which had recently introduced five days' paid emergency carers' leave as well as an (unpaid) responsibility break of up to six months for staff with care responsibilities for older adults or people with sickness or disabilities. Employees are also entitled to a career break or to work part time ('key time') in order to help them care for young children. The employment status of longer-serving (at least five years' service), higher level staff is protected during these breaks/periods of reduced hours; however, relatively new or lower level staff do not enjoy such protection. Staff must also achieve satisfactory performance markings in their annual appraisals to be eligible.

Table 7: Formal policies adopted by the organisations included in the study

Policies [✓ = policy available]	CCC	SCC	Shopwell	Cellbank
Part-time working	✓	✓	✓	✓
Flexi-time	✓	✓		
V-time (voluntary reduced worktime options)		✓		
Shift-swap scheme			✓	
Managerial friends and family rota			✓	
Job sharing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Term-time working	✓	✓		
Annualised hours		✓		
Home/teleworking		✓		
Flexi-place working			✓	
Extra statutory maternity leave	✓	✓	✓	✓
Paternity leave (paid)	✓	✓	✓	
Paternity leave (unpaid)			✓	✓
Adoption leave (paid)	✓	✓	✓	
Adoption leave (unpaid)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Parental leave (paid)	✓			
Parental leave (unpaid)		✓	✓	✓
Carers' leave (paid)				✓
Carers' leave (unpaid)	✓	✓	✓	
Responsibility break				✓
Emergency leave (paid)				✓
Emergency leave (unpaid)	✓		✓	✓
Career break (unpaid)		✓	✓	✓
Leave for older employees (unpaid)			✓	
Study leave	✓		✓	✓
Compassionate leave (paid)	✓	✓		✓
Compassionate leave (unpaid)	✓	✓	✓	
Leave for religious observance		✓		
Miscellaneous leave		✓		

The differences between the organisations, especially in terms of whether leave is paid or unpaid, and in terms of options for time flexibility, reflect the nature of the industry and occupation, and the level of investment that organisations put into employees' human capital. Thus, Cellbank offers relatively generous leave for skilled employees who have potential for developing in their careers, while Shopwell is highly flexible in allowing comparatively low-skilled employees to substitute for each other.

Managers' awareness of policies

Managers' awareness of their organisation's family-friendly policies varied according to the individuals interviewed and the organisation they worked for. In all six workplaces, managers with designated responsibility for human resource

issues showed a greater awareness of the scope and nature of the policies than line managers who had day-to-day responsibility for implementation. Furthermore, the latter showed little knowledge of the statutory requirements in this field, with most stating that they were unsure of their organisation's obligations.

Awareness among the Shopwell line managers in both localities appeared to be higher than in the other organisations; this can be attributed, in part, to the organisational culture. Within Shopwell, communication is prioritised as a mechanism for both internal and external marketing purposes. The company promotes itself as a forward-looking employer that provides a higher quality of working life than its competitors, and this message is frequently reiterated to staff.

Shift-swap was frequently mentioned in both Shopwell stores. It is the main way in which

flexibility is achieved, and was often arranged by the employees themselves, without the need for formal line manager approval, depending on the personnel involved. The 'friends and family' rota (see above) was also mentioned as a key initiative by the Canterbury Shopwell line managers, but had not been introduced at the Sheffield store at the time the interviews took place (although it has since been implemented there). Shopwell managers pointed out that implementing these policies aided staff retention and thus reduced recruitment costs.

Cellbank line managers in both localities had good overall awareness of the company's policies; compassionate leave and paid carers' leave in particular were mentioned by most managers. The former has been available for some time and has a relatively high uptake, while the latter is a new and, as will be explained later, slightly controversial initiative.

In Canterbury, the local authority line managers showed some awareness of the policies, particularly mentioning flexi-time, compassionate leave and parental leave. The interviews with their counterparts in Sheffield, however, provided the most surprising results. Throughout the 1980s the city was run by a Left-wing Labour council, which introduced various controversial and radical policies. For example, flexi-time was introduced well before many private sector organisations 'jumped on the bandwagon' and is now so 'institutionalised' that it has become the 'norm'. Line managers could therefore be expected to have a relatively high awareness of the Council's current family-friendly policies. However, those interviewed had a lower awareness than their counterparts in the five other workplaces. Three of the four local authority managers in SCC stated that they did not know what policies existed, but knew that they could consult a manual if necessary. One of the managers started to read the manual while being interviewed; another apologised for not doing enough 'preparation' for the interview and being 'unable' to answer some of the questions. This lower awareness may be because the department surveyed had a higher proportion of male managers and staff than the Council as a whole (and, as noted in Chapter 2, but was surprising given the high level of caring responsibilities) reported by the employees in our survey.

Implementation of policies

Implementation of family- and carer-friendly policies appears to be determined by five issues: managerial discretion, service provision and delivery, concerns about the potential for abuse, training and guidance, and consultation and communication.

Managerial discretion

Although each of the four organisations has formal family-friendly employment policies, in practice, implementation is determined to a large extent by individual line managers. Their role in implementing the policies is dependent on their interpretation of written company policy, their perception of the needs of individual members of staff and their willingness to accommodate these needs, and the requirement to ensure service provision and delivery. This means that, although formal policy statements form an important context, in reality, implementation takes place on a more informal, flexible basis.

One Cellbank manager explained this process:

"The managers have a responsibility to check what policies and leave are available to staff and then make a decision on if staff qualify.... The policies are written down and we have strict guidelines, but ... we have to take each individual case separately. So it may vary ... depending on how each manager interprets the rules and also how they see the situation." (Cellbank manager, Sheffield)

A CCC line manager similarly commented:

"I operate a policy which I see as a common sense one. I don't stick rigidly to the council one. I treat it on the basis of need. ... I would much rather have a flexible approach than have a rigid corporate approach." (CCC manager)

With this type of informal flexibility, the way in which line managers approach these issues inevitably varies according to their own beliefs and values which are, in turn, determined by their own experience of combining caring responsibilities and paid work, and their

relationship with their employees. In all six workplaces the managers with experience of caring were more sympathetic to employees than those who had never been carers. For example, a Cellbank manager in Canterbury, who had children of her own, commented that she was probably more understanding of carers' needs than other managers without similar responsibilities.

The relationship between line managers and employees also has implications for the way in which policies are implemented:

“The policies are in writing from head office but in reality it depends on personal relationships between line managers and staff... I take the view that you should treat others like you would want to be treated, but I don't stick rigidly to the guidelines.” (Cellbank manager, Sheffield)

This links to the issue of reciprocity, which was a dominant theme in Cellbank and the two local authorities. Line managers indicated that they were more likely to be accommodating when employees required employment flexibility or leave if they felt that the employee would reciprocate at other times:

“It's common sense to enable flexibility within work. And there's give and take on that. We had a situation recently where we were really short-staffed.... Some of the part-time staff volunteered to do extra hours to be able to cover that. I think that is a direct response to the fact that we've been flexible with them in the past.” (CCC manager)

“If someone says ... ‘My son's had an accident and I need to take him to the hospital’, I say ‘Yes, fair enough’. If I treat them well, then they treat me well.... If they are putting in their time and giving me their best, I will do what I can ... to meet their needs and to help those needs.” (CCC manager)

Reciprocity between managers and employees seemed to be less emphasised in both Shopwell stores, but reciprocity between individual employees could occur through the shift-swapping scheme:

“Shift swapping is a good way of them [staff] fitting caring in and being flexible, and I don't really have much to do with that. They decide among themselves and I agree and sign it.” (Shopwell manager, Sheffield)

Reciprocity between employees also occurred in Cellbank, with employees swapping days with their colleagues to meet their caring responsibilities. Both shift and day swapping were relatively informal, self-managed systems and occur in Shopwell and Cellbank because staff are often performing similar activities, thus substitutability is relatively easy. In the local authorities, tasks are generally more specialised and staff substitutability is more difficult to achieve.

Interviews with line managers tended to stress the advantages of a flexible and relatively informal approach to implementation. Managers liked the opportunity to treat requests from their most reliable employees (especially those who were flexible in performing work tasks) in a flexible and individualised manner. By implication, this inevitably means that less valued employees, or those who always stick rigidly to their job description, may receive a less favourable reception when asking for support in carrying out their care roles.

Employees tended to emphasise the unfairness that they felt arises from the operation of managerial discretion. Some managers were regarded as rigid and inflexible, while others were more accommodating and sympathetic to carers' needs, leading to unfairness across the organisation. Equally there was some concern that giving access to family-friendly policies enables some managers to reward their ‘favourites’ or to act punitively towards less well-regarded staff.

Both line managers and employees were conscious of a tension between treating everyone equally and fairly, responding appropriately to each individual case (when each case is always unique) and handling each situation in a way which is helpful to the employee concerned without putting undue pressure on other workers. Managers and employees identified a need for additional training to support them in finding ways of resolving such tension.

Tension between family-friendly employment policies and service provision and delivery

There appeared to be a fine line between providing support to staff with care responsibilities and ensuring service provision and delivery across the organisations. Cellbank, Shopwell and some local authority departments deal directly with the public and require a sufficient number of staff to be available during opening hours to deal with customers. Likewise, other local government departments have to meet the needs of business clients. Indeed, service delivery has become increasingly important in local authorities in recent years with the emergence of market principles such as Compulsory Competitive Tendering and Best Value.

This tension between family-friendly employment policies and service provision and delivery was exemplified by two Shopwell managers:

“In terms of the leave, we have to make sure there is a balance between meeting the needs of the colleagues and providing a service to our customers.” (Shopwell manager, Sheffield)

“Although it is flexible you still need the hours for the needs of the business, and it is very difficult. If you can get the colleagues to fit the hours – brilliant, but then if you want to change them in any way it is very difficult because you have always got the needs of the business there.” (Shopwell manager, Canterbury)

This tension was most acutely felt in Cellbank and at SCC. Both organisations had recently experienced cuts in budgets and staffing levels, and managers in both reported difficulties covering for staff who were absent due to care responsibilities:

“We try and be as obliging as possible but it’s very difficult because we need staff to serve customers, and for things like unpaid leave we don’t have enough counter staff, so it’s very difficult. I think we are understaffed anyway, and so to let staff have more time off makes it even more difficult. The bank gives the impression of being a caring organisation, but it’s not as simple as that. The bank does have

policies, but it’s very difficult to implement them and provide the right service because we have no back up.” (Cellbank manager, Sheffield)

Managers at Cellbank and SCC suggested that a combination of tight budgets and the availability of family-friendly employment policies often led to increased pressure on staff. As a result, they felt those with care responsibilities experienced feelings of guilt and a reluctance to take time off work. This was apparently a particular problem in one of SCC’s departments, which deals directly with the public:

“Due to cuts we are short staffed ... if it’s leave for emergency care then we just have to cope somehow, but it does increase the stress on other members of staff.” (SCC manager)

Fewer CCC managers (than in Sheffield) mentioned the problem of cover and, indeed, as described in Chapter 1, proportionately fewer CCC respondents provided a direct service to the public. In CCC, managers tended to be more concerned with the pressures of constant reorganisation, Compulsory Competitive Tendering and Best Value.

