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## **Employers' Knowledge and Attitudes Regarding Organizational Policy Toward Workers Caring for Aging Family Members**

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*The study examined employers' knowledge of and attitudes toward working carers who care for aging family members. The study was based on the ecological model. One hundred employers were interviewed using structured questionnaires and 13 employers by additional in-depth interviews. Both research instruments included areas of disruption to the organization, existing policies, and feasibility as to developing appropriate policies to support working carers. Results show that caregiving caused a disruption in workers' functioning mainly by being absent, leaving work early, and coming to work late. Usually, there was "no policy," and half of the employers did not support introducing such a policy. Women managers in public organizations, who had less seniority and less previous experience with working-carers, tended to*

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*be more positive about supportive policies. Recommendations are included.*

**KEYWORDS** *eldercare, employers, Israel, organization policy, working carers*

## INTRODUCTION

Population aging has become a global phenomenon; almost all societies worldwide are affected by changes in their population structures, with a decreasing share of younger people and a growing proportion of elders. This process alters the age structures of nations and has caused age pyramids to become rectangularized in most developed countries. The phenomenon of global aging poses challenges to families, organizations, and states (Bengtson, Lowenstein, Putney, & Gans, 2003). Israel is still a relatively young country with only 10% of the total population aged 65 and older. However, in the big cities, the percentage is close to 20%, and those aged 80 and older compose 40% of the 65 and older group (Brodsky, Shnoor, & Be'er, 2009).

Parallel to global aging, the family is undergoing changes in its structure, including a decrease in family size, increased divorce rates, lower marriage rates, and a growing number of single-parent families. These changes imply that in the coming years, care of frail older people will depend on a smaller number of family members. These family members are likely to become caregivers of aging parents either at one or at several points in time along the life course. At the same time, welfare and health systems are encountering difficulties in providing an appropriate response for workers facing eldercare responsibilities, which leads to an increased family burden (Kunemund, 2006). Longer life expectancy, especially an increase in the number of the "old-old," 75 and older (World Health Organization, 2007), indicates that eldercare of family members will stretch over many years, while many of those in carer roles are still active in the labor market. Added to changes in demography and family forms are other social trends, such as changing employment patterns, with increased participation of women (the traditional family caregivers) in the labor force, a fact that affects family relations and caregiving. These changes affect the economy, the labor market, and the future funding of health and welfare systems (Bengtson & Lowenstein, 2003).

There is good reason to believe that policy provides an important mechanism through which cultural expectations toward adult aging can be influenced, and that policy influences how midlife and older adults plan for the future (Sidorenko & Walker, 2004). Such planning is shaped not only by national and local policies, but by the range and use of services available as well as personnel policies and organizational programs (e.g., flexible work

time, leave arrangements). It is usually in the interest of employers to support employees in managing their personal and family lives; they perceive it as strategic business tools for improving recruitment, retention, commitment, and productivity. Employers also perceive such strategy as beneficial for both employer and employees (Bond, Galinsky, Kim, & Brownfield, 2005).

There is currently substantial empirical data about the impact of work-family spillover among working carers (Grzywacz, Almeida, & McDonald, 2002; Roehling, Moen, & Batt, 2003) but sparse available data on employers' knowledge of and attitudes toward this population. Some studies have attributed the low utilization of eldercare programs to inadequate employer communications and lack of employee awareness about these programs (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2002). Thus, it is important to study the difficulties faced by organizations employing those currently in care-giver roles, or those who will become caregivers in the future, as well as the measures they take to meet the needs of these employees.

The aim of the present study was twofold: to explore employers' knowledge and attitudes in different Israeli organizations regarding policy toward employees caring for aging family members and to examine the implications of care responsibilities for employees' performance at work and for the organization.