“With all the financial problems there are, I’m seriously trying to get early retirement; I’m so fed up with it... It is quite horrendous. With all the pressures that are coming through from government, with Best Value regime – issues that you have to go through on top of actually doing the job.” (CCC manager)

Concerns about potential for abuse

Some line managers suggested that the policies could be ‘abused’, with some employees making use of flexible working arrangements and leave entitlements for what they referred to as ‘illegitimate’ reasons. Implementation of family-friendly employment policies is influenced by the degree of trust that exists between managers and employees. Although an employee’s own illness is usually supported by self-certification and/or an absence from work certificate signed by a medical practitioner, employees are not obliged to provide evidence that someone for whom they care is ill or needs special support. A combination of this

lack of evidence and managers' own interpretation of individual circumstances had led some to question the legitimacy of their employees' claims.

The argument about employees providing evidence of the need for leave and the legitimacy of individual cases is, of course, nothing new. Prior to the introduction of carers' leave, it was suggested that employees often claimed that they were ill themselves in order to meet their caring responsibilities. It may be suggested that, instead of questioning the legitimacy of their employees' illnesses, some managers may now be questioning the legitimacy of the illnesses of those for whom their employees provide care.

The interviews revealed that some family-friendly employment policies were perceived to be more vulnerable to abuse than others. Cellbank employees are entitled to up to five days' paid carer's leave per year. This was seen as leading to possible tensions by some managers, who thought that it would be unfortunate if people started to make 'regular' use of these days, since workers without caring responsibilities might regard it as extra holiday.

In the same way, some CCC managers thought that flexi-time was open to abuse as a consequence of poor management, although, given extended opening hours, they also recognised that it was essential to providing cover. However, employees were able to accumulate flexi-hours amounting to a maximum of two days per month, and some employees did this on a regular basis, taking their 'flexi' days at busy times. This sometimes led to insufficient staff available to meet service provision and delivery:

"[Flexi-time] is felt to be too flexible and it causes problems of office cover and that sort of thing.... The issue really is that people say, 'I want those two days off at the end of the month. I'll work my hours to get that'."
(CCC manager)

In Shopwell, there was less concern about the issue of abusing the system. This is probably related to the relatively highly controlled organisation of work in a supermarket setting, and especially to the fact that options such as shift-swap were organised by employees among themselves, without cost to the employer.

Training and guidance

According to the line managers interviewed, there is a lack of training and guidance with regard to family-friendly employment policies. All except the human resource and personnel managers stated that they had not received any training in this area. Moreover, the training that had been provided for personnel officers tended to be concerned with wider equal opportunities issues rather than dealing specifically with family-friendly employment policies. This lack of training and guidance explains, in part, why line managers' awareness of policies and methods of dealing with their implementation varied so much within the individual organisations.

Consultation and communication within the organisations

Consultation about the policies appeared to be relatively limited. Managers in all six workplaces suggested that policy decisions were usually made at head office level and then communicated to managers locally by written messages, in the form of manuals, faxes and newsletters. In Cellbank these were particularly important given the dispersed nature of the workforce.

SCC and Shopwell supplement this written communication about how to implement family-friendly employment policies with staff briefings. Staff from personnel at both SCC and CCC make presentations to line managers, although this tends to take place on an ad hoc basis. Staff at Shopwell, in contrast, are informed on a more systematic basis as part of a wider monthly managerial briefing process. Again, it should be noted that Shopwell is an organisation which places particular emphasis on effective communication; this may be linked to the nature of the supermarket business, in which work units are geographically dispersed and local managers work in small teams with large workforces.

Most line managers accepted this comparative lack of consultation, but those working at the South Yorkshire branches of Cellbank were particularly critical of their company's efforts in this respect. These managers had very recently been awarded responsibility for implementing family-friendly employment policies prior to being interviewed by the researchers, yet felt they had not been involved in any consultation:

“These policies have never been the responsibility of the branch before, but now they are middle management responsibility.... There wasn’t any consultation with me, or people like me. We are just told what we can and can’t allow in the manual.” (Cellbank manager, Sheffield)

However, most managers did recognise that there are mechanisms for employee feedback about the policies. At Shopwell listening groups operate and at Cellbank there is an annual employee survey, both of which enable employees to express their views to head office on a range of company policies and issues. However, the line managers in both these organisations indicated that issues raised through these forums are not always ‘actioned’:

“There is no consultation of the staff about the policies, they are put in place and then we are informed. We can give feedback though, but they don’t always listen. Each year the bank does a survey of staff about its competence as an employer and staff can give feedback in that forum about issues. I know that this year there were some comments about family-friendly employment policies.... They don’t always listen, but they can be told.” (Cellbank manager, Sheffield)

SCC line managers, in contrast, stated that feedback *is* ‘actioned’ by personnel:

“The employer is good at listening to employees, and if enough people say there needs to be a change of policy then it does get changed.” (SCC manager)

Of the organisations surveyed, only Cellbank monitors take-up of family-friendly employment policies.

The business case for family-friendly employment policies

Line managers in each of the organisations recognised that there is a strong business case for offering family-friendly employment policies, principally that the company is perceived both externally and internally as a good, caring employer. As a SCC line manager pointed out,

this ‘caring’ image helps generate a loyal, productive and happy workforce:

“The organisation is seen as a reasonable [employer] ... there is no point in staff being at work if they have family issues to deal with, because they won’t do their job properly anyway. It’s far better to give an employee leave because it leads to better productivity.” (SCC manager)

In all the organisations, the managers also suggested that staff recruitment and retention improve as a result of the policies. This, in turn, was argued to lead to financial savings, not only through a reduction in staff recruitment costs, but also through a fall in the training costs associated with new members of staff. As one Cellbank manager put it, the bank would benefit from being able to retain its ‘thinking’ staff and, as a Shopwell manager said:

“Turnover would be massive if we didn’t ask the questions and do anything about them.... They are fully trained, they know the way Shopwell works, and some of them are colleagues that we want to keep, so that is our benefit, to keep them. Plus, every person we employ in Shopwell costs us £3,500. So it’s in our interests to keep the people we’ve got so we don’t have to keep replacing them all the time.” (Shopwell manager)

Past research has shown that managers have been reluctant to train certain staff, particularly women of childbearing age, on the basis that the investment will be wasted if they leave the organisation (Wigfield, 2001). Our evidence supports the view that this managerial perspective has shifted. Comments made in the interviews show that some organisations recognise the value of their female staff and provide family-friendly employment policies as a mechanism for retaining their skills and ensuring that investment in training is not wasted.

In three very different sectors, we found a common view that employers need to be aware of, and responsive to, employees’ care responsibilities if they are to recruit and retain the kind of staff they need, and enable those employees to perform effectively in their work roles. Tension about family-friendly employment arose when organisations were operating at low

staffing levels, when employees could not readily be substituted in their role by another employee and when there was a lack of reciprocity between managers and staff or between employees.

Substitutability was simpler to arrange in Shopwell than in the other organisations, with particular difficulties in Cellbank related to small, dispersed work sites, and great variation in the local authorities depending on the job and skill level of the employee. With regard to managerial attitudes, there was as much variation within the organisations as between them – a finding which confirms that organisations operate through the medium of interpersonal relationships as much as through the formulation of formal employment policies.

Concluding summary

- All four organisations have a wide range of formal family-friendly employment policies, although SCC offers some additional types of support. It is easier for some types of organisation (such as supermarkets) to offer policies involving time flexibility than others (such as banks).
- Awareness of policies varies by organisation. Shopwell managers had a particularly good awareness due to the organisational culture, but awareness among the SCC managers was lower than might have been expected.
- Despite written formal company policy, implementation often takes place on an informal, flexible basis and is determined by reciprocity between managers and employees. Managers who themselves have experience of caring are more sympathetic towards staff needs.
- Managers feel they must provide a balance between family-friendly employment policies, and service provision and delivery.
- Some managers have concerns about the potential for abuse and question the legitimacy of the uptake of some policies.
- Employees may be reluctant to take up policy options that result in loss of earnings, and managers bear this in mind in negotiating arrangements with their staff.
- Managers feel that there is a lack of training, guidance, consultation and communication concerning the implementation of the policies within the organisations.
- Managers believe that there is a strong business case for offering family-friendly employment policies, such as a better company image, an increase in staff productivity and loyalty, an improvement in staff recruitment and retention, and lower recruitment costs.

4

Caring and the experiences of employees

The last chapter described how employers approach the issues raised by ‘family-friendly’ employment. This chapter explores the situation of the employees: the use they made of family-friendly policies, their opinions of their employer’s provisions and their relationships with their managers and colleagues. Here we draw on the evidence from the questionnaire, as well as on the focus groups and interviews with the employees themselves.

Employers and help with caring

Awareness, use and satisfaction

Chapter 3 showed that all four organisations have a good range of family-friendly employment policies. Despite this, half of all of our respondents were not aware that their employer provided any services for people with care responsibilities (Table 8). There was some variation between the employers, however: Shopwell, with its high-profile friends and family

policies, indicated a slightly lower proportion of ‘don’t knows’, and a rather higher level of satisfaction with the employer’s policies. (An even lower level of employer’s care provision was reported as far as the partners of respondents were concerned.)

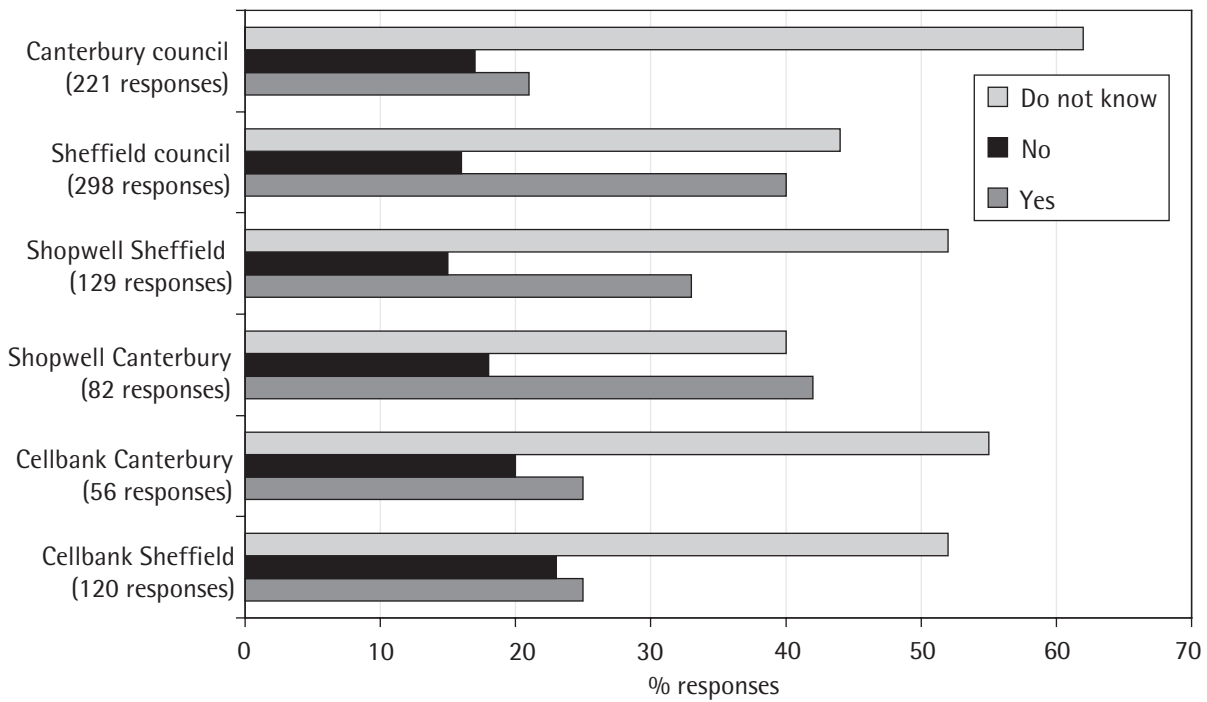
To explore this in more depth, our questionnaire measured respondents’ perceptions of the specific policies available to them, and the extent to which they had made use of the options available. Figure 7 illustrates the locality variations among Shopwell, Cellbank and council employees. For example, the level of awareness of employer services was higher in Sheffield than in Canterbury, possibly reflecting the generally longer service of Sheffield employees. However, the study also found higher levels of dissatisfaction with employer policies and services in Sheffield than in Canterbury, except at Cellbank. Despite having only modest knowledge of employer services, employees’ awareness of the nature of these services did reflect, in broad outline, the variation in what was offered in the different sectors (Table 9).

Table 8: Employees’ knowledge of and satisfaction with employer’s care assistance, by organisation (%)

	Cellbank	Shopwell	Council	Total	Total (M)
<i>Does your employer provide any kind of help or services for employees who have care responsibilities?</i>					
Yes	25	38	32	32	291
No	22	17	16	18	159
Don't know	53	45	52	50	456
Number of responses	176	211	519	-	906
<i>Do you feel the care assistance provided by your employer is satisfactory?</i>					
Yes	15	32	19	21	172
No	27	18	21	22	177
Don't know	58	51	59	57	468
Number of responses	163	176	478	-	817

Figure 7: Employees' knowledge of and satisfaction with employer's care assistance, by organisation in the two locations (%)

(a) Does your employer provide help or services for carers?



(b) Are you satisfied with your employer's care assistance?

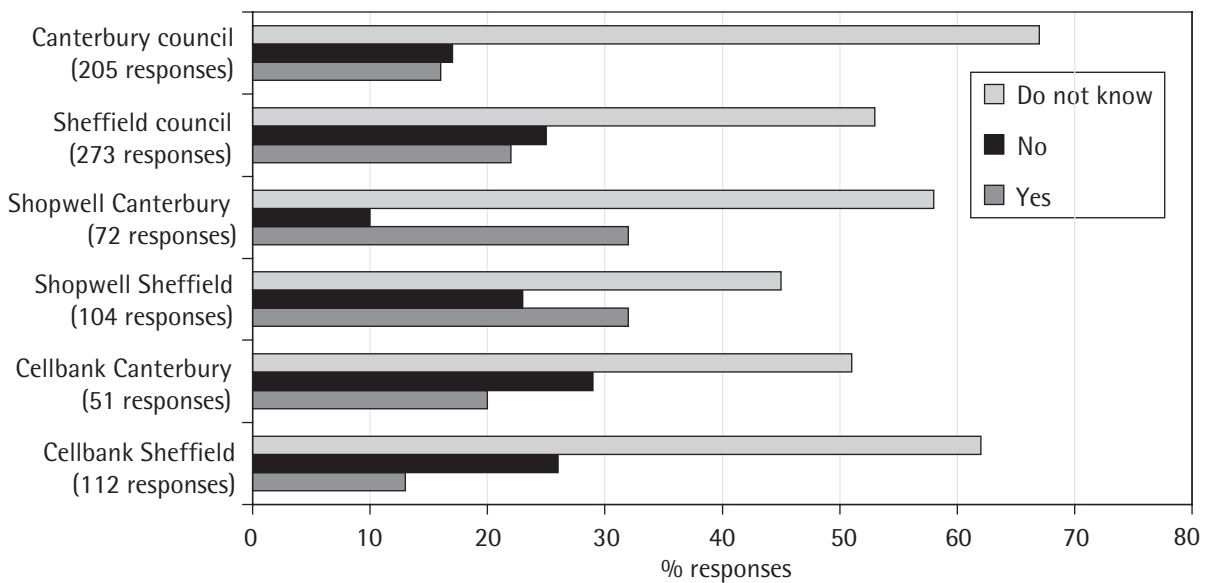


Table 10 gives an indication of take up of family-friendly policy options (note that cell sizes are small). Cellbank is the only organisation that monitors the take up of services (see Chapter 3) and therefore the use of family-friendly employment policies is difficult to assess in the other organisations. Nevertheless, it appears that employees make greater use of opportunities for

time flexibility (that is, reduced hours or flexi-time) than of caring leave of different kinds, a factor which may be attributable to the fact that much of the leave is unpaid (see Table 7). (Our research also found that some people would appreciate more direct assistance, particularly in respect of childcare.)

Table 9: Employees' perceptions of employer policies available, by sector (%)

Those who thought each option was available	Cellbank	Shopwell	Council	Total
Reduced hours or part-time working	80	85	70	75
Flexi-time	44	48	83	69
Job sharing	80	39	73	66
Career break	78	72	26	45
Paid paternity leave	16	55	46	43
Parental leave	36	55	23	33
Unpaid paternity leave	38	37	26	30
Extra statutory maternity leave	20	19	26	23
Family leave	27	37	11	20
Term-time working	9	28	17	18
Home/teleworking	16	0	25	17
Information/advice about local childcare or eldercare services	0	8	21	15
Counselling for employees with care responsibilities	16	3	18	14
Number of responses	45	75	180	300

Note: Respondents were asked to indicate all the options they thought were available.

Table 10: Employees' reported use of employer services by sector (number)

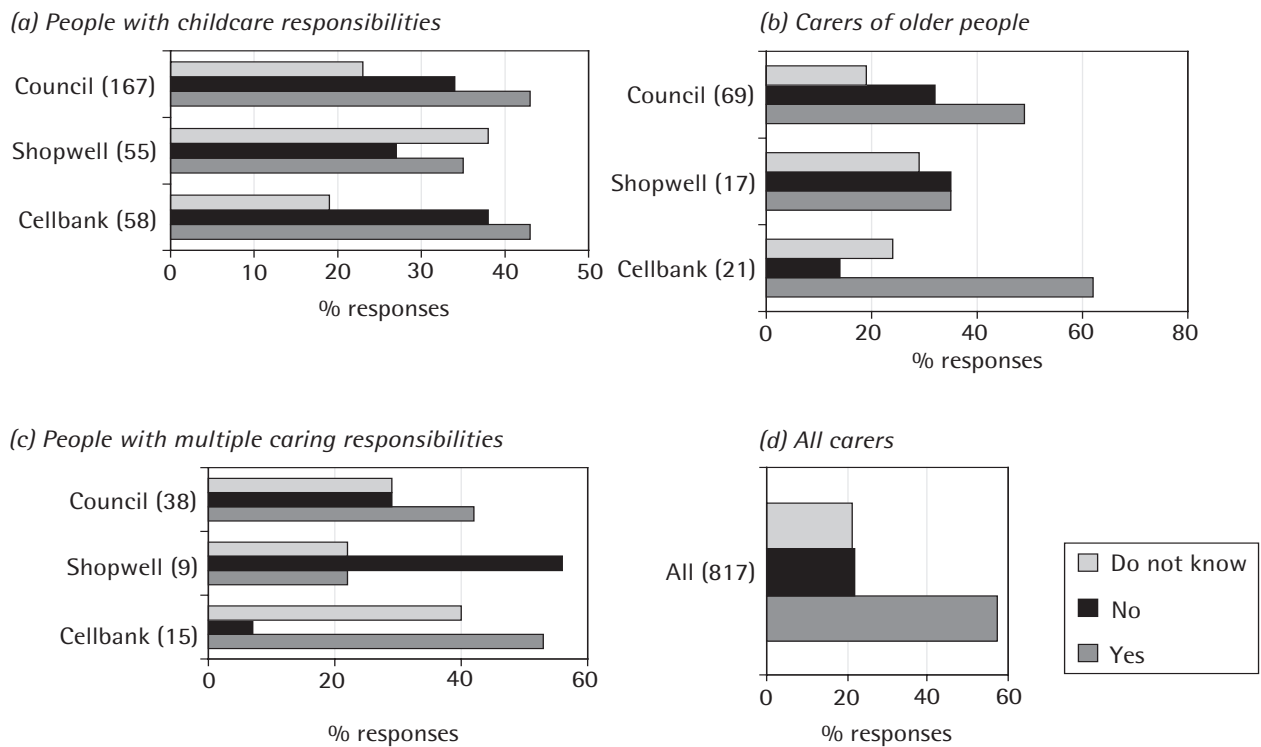
Service offered by employer	Cellbank	Shopwell	Council	Total (%)
Reduced hours or part-time working	10	11	45	52
Flexi-time	4	3	75	65
Job sharing	1	2	20	18
Career break	0	0	2	2
Paid paternity leave	1	4	19	19
Parental leave	0	3	3	5
Unpaid paternity leave	1	0	3	3
Extra statutory maternity leave	4	0	19	18
Family leave	0	1	2	2
Term-time working	1	1	7	7
Home/teleworking	1	n/a	22	18
Information/advice about local childcare or eldercare services	1	0	2	2
Counselling for employees with care responsibilities	0	0	1	1
Number of responses	15	16	95	126

Note: The question also included the use of partner's employer services.

Finally, how does satisfaction (or otherwise) with employer services relate to the varying categories of carers surveyed? Figure 8 shows no clear pattern and cell numbers are too small, in most cases, to draw firm inferences. However, taking the childcare category (the largest) on its own, levels of satisfaction are highest in Shopwell followed by the council employees, then Cellbank. It may also be noted that the level of 'don't knows' was lowest in Shopwell in all three care groups. This may reflect different expectations of the employer; as one Shopwell manager indicated: "To say we are retail, I think

we do quite well. People don't expect us to do it and they are glad when we do". Nevertheless, among carers as a whole, levels of dissatisfaction with employer policies were marginally higher than levels of satisfaction.

Of those respondents who were aware of services, most referred to some form of time flexibility. 'Shift-swap' was a widely used option at Shopwell (as noted earlier, employees were responsible for arranging their own swaps, and this option was therefore available at minimal cost to the employer). The differences in Table 8

Figure 8: Satisfaction with services offered by employer (%)

reflect the characteristics of the employee respondents in the three sectors:

- Flexi-time was mentioned less frequently in banking and retail (where hours, although flexible, are subsequently 'fixed') than in the councils (where hours are more variable at the employee's discretion).
- Job sharing is less meaningful in an employment context, such as Shopwell, where employment patterns are already highly flexible and, conversely, term-time only working is a more realistic possibility.
- In banking, where respondents were overwhelmingly female, there was low take up of policy on paid paternity leave.

Reported use of employer family-friendly policies was even lower than respondent awareness of them – only 126 respondents reported using these policies, 65 of them council employees in Sheffield (see Table 10).

How the carers managed

Respondents were invited to write their own comments about family-friendly employer policies at the end of the questionnaire. Many critical

comments made by people with childcare responsibilities referred to the possibility of the employers giving direct assistance with childcare, particularly crèche provision. These came mainly from employees of the two councils and Shopwell:

“Shopwell does not have the hours to let all working mums work during school time, so why can't they have a crèche for employees' children who work out of school time and for younger pre-school children, as I do feel I am imposing on grandparents' time.”
(Shopwell Sheffield)

“As a line manager responsible for several parents, I think CCC should establish a crèche for staff.” (CCC manager)

No carers of older people suggested the need for direct care provision on the part of employers.

Besides direct provision, flexibility and the ability to take time off in family crises were also frequently mentioned. These also emerged as the employer policies most frequently used by our respondents. Although all the organisations facilitated flexibility to some extent (see Chapter 3), employees reported that this flexibility did not always work in practice – even in Shopwell, with

its strong commitment to time flexibility and high profile family-friendly employment policies:

“In actual fact my employer does offer to help with any problems over working hours, but when you do ask for help there is always some reason to NOT meet our requests: ie short-staffed, busy period, etc. Holiday requests are a constant stress factor, as they do not employ enough to cover properly when taking holidays and they only let three people per shift off, which is ridiculous!” (Shopwell Sheffield)

“Now and again my mum-in-law (aged 87) is ill and I can’t give three weeks’ notice to see her, so I would like to say to Shopwell, ‘I just have to go to help her. It’s her only child’.” (Shopwell Canterbury)

“Unable to take odd days off in an emergency. Holidays are booked nearly a year in advance, and if any days are saved for ‘emergencies’ it is very difficult to obtain time off when needed.” (Cellbank Sheffield)⁷

In relation to flexibility, the major point to emerge from the questionnaire comments was the importance of managerial discretion, confirming what we had been told by the line managers (Chapter 3):

“It isn’t Shopwell, it’s the managers who are funny when you have time (one day) to take your family to hospital.” (Shopwell Sheffield)

“[I] think that there are regulations re care leave, etc, but as it is at your line manager’s discretion it is not very helpful, at least with my line manager, who is very reluctant to allow any time off for any family responsibilities.” (SCC)

“I would say that all support for caring will depend entirely on the attitude of your line manager and colleagues, as with all policies!” (CCC)

In the questionnaire comments, the need for time flexibility and managerial understanding was

particularly emphasised in respect of responsibilities towards older people:

“I have never forgotten my line manager pressing me to work a weekend as extra hours, when I had explained that I had promised to visit my terminally ill father that weekend in a different county. He had stone-cold determination: it made me feel sick and it changed my outlook on my employer – give nothing, get nothing in return.” (CCC)

The question of reciprocity – between employer and employee, as well as between colleagues (which was mentioned by many of the line managers in Chapter 3), also emerged as an important issue. Here, however, comments were by no means entirely negative:

“I am recently widowed and I am carer for my disabled mother-in-law aged 87. I have only worked at Shopwell since 1999 and have found them to be very understanding about me being inflexible with my working hours.” (Shopwell Sheffield)

“When my parents died (20 years and seven years ago) the bank was very supportive and gave me compassionate leave. My mother was in hospital for a week before she died and I was told I could stay with her as long as I needed, which I very much appreciated.” (Cellbank Canterbury)

“The places that I work are very understanding and I do not believe I would have a problem if my children’s childcare and welfare had to come first: ie sickness, occasional problems with childcare.” (CCC)

Family-friendly employment policies have been found to generate resentment from those without caring responsibilities (Lewis and Lewis, 1996). However, only four of the respondents in this research made these kinds of comments, suggesting that levels of resentment are no longer, in fact, particularly high, although one respondent remarked:

“Being a single childless person with no care responsibilities, I find it increasingly annoying that people with children are always given concessions and allowed to take liberties the rest of us can’t get away

⁷ Carers’ leave in Cellbank was introduced after the questionnaire data were collected.

with. They think they have the automatic right to have time off during school holidays, and that because you haven't got children you shouldn't have bank holiday week, etc. I thought we were supposed to have equal opportunities." (SCC)

Others, however, were more inclined to think that this was an individual, rather than an organisational, responsibility:

"The effects of working mothers/carers on the remainder of the workforce should be assessed. These effects are a direct result of the type of individuals involved. For some people, working and being a parent is no problem; however, others think that it is their given right to have time off without notice for sports days, school plays, etc, without a thought of the effects on the office or their team/colleagues, and thereby creating resentment and bad feeling." (CCC)

The qualitative data from focus groups and in-depth interviews developed many of the themes identified in the questionnaire comments. Opinions relating to employers and carer services did not vary systematically between the different care groupings, nor did employers draw systematic distinctions between different categories of carer. People with childcare responsibilities stressed their particular problems relating to the school timetable and practical care arrangements. Carers of older people and of disabled adults placed less emphasis on access to substitute care provided by employers. Rather, these carers emphasised their need for greater personal time flexibility, particularly in emergencies. Of course, emergency flexibility was also important to working parents.

Experiences of those with childcare responsibilities

As expected, the data show that the problems and tensions of employment and childcare vary over the different phases of childrearing. With pre-school children, the major problems occur when childcare arrangements break down. Parents of school children of all ages also stress that they have to cope with an educational timetable often at variance with employer requirements, with

school holidays presenting particularly difficult and expensive problems.

Those with childcare responsibilities tended to focus on practical solutions to the problems they faced. In addition to crèche facilities, the problem of juggling the school day and school holidays emerged as a major concern:

"You have this problem at the end of the day – a couple of hours' gap between the time that the school finishes and the time that you would normally finish work." (CCC)

"From hearing what everyone is saying, it does sound as if school holidays would be a time that perhaps employers could focus on, because it is the one at which your heart sinks when you're just approaching it." (CCC)

"If you think about it, the schools have got all the facilities there as it is, because the children are there most of the time, and maybe the government should do more for school holiday clubs." (Cellbank)

Older teenagers also presented problems, but of a different type, that is, of policing as well as meeting their rather different needs:

"We feel that we can't leave our teenagers because of their behaviour ... we find our teenagers more difficult than our young ones, to be honest." (CCC)

Teenagers, however, have rather exacting care requirements, as is illustrated by this extract from the Canterbury focus group:

K: "Whereas, with a young child, you can leave them with in-laws quite happily, with a teenager you've got the case of 'Will that grandparent be able to cope with a teenager?'"

M: "The teenager will probably refuse to go anyway."

E: "They would. What teenager is going to want to be with the 'oldies'? ... they always have to be cooler than adults."

People with childcare responsibilities did sometimes feel resentment from colleagues (no

carers of older people and/or disabled people reported such criticisms):

[Speaking of male colleagues] “Even in this day and age there is still a lot of, you know, you should be at home, looking after your child. But in a friendly way – people who have got very traditional values and views.” (SCC)

“I don’t think it’s that people who haven’t had children are intentionally being horrible, they just don’t realise the problems that you may have.” (Cellbank)

Nevertheless, one option used by some parents in the two councils was to take children into the workplace:

“They bring the kids in during holidays – fine, nobody’s worried, and maybe that’s good.” (CCC)

“I’ve been known to take three children in with me.” (SCC)

This option, however, is not open to Shopwell employees and to a very limited extent in Cellbank. Neither was it mentioned as a possibility for people caring for older people or disabled people.

Carers of older people and/or people with disabilities: flexibility, discretion, reciprocity

If the major task for people with childcare responsibilities is to make arrangements that fit a structured timetable determined elsewhere, the major problem for carers of older people and disabled people that emerged in the interviews and focus groups is to be able to respond to unpredictable events. Of course, parents have crises too – illness, breakdown of care arrangements and so on – but in the comments of those caring for older people or disabled people, this issue was brought to the fore.

Two major sets of factors affect carers’ capacities to respond to an unexpected event and participants in the study drew attention to both. First are the requirements of the job: as noted in

Chapter 2, if the job involves the delivery of services to the public/consumer at particular hours (whether this is a bank, a supermarket or a council department), the employee will find it difficult to leave unless cover can be arranged. Second are the interpersonal relations in employment – whether managers will allow caring flexibility and colleagues will provide cover.

The topic of service demands has already been discussed at some length in Chapter 3. Employees tended not to question the legitimacy of these demands (although there was some discussion about managerial pressure in the focus groups) and demonstrated awareness of service delivery requirements. What did disturb these employees, however, was that the increasing demands of the job made it harder to provide the cover that was needed if an emergency did occur. This was particularly true in the organisations that had recently experienced financial constraints and staff reductions, as discussed in Chapter 3:

“There is no flexibility in the job whatsoever. The nub of the problem is the lack of cover.” (Cellbank)

“Fewer and fewer resources – there are fewer and fewer staff basically, and so it is working under pressure and that pressure just cascades down.” (SCC)

Indeed, as other authors have noted, it is somewhat paradoxical that, as more carers are in employment, so workplace pressures have grown following increased pressure to cut costs and be economically competitive. Thus, even if family-friendly policies are available, employees may not feel able to take advantage of them (Hochschild, 1997).

Relationships with colleagues, including managers, are, of course, highly dependent on particular situations and personalities. Managerial discretion is a key factor in managing employment and caring, and, in some of the interviews and focus groups, a lack of managerial empathy was felt to be problematic:

“If you get a manager that tends to be quite offhand and separate, or you can’t approach them, then you tend to feel isolated ... I mean my manager at the moment, and she

is with everybody, is that she doesn't want to know." (SCC)

"My line manager ... he's not particularly sympathetic, a slightly selfish person.... I don't think he really understands family life." (CCC)

Others, however, told a very different and more positive story:

"I spoke to G and I said 'L is in hospital, I'm with him at the moment'. She said, 'No problem, don't worry. I'll sort you some compassionate leave out. Let me know how he is'. And then she 'phoned me up and asked." (SCC)

Because managerial discretion is so significant, it is important to remember that it is not necessarily limitless:

"I got a 'phone call from the hospital [about my father]. I rang [Shopwell] – 'Fine, no problem'. In fact he died that evening, so when I 'phoned the next day, again – 'No problem at all'. Couldn't be more sympathetic and helpful. But then of course in subsequent weeks when I was recovering from ... deeply in grief, dealing with all the aftermath, they were less supportive. At that point they said, 'No, you can't reduce your hours'." (Shopwell Canterbury)

The significance of managerial discretion can mean that employees in different departments of the same organisation can have very different experiences:

"You get parts of the council where there is such a miserable adherence to rules and you get other parts where there is much more concentration on morale and delivering the work to the extent that people can then be free to attend to their needs. I have never known anybody in our department refused latitude to deal with need." (CCC)

The focus group extract above also addresses a theme closely bound up with managerial discretion: the notion of reciprocity. On many occasions in the interviews and focus group discussions, carers emphasised that the contract they had with their employers 'worked both ways':

"I will not steal a minute from my employer because I value what they give me. They trust me and I don't abuse that trust." (CCC)

"I think it depends on each line manager. Mine particularly is very good. Some people are; some people aren't. I honestly believe it's how you work in the first place. I do the work. I put the effort I need to put into the job and go home ... I think if you put in things, ... I think it pays back." (CCC)

Ideas of reciprocity imbue not only perceptions of relationships between employees and employers (managers) but also with work colleagues:

"Somebody I work with who has kids, she is perceived as being a 'lead swinger' when she 'phones in.... But if I 'phoned in, 'My mum's poorly', it's 'Oh, don't worry about it, come back when you're ready' ... I think it's because we are two different personalities.... She does really, really swing it." (SCC)

Indeed, work colleagues can be a considerable source of emotional support to carers –this research indicated particularly if they are women:

"I certainly wouldn't dream of telling my male colleagues. Male pride and all that kind of thing. It affects socialising and things like that.... The people [speaking of women] I work with are very supportive and understanding all round.... If things are very low at home, I just sit down and talk. And sometimes that's all you need – transferring the burden. They are very good like that; they are like a family." (CCC male carer)

However, feelings of reciprocal obligation to colleagues can also make life more difficult for carers if work pressures are intense:

"The bank should inform itself about carers' issues. It should think about the implications of low levels of staffing for its employees. Carers' leave isn't really an option when you think of the burdens it is placing on your colleagues who have to cover for you." (Cellbank)

The two major factors impacting on the way work-life policies were implemented, were the demands of the work organisation and the nature of and relationships with first-line supervisors.

However, the most understanding and sympathetic supervisor will find it difficult to implement policies if there are insufficient staff available for cover. 'Lean' organisations, it would seem, are not particularly family-friendly.

These two major factors cut across both organisational and locality differences. As noted in Chapter 2, the localities were rather different in respect of their recent histories and population stability, but these differences did not have an impact on the way in which policies were applied within the organisations. More important were the immediate constraints experienced by both managers and employees, together with the nature of their personal interactions.

Multiple carers

Of the 945 employee respondents, 71 (7.5%) were multiple carers (that is, they might be caring for a disabled child or adult as well as children under sixteen, be caring for a disabled adult as well as an older person, or for an older person as well as children). In total, 37 of the multiple carers (4% of our respondents) fell into this last category – the so-called 'sandwich generation'. The extent of the multiple carers' responsibilities was reflected in their level of awareness of the issues related to employment and caring. One expression of this was that, whereas 25% of the multiple carers wrote comments on their questionnaires, only 12% of the whole sample did so.

Many, indeed most, of the multiple carers cared for older people, and their needs and difficulties were virtually the same as those people caring only for older people, although the problems were often experienced more intensely. Not surprisingly, individuals with multiple care responsibilities had faced considerable difficulties in combining employment with caring, both in respect of individual career development as well as the constant shifts in employment arrangements that had to be made in response to caring needs:

"There was a time when I thought I would fly higher than I have, but once we discovered about [X's illness] I appreciated then that the option for going for a job which meant a lot of travelling or being

away from home was not one that I could pursue.... There was an offer of a job 10 years ago which would have meant a lot of travelling around the country.... That one – I specifically made the decision that I couldn't do that because of the effect on X." (CCC)

"I've changed my hours so many times I can't begin to tell you. And I have never had any problem, wanting to change them. I've done 21, I've done 28 and I've done 18½ ... when the children were really very young, and I was on my own. And at that stage you needed to work 24 hours to get Family Credit. And I went to the Assistant Director who said, 'No problem', and I went up to 24 hours." (SCC)

This last extract makes the point that, even for carers under very intense pressures, the financial returns from employment may still be an absolute necessity. This issue emerged quite strongly among multiple carers (and carers of older people and disabled people as well). Employment is obviously also related to the level of income coming into the household:

"For the last two-and-a-half years my wife has been unable to work and I feel the system has let us down. I would like help to get some support financially as we only have my money coming in." (Shopwell Canterbury)

"I think there is room for a lot of improvement because at times you are deeply emotionally involved, so it's hard to make good financial decisions. In my case, I just reduced my hours or stopped regardless of the financial consequences. I think there are people who aren't able to do that. There must be many people for whom it's going to cause extreme financial hardship. They need quick support and, if they are entitled to benefits, that needs to be provided very quickly. Because otherwise, at the end of the period of caring, if you are caring for someone with terminal illness, you come out of that with finances quite tatty." (Shopwell Canterbury)

"My mother is in residential care.... I found it impossible to continue caring for her at home and to work at the same time. Being

a single person, I had to support myself. She lived on her own and support services were not adequate.” (SCC)

The needs of multiple carers may well extend beyond the assistance that can be reasonably anticipated from even the most ‘family-friendly’ employer, and underline the continuing requirement for state and community support.

Limits to combining employment and caring

One factor that emerged among all categories of carers was the satisfaction most got out of going to work:

“I feel guilty leaving [my son] ... but at the same time, I thoroughly enjoy my job and I couldn’t be at home five days a week. I think I need the grown up side of it.”
(Cellbank)

“I do get tired looking after two people at home.... But if I had to be there all day every day, I think I would go stark, staring bonkers. I’m very much a person who needs a home life and an outside life. I need to mix with other people.” (CCC)

However (and as we have seen in our discussion of multiple carers above), although there are many positive aspects to the ways in which employed carers manage to balance their lives, including the help and support they get from their employers, colleagues and families, it should not be forgotten that, for a minority, the struggle to balance the two roles is very acute. We spoke to a (small) number of people who were thinking of changing their jobs, or giving up work altogether, because, given the incapacity of the person they cared for, the pressures had simply become too much to bear. For example, a Cellbank employee, caring for a very elderly and demanding relative, simply found it impossible to attend a course, even though the bank had offered to pay for substitute care (which would have been refused by the intended recipient). Thus, there are some limits beyond which employment and caring cannot be combined, given the requirements of employing organisations (as indicated earlier), and for some people caring itself will be a full-time job.

Concluding summary

- Employees’ awareness and use of the policies and services provided by employers is low, even among those with care responsibilities.
- Carers using employer provision used mainly flexible working and very few employees had used directly provided employer services.
- Dissatisfaction with employer services was slightly higher than satisfaction.
- The main problem faced by parents with school-age children related to lack of fit between working hours and the school timetable: they would appreciate more employer assistance in managing this, including support relating to older children and teenagers.
- Carers of older people and people with disabilities need to be able to respond quickly to unexpected events and to feel confident that they will not be penalised for this.
- Carers reported that managerial discretion was central to being able to achieve work–family balance.
- Ideas of reciprocity were important, between employees, managers and colleagues.
- In some cases, increased workplace pressures were making caring responsibilities more difficult to achieve.
- In both localities, the two major factors having an impact on the way work–life policies were implemented were the demands of work organisation and the relationships between employees, their colleagues and their managers.
- Carers of older people and disabled people did not report colleague resentment, whereas some staff with children did (although this was not seen to be excessive).
- Carers value the experience of employment.
- For many carers, their employment income is essential. However, this can be a source of stress, particularly for people with extensive caring responsibilities.

5

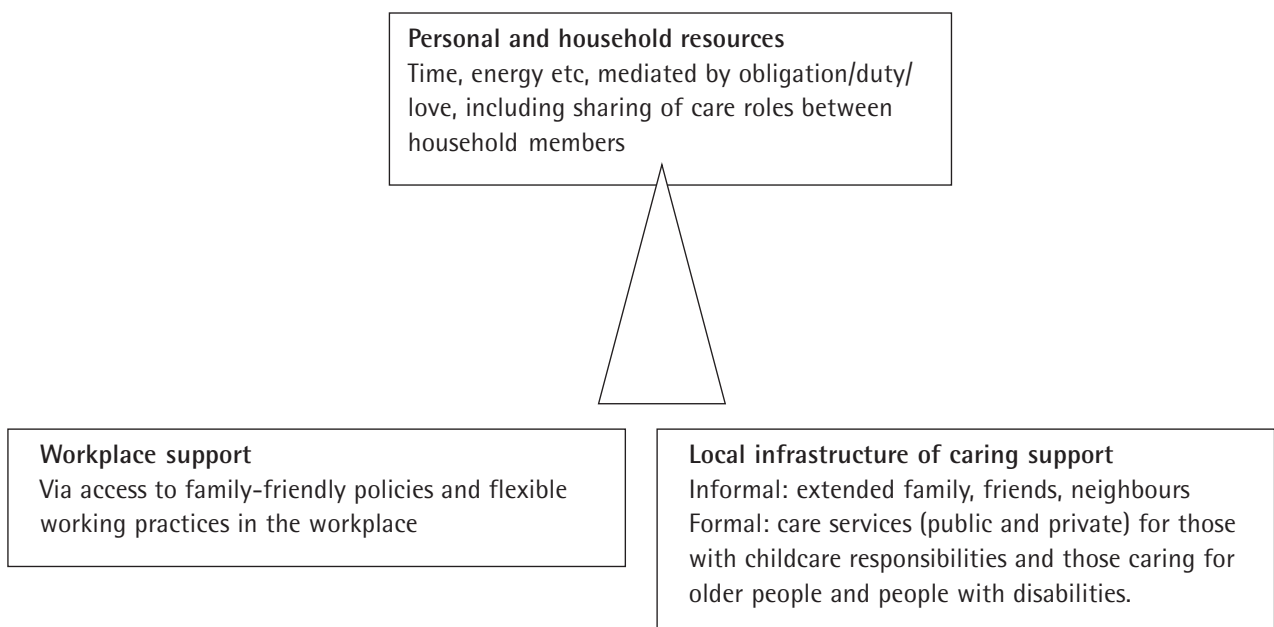
Infrastructures of care support and examples of good practice

It is clear from the previous chapters that employees with care responsibilities cope with the wide-ranging demands on their time and energies by drawing on three main sources of support (see Figure 9). We have already explored our employee survey respondents' personal strategies and the extent to which they are able to draw on workplace policies designed to be family- or carer-friendly. This chapter focuses on the infrastructure of caring support available in the two localities and considers recent policy changes affecting the available services, as well as scope for policy development.

Changing national policy in support of carers

Since 1997, a number of policy changes affecting employees with care responsibilities have been introduced, against a background of wider measures affecting all employees. In December 1997, it was agreed that the European Part-time Work Directive would be implemented in the UK from July 2000, giving part-time workers the right to 'no less favourable treatment' than full-time workers. This development affects pay, holidays, access to occupational pension schemes, sick pay, maternity/parental leave and training. In October

Figure 9: Sources of support for employed carers



1998, the European Working Time Directive came into force in the UK. This introduced a maximum working week of 48 hours, minimum rest periods and, from November 1999, a right to four weeks' paid leave per annum.

In 1999, the Employment Relations Act gave employees the right to 'reasonable' (unpaid) time off to deal with unexpected or sudden situations relating to those they care for. The Act also entitled parents of children born after 15 December 1999 to up to 13 weeks of unpaid leave during the first five years of each child's life. Minor enhancements to this entitlement were introduced in April 2001 – notably the extension of the maximum unpaid leave allowed from 13 to 18 weeks for parents of a disabled child. In his Budget statement of 2001, the Chancellor of the Exchequer raised maternity pay, announced that maternity leave would be extended from 18 to 26 weeks from April 2003, and introduced paid adoption leave and two weeks' paid paternity leave, also from that date.

Other policy developments have included the implementation of national strategies for carers (DSS, 1999) and for childcare (DfEE, 1998), as well as fiscal innovations such as the Working Families' Tax Credit, a government commitment to 'modernise social services' and specific attention to work–life balance issues. The focus on work–life balance has included a consultation document (DfEE, 2000), which sets out how "Government ... in partnership with businesses, the voluntary sector and employee organisations, [might] bring about [a] better balance between work and other aspects of life". To take this forward, the DfEE set up a Work–Life Balance Challenge Fund in 2000 to support projects that demonstrate "innovative practical ways to introduce changes to working patterns or practices, so as to benefit both the business and its employees". In late 2000, a Green Paper (DTI, 2000) on working parents was issued; in 2001 a Work and Parents Taskforce, established by the Department of Trade and Industry, recommended that parents of young children should have the right to negotiate reduced hours with their employer.

The national strategy for carers and proposals outlined in *Modernising social services* (DoH, 1998) have led to new developments affecting carers of older people and disabled people. The Care Standards Act was enacted in 2000; a

National Care Standards Commission has been established, with responsibility for regulating domiciliary care services; the Carers' Special Grant has been introduced; and local authorities now receive Practice Guidance on the Assessment of Carers' needs. Within the voluntary sector, the relevant agencies have shown increasing awareness of the needs of carers, including those who are in employment.

Childcare policy in the UK has notoriously lagged behind that in most other European countries well into the 1990s. The National Childcare Strategy was introduced in 1998 to create 900,000 new places for 1.6 million children in England by 2004, with substantial funding for delivery through Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships, whose responsibilities include planning service provision and providing information. The Strategy has substantially increased day nursery and after-school club places, somewhat offset by a national decline in numbers of registered childminders (DES, 2001). By common consent, services for pre-school and school-age children remain inadequate in many localities and, as shown in earlier chapters of this report, working parents continue to face difficulties in locating suitably flexible provision to meet their needs at a reasonable cost.

Local care infrastructure: support available to carers in Sheffield and Canterbury

The national policy described above provides an important context shaping the provision of those care services that are likely to be an important support to employed carers. Although recent government policy has been to reduce inequalities in access to such provision between localities, important variations remain. These result from differences in the services offered by private and voluntary sector providers, and from the different priorities of local authorities. This section therefore reviews the key services provided in the localities where our research was conducted.

Childcare provision

Childcare provision has increased rapidly in recent years in line with national trends, but there remain interesting differences between the localities in what is a constantly changing picture. According to the most recent figures available, Canterbury offers more places in day nursery care (approximately 110 places per 1,000 under-fives, compared to around 90 in Sheffield). By contrast, Sheffield has rather more playgroup places per child than Canterbury (around 60 per 1,000 compared with less than 30 in Canterbury). Both localities have similar capacity in places with childminders (just under 60 per 1,000), but Sheffield has more extensive provision of out-of-school clubs (over 50 per 1,000 compared with fewer than 20 in Canterbury) (see Mooney et al, 2001, for recent changes in childminder provision).

Information about childcare services has improved across the country with the establishment of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships and these are now well established in both localities. It is likely that the more extensive nursery provision in Canterbury, given higher female workforce participation rates and lower percentages of women working part-time in the South East compared to Yorkshire and Humberside, is a response to demand among employed mothers. Lower numbers of playgroup places in Canterbury will also reflect the difference in female employment rates.

Domiciliary services and support for carers of older people and disabled people living at home

In both localities the major responsibility for social services and thus the care of older people and people with disabilities rests with local authorities. (Although private and voluntary sector providers have become more prominent in the past decade, most of the funding for their activities still comes via local authorities.) For Canterbury, this means Kent County Council (KCC), although CCC also provides some elements of infrastructure. Voluntary sector involvement is especially visible through Age Concern, which runs the main day centre for older people in Canterbury, and both Age Concern and Help the Aged have other centres in nearby towns. There are a number of other drop-

in centres. KCC social services organises home care workers and the full range of other support services for older people. CCC organises Lifeline and key-holding services, and also provides accommodation for Carers' Voice and Crossroads Caring for Carers – active voluntary carer support organisations operating in the area. KCC gives priority to caring for older and frail people in their own homes, often contracting this work to independent agencies. There are over 70 residential and nursing homes in the Canterbury district, most privately run.

In Sheffield, the local authority, voluntary and private sectors combine to provide various schemes designed to enable older people to continue to be cared for in their homes. SCC has responsibility for making arrangements for residential and nursing home care and, in total, there are over 100 residential and nursing homes. A full range of home care support services is provided. The vast majority of these services are provided by private sector agencies, although the authority directly operates a frozen meal delivery service and a gardening scheme.

Several voluntary sector organisations also operate home support schemes including the Help at Home Scheme (Age Concern) and the Sheffield Stay Put Scheme (Metropolitan Housing Foundation). A number of other organisations also offer information and support to carers. Prominent in Sheffield are Voluntary Action Sheffield, the Sheffield Carers' Centre (funded by Sheffield Social Services), the Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Prudential Life Assurance. Sheffield Carers' Centre agency recently completed a three-year programme developing support for employed carers. Its experience has been fed into the way SCC has spent its Carers' Special Grant and has informed its implementation of Carer's Assessments (see below for examples of innovations).

The performance of local authorities in the provision of care services is now evaluated at the national level, to allow comparative analysis of performance. Data are available at county and metropolitan district level and are shown in Tables 11 and 12. When measured in this way, social services provision for older adults is better in Sheffield than in Kent. Sheffield delivers more hours of home help and home care, to a higher proportion of households, than does Kent.

Employed carers and care support services

As already discussed in Chapter 2, most of the employed carers who responded to the questionnaire were making more use of informal than of formal support. On average, more than three quarters of those who cared for children relied on some support from their children's grandparents, compared with around a quarter who used a day nursery, a fifth who used an after-school club and a sixth who used a childminder. Almost half of those caring for older people receive support from relatives outside their household in carrying out this responsibility, while only one in eight use respite, day centre or residential services, and about one in four rely on a district nurse or care assistant.

When formal services were used, the questionnaire measured employees' satisfaction with the arrangements they had made. While relatively few carers used such services, there was an extremely high degree of satisfaction with these arrangements in relevant cases. However, many respondents were critical of the bureaucracy involved:

"I think it was more by luck than judgement that we got through each stage. The system's not geared up for that [changes in circumstances due to respite care], so, if you're on benefit you're on benefit until you've finished it, and then you're off. Short episodes were a nightmare because they have to keep reassessing ... they can't keep up with the paperwork because they are under such a backlog, so they are always behind." (CCC carer of an older parent)

The focus groups and follow-up interviews with employed carers provided an opportunity to explore the use of formal services in more depth. These yielded examples in which use of formal services had been crucial in enabling a carer to remain in employment. Such arrangements had been particularly important to employees dealing with the sudden illness or disability of a spouse, or who had primary care for a parent. Usually these employees had been anxious, for financial and social reasons, to remain in employment. Most had benefited from some workplace flexibility to accommodate their changing circumstances, but had gained support in arranging suitable formal care from health service

or social services workers, rather than from their employer.

One focus group participant was suddenly faced with care responsibilities to be accommodated alongside a full-time managerial job. Her circumstances illustrate the complex situation many such carers face:

"I was in a cleft stick between making sure the department I was responsible for was OK, and making sure that I looked after my husband [after a disabling stroke]. There was never any question from my line manager, about if I needed some time off – there was total support in that way. But, at the same time, the bottom line was, 'You've got to put the time back somewhere'. I took the decision that it wasn't a good idea for me to just leave work – I thought I would have resented that very strongly. And the family supported that. I used to get up very, very early, sort out my husband before I left for work, and build up time. We used the [council] Home Care Service when [he] came out of hospital. I used them really just as a checking service, to make sure he was all right. I needed somebody to keep an eye on him, and the only alternative – realistically – would have been a neighbour, and you can't ask neighbours to do that regularly. The only other alternative would have been paying for private care, which is incredibly expensive. The occupational therapist at the hospital [was excellent]. I started off by saying, 'I am not leaving work'. So I set the ground rules, maybe. She sorted it out for me." (SCC woman caring for husband)

This example demonstrates how, for employed carers, support services in their locality are important in enabling them to manage their different roles, but are only one piece in a complex jigsaw. In this case, support from professional services was crucial both in setting up and maintaining the employed carer role.

In the childcare focus groups, in which both men and women participated, it was clear that financial and family factors were strongly influential in determining whether use is made of formal services, which in most cases involve a direct financial cost. Where grandparents lived locally and were able to take on the responsibility

Table 11: Households receiving home help and home care per 10,000 households, 1998–2000, by sector of provider (rates per 10,000 households and % change)

	All sectors				Local authority				Independent			
	1998	1999	2000	% change 1999– 2000	1998	1999	2000	% change 1999– 2000	1998	1999	2000	% change 1999– 2000
England	238	226	212	-6	157	136	120	-11	81	89	101	14
Sheffield	239	213	174	-18	185	171	132	-22	54	42	42	-1
Kent	158	163	161	-1	30	24	32	36	129	139	129	-7

Note: Although collected by the Department of Health in a way which is designed to permit comparability, it has not been possible for the researchers to check that figures are truly comparable, for example, we do not know if contact hours include or exclude travelling time.

Source: DoH (2001)

Table 12: Contact hours of home help and home care, 1998–2000, by sector of provider (rates per 10,000 households and % change)

	All sectors				Local authority				Independent			
	1998	1999	2000	% change 1999– 2000	1998	1999	2000	% change 1999– 2000	1998	1999	2000	% change 1999– 2000
England	1,389	1,427	1,487	7	752	706	661	-6	638	722	826	14
Sheffield	..	1,498	1,453	-3	..	1,037	1,105	7	..	461	348	-25
Kent	1,300	1,159	1,109	-4	256	174	205	18	1,044	985	904	-8

Note: Although collected by the Department of Health in a way which is designed to permit comparability, it has not been possible for the researchers to check that figures are truly comparable, for example, we do not know if contact hours include or exclude travelling time.

Source: DoH (2001)

of care for children, their services were commonly used. As noted earlier, Sheffield parents were rather more likely to have access to local family support, although it should be stressed that some parents in both localities lacked this option.

Those without access to extensive family support often used a varied package of services, combined in different ways over time as needs changed. Many parents combined formal and informal arrangements. It was in discussions with those reliant on formal services that the greatest emphasis was placed on the lack of fit between school timetables and most employees' work schedules. Given their lesser access to family support, it is not surprising that employees in Canterbury made this point more emphatically.

Even within each locality, experience of different types of formal provision varied, with participants reporting both positive and negative experiences of employing nannies, using the services of childminders, taking children to day nurseries and relying on after-school clubs or holiday schemes. The combination of arrangements required changes over time, as families cope with children of different ages (and with different numbers of children requiring care and supervision). In the focus groups, some parents discussed changing patterns of childcare support which had spanned ten years or longer – a period in which, as already discussed, childcare services have been subject to considerable development and change. Coordinating these arrangements had often been time-consuming and frustrating and, for those with two or more children, had at times been both complex and expensive. As one father put it:

“There are tens of thousands of people that are going through the same thing, and it just doesn’t make sense that there isn’t a better way of going about these things than all these people going through all these contortions to keep a job and a family together.” (SCC)

Tables 11 and 12 show that employed carers of older people and disabled people in Sheffield had access to a rather more developed infrastructure of care support services than their counterparts in Canterbury. However, it is important to stress that in neither locality did employees feel support services were generous or able to meet all their needs. Furthermore, those who described their care responsibilities in focus groups and interviews, were often discussing situations with which they had been dealing for a decade or more – a period which has seen significant changes in both public funding for, and strategic approaches to, care provision. Nevertheless, when employees had been supported by care services, they felt this support had made an important difference to their situation, reducing family and personal stress and, in some cases, permitting them to continue in employment.

Employers' links with care support services

Given the explicit commitment to family-friendly and work-life balance policies in Shopwell, Cellbank and SCC, one would expect to find some links between these organisations and care services in their localities. In fact, there was very limited evidence of such developments. Representatives of Shopwell (at the national level) indicated that this organisation is actively developing contacts with care service providers, with a view to establishing easier access to services (such as holiday clubs for school-age children) for their employees. Shopwell sees this as an important part of its commitment to family-friendly employment. Shopwell and Cellbank also stress that they operate schemes to encourage employees to contribute to their local communities, for example, through charitable fund-raising.

Because of their statutory obligations, both the local authorities, SCC and CCC, inevitably have extensive links with their local communities and are providers and funders of key services for older people, disabled people and children. Line

managers drew attention to these aspects and emphasised that their employer was an important stakeholder in the local community.

Despite this, it was striking that none of the managers interviewed was aware of any current links between their organisation and local service providers aiming to help employed carers carry out their roles. Several managers in CCC pointed out that there had previously been an arrangement with a local NHS Trust to access places in its day nursery:

“We did have contacts with the nursery at the hospital, and we used to actually subsidise staff to put their children there, but we found that a lot of staff wanted to find their own. It wasn’t particularly convenient. It didn’t work out very well, and then they had problems there ... it was losing money.” (CCC manager)

A Cellbank manager said that she used to keep a binder containing information about registered childminders and nurseries, and different types of care services available, but that the contact was no longer there.

When asked, most managers did feel that there was a need to develop services to support employed carers, but generally they thought in terms of workplace provision rather than establishing closer links with local providers:

“There has been talk of having workplace crèches and things like that. I think the need is for when children start school and the difficulties in meeting holiday periods. ... I think it would be a bit easier if there were some workplace-centred things, so that summer clubs were run at the local authority, rather than all of us having to take our kids to summer clubs.” (CCC manager)

There was some evidence of employers referring employees to external agencies that could offer support to those requiring help. However, these examples tended to be for staff who themselves needed counselling, emotional or medical support, rather than employees looking for practical support in resolving the everyday problems and occasional crises of care responsibilities. There was little evidence of these employers developing practical strategies designed to involve local care providers in

establishing routine arrangements to support staff with care responsibilities and enable them to avoid the personal stress highlighted by many respondents.

In the focus group interviews with Sheffield employees who were carers, participants reported having reasonable access to publicly available information about the kind of services needed by carers. People working for local authorities and banks tended to have the skills to exploit this type of resource. Employees valued good access to information, but some were unsure whether this was really an employer's responsibility (as discussed in Chapter 4, those caring for older relatives and disabled relatives did not expect employers to provide support of a practical kind, such as day care or respite care).

By contrast, many people with childcare responsibilities felt that support with predictable childcare needs (such as how to manage children's fourteen weeks' holiday from school against an annual leave allowance that rarely exceeded five weeks) would be beneficial. It was felt that employers could offer support by negotiating childcare places, possibly at favourable rates or with an employer subsidy, in after-school and holiday clubs. There was also considerable support for employer involvement in organising pre-school care, either through workplace or locally based nurseries.

Good practice and policy change in supporting employed carers

It is evident from the above that this research, despite including organisations which were seeking to be 'family-friendly' employers, found few examples of good or innovative practice in relation to employers' links with locally based service provision. Nevertheless, our investigation of the local infrastructure of care support did reveal some innovative schemes and approaches. These were largely seen in Sheffield (as mentioned in Chapter 1, Kent is currently severely constrained in the extent to which it can fund new initiatives via its local authorities). An interesting feature of the example given below is the linking of private, voluntary and public sector organisations.

Children Mean Business (CMB) is a Sheffield-based project set up with European funding. It is

based on a partnership between the local authority Young Children's Service, Sheffield Children's Information Service, Sheffield Out-of-School Network, the Pre-school Learning Alliance and Sheffield Training and Enterprise Council (now the South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council). Its remit is to develop childcare businesses and to promote family-friendly employment among employers. The project runs business clubs for employers, works with organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses and uses its website and other marketing techniques to stimulate interest in flexible employment practices that support employed carers. CMB's manager offered some examples of how the project works.

One major organisation had been concerned about the cost implications of employees 'taking time off sick during school holidays':

"They came to us for advice about what to do about it. We linked them with various out-of-school clubs and looked at partnering them for a holiday play-scheme. We assist companies to become responsible for childcare. Maybe a smaller company would just put up a notice – 'this is where you can get information' – and they know that they are giving some sort of help to their employees and sometimes just a friendly ear. Perhaps in the future they will look at putting in some training for managers. To change a culture of an industry you have to plant the seeds and let them grow, and it takes time. The University Hospital Trust do a news-sheet to all their employees on a regular basis, as do the Benefits Agency, which is really good. Some companies run childcare voucher schemes. I think [CMB] is poised at the moment to have a major impact. There is a great potential for further growth – one of the things is to offer management training on family-friendly working."

Our research into care infrastructure also identified ways in which, in Sheffield, new ideas were feeding into local authority policy on working with carers of older people and disabled people. These developments had arisen in the context of changes in government policy and cross-fertilisation of ideas at the local level, between the voluntary and local authority sectors. SCC had appointed a Policy and Services Officer

for Carers, responsible for implementing statutory obligations and national policy on carers, developing consultation about local needs and administering the Carers' Special Grant (in Sheffield, worth £1.2 million over five years). This Officer was confident that the funding would be spent in ways that would benefit employed carers (among others):

“The working carer may do caring before work, be bobbing back at lunchtime and caring in the evenings and at weekends. This caring is not as visible [as caring 9-5] in terms of numbers of hours. The [new] guidance says you have to take into account the impact on that individual. ... The most important work we are doing ... is the development of proper Carer's Assessments. ... You've got to be carer-focused. You have to recognise the role of the carer in their own right – stop chasing needs, stop quibbling about wants ... have a look at outcomes and what actually happens as a result of putting in services. Does it improve the situation or not? ... Carer's Special Grant is letting people vote with their feet, so people are choosing particular things – some of those people are working carers.”

This officer nevertheless felt there were limitations to the extent to which employers could offer support for working carers:

“Key people such as personnel officers may very well keep information about where to contact social services and there is some value in that. Employers can't be referral points, I don't think. If I were a personnel manager I would want a bank of information – you would want to have national network lines and helplines. Big employers no longer have welfare officers; they subcontract that out to large national bodies. And I don't think private providers have got their head round the potential of the market. They don't identify working carers as a group. Nobody is confident enough about the size of the market to start putting adverts specifically directed at working carers – that's my impression. I think [development of services] is individual purchaser driven. ... People are saying, 'If I am going to stay in work, then I will need somebody to come in a couple of times a

day'. People who are able to, go and purchase those services from agencies themselves.”

This view was, to some extent, corroborated in our interviews with private providers of domiciliary care services. As one major provider in Sheffield (who worked mainly through contracts with local authorities) explained, even private providers operate within a regulatory framework which includes Inland Revenue rules on VAT exemption and guidelines implemented by local authorities:

“Under the contract with local authorities we are not allowed to offer additional services. We could abuse the client. About five years ago we used to take some clients out for a trip in the car and we used to charge the client 17p a mile to cover the petrol. It was frowned on and stopped by the local authority. There is the protection for the service user ... but it takes away client choice and spontaneity.”

The extension in 2000 of direct payments (DP) arrangements to older people with care needs provides one avenue for more flexibility in service delivery, since this enables DP recipients to design their own packages of care and employ their own carers. As yet, however, DP uptake remains extremely low (Stiell et al, 2001).

One private provider also commented on a further difficulty in planning flexible services to meet the needs of carers as well as those they care for:

“The care need comes on very suddenly. It isn't like a planned pregnancy. It's an immediate care need, and there is guilt and problems and responsibilities and the initial instinct is to provide care yourself. Then, the need for external help depends on how the family copes and all sorts of stuff.”

The research collected data from employees about both their current situation and their past experience of combining a job with care responsibilities. Given the considerable changes in the care infrastructure during the past decade (affecting both provision for childcare and services for older people and disabled people), it has been difficult to assess the impact of differences between the two localities. What is

clear is that most employed carers, in both localities, have had to rely more on informal support and time flexibility at work in carrying out their caring roles than on formal sources and a local infrastructure of care support. Many carers, and some managers, felt that the balance between the three sources of support (see Figure 9) should be improved. Too much is reliant on employees' use of personal and household resources, at times imposing severe stress, while too little dependable support is available through workplace policies. Also, the formal aspects of the local infrastructure of caring support still require further development.

Concluding summary

- Important developments in national policy have changed the context in which local infrastructures of care develop: most of these changes appear to be positive.
- There are still important regional and local variations in the care services available. In the absence of a large-scale sample survey devoted to the topic, no easy assessment of the overall impact on employed carers of differences in the care infrastructures in Sheffield and Canterbury was possible. However, at an individual level, access to formal care services at the time of need had an important impact on people's ability to manage work and care. This was especially true for carers of older people and disabled people.
- Although only a minority of employed carers was making use of formal care services they were highly satisfied with the formal arrangement they had made.
- Some carers of older people and disabled people found the paperwork involved in responding to changes in the circumstances of those they cared for very burdensome.
- Employers were rarely involved in the formal care arrangements used by employed carers.
- Employers, despite their commitment to family-friendly practices, had not established links with local service providers.
- Some examples of innovative practice emerged in discussions with relevant providers, and some practitioners felt that new policies held the potential to offer better support for employed carers.

Conclusions

Our research has shown that, in the six workplaces studied (in four organisations), a large number of employees (almost half of all respondents) are working carers, many with childcare responsibilities. A significant minority (14%) cares for older adults and a smaller number for adults or children with disabilities.

All the organisations studied have a range of formal family-friendly employment policies designed to help these carers balance work and family life. The policies vary slightly by organisation, with Sheffield City Council offering a wider range. However, despite the existence of these policies, employers' and employees' awareness of the help that is available was low, although, unsurprisingly, awareness was slightly higher for carers than for non-carers. Awareness of the policies available was also greater in some of the workplaces studied than in others. Shopwell managers and staff, in both locations, had a particularly good awareness, which can be linked to the organisational culture and to the relatively high 'internal' profile that has been attached to issues of 'family friendliness'.

In all the organisations, employees made only limited use of the policies, with carers mainly using those options which permit time flexibility. Thus, the most common response as far as knowledge of employer's services was concerned, was 'don't know' – even among carers. Similarly, the majority of respondents 'didn't know' whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with their employer's care assistance, although, of those who expressed an opinion (43%), slightly more were 'dissatisfied' than 'satisfied'. Where assistance with care is concerned, carers tend to make use of support outside the workplace. This is mainly family support, particularly in Sheffield.

The study has also shown that, despite the clear guidelines set out in written policy statements concerning the implementation of the policies within the organisations, there was a low level of training and guidance within the workplace, although this varied between the organisations. In practice, implementation often takes place on an informal, flexible basis, and is strongly influenced by reciprocity between managers and employees and between colleagues themselves. Managerial discretion is central to employees being able to achieve an adequate work–family balance. Those managers who themselves have experience of caring are more likely to facilitate this, being more sympathetic towards staff needs.

While managerial discretion has its positive side and can often be used to gain a maximum family-friendly outcome for both the employer and employee, its negative aspects should not be overlooked. In a situation where neither employee nor manager may be fully aware of the range of policy possibilities available, 'discretion' may be perceived as 'favouritism'. Thus, while it is not being suggested that managerial discretion should be in any way constrained, it is also important to ensure that both employees and managers are supported and informed by a clear framework of policies.

While employees strive to achieve a balance between work and family life, employers also seek to reach a balance between the provision of family-friendly employment policies and meeting the requirements of service provision and delivery. As has been shown, service requirements vary according to whether the service is provided directly to members of the public or not, as there is a level below which this cannot fall.

The evidence provided in this report indicates that meeting this balance is more difficult for managers and employers in departments or organisations operating under tight financial constraints and/or with insufficient staffing levels, and that these workplace pressures, in turn, make it harder for workers to accommodate their caring responsibilities. These problems in the implementation of family-friendly policies within 'lean' organisations were found in both localities. Thus, locality-specific characteristics – the infrastructure of support available locally, or the population characteristics discussed in Chapter 2 – do not appear to have an impact on the way family-friendly policies are managed.

The difficulties facing workers with care responsibilities vary depending on the nature of those responsibilities. The main problem faced by parents of school-age children relates to a lack of fit between working hours and the school timetable; these workers would appreciate more employer assistance in managing this. Staff caring for older people and disabled people, on the other hand, need to be able to respond quickly to crises and to feel confident they will not be penalised for doing so. At an individual level, access to care services at the time of need, had an important impact on the ability to manage work and care.

Moreover, for many carers of disabled adults and older people, their income from employment is absolutely essential. Some carers are effectively carrying out two jobs, and find themselves under considerable financial and emotional pressures.

Some managers expressed concerns about the potential for abuse of family-friendly policies and questioned the legitimacy of the uptake of some provisions. Despite this, most managers feel there is a strong business case for offering family-friendly employment policies. The benefits include a better company image, increased productivity, greater staff loyalty, and an improvement in staff recruitment and retention. Moreover, the research shows that employers are continually striving to make improvements to the type of family-friendly employment policies that are available and also to the way in which they are delivered.

In the workplaces studied, the organisations did not have well-established links with local care providers. Employees and managers tend to

think in terms of workplace provision, although, in practice, carers are well aware that it is the combination of personal commitment, flexibility within the employment relationship and access to reliable care services which makes for a successful combination of employment and caring.

Policy implications

- Even where organisations have policies, awareness needs to be improved at all levels.
- There is a need to improve communication within organisations. This requires the support of training and guidance (for both managers and employees) to ensure that employees can take advantage of policies, irrespective of who their line manager is or of their relationship with him/her.
- There is a continuing need for government-provided services (and voluntary sector assistance), as organisations under financial stress or other pressures will not be able or willing to provide the resources needed for good work–life balance.
- Carers of disabled adults and older people do not regard their employer as a potential provider of practical help with caring, although those whose employers provided information about local services found this helpful. The financial and emotional demands faced by working carers can be considerable, and they therefore need continuing (and enhanced) support from national and local government. Employers should develop good up-to-date resources about local services and support to assist employees and managers alike. They also need to be aware that pressures on carers of older or ill people often continue even after a cared-for person has died, and to incorporate this understanding into training for managers.
- Changes to school timetables and school holidays need to be explored (in some parts of the country these are already being reviewed), and there needs to be further expansion of the range of workplace and external services available, such as after-school clubs. Small- and medium-sized enterprises face particular difficulty in developing workplace provision, and employees in smaller organisations rely particularly heavily on the external services available in their locality. Further development of out-of-school services is

essential as long as the annual length of school holidays (however distributed across the year) exceeds the annual holiday entitlement of employees. Employers with a high proportion of staff with childcare responsibilities may gain significant business benefits from offering additional support to them in coping with school holiday periods.

- Opposition to family-friendly employment should not be overstated. Most managers and employees are sympathetic to the needs of carers and wish to be helpful. Care needs to be taken that employers do not erode goodwill between workers by taking unreasonable advantage of employees' willingness to support each other.
- Employers and local care providers should enter into a dialogue about how they can support employed carers. For those with childcare responsibilities, continuing development of the childcare infrastructure, especially during school holidays, should make this possible, and would have a range of business benefits as well as reducing the difficulties faced by working carers. The needs of multiple carers and those caring for older, sick or disabled people, will sometimes extend beyond the assistance that can reasonably be anticipated from even the most 'family-friendly' employer. This underlines the continuing need for state and community support for this group. Establishing lines of communication between care providers and employers will be an important step in ensuring that care services develop in ways that offer practical support to employed carers.

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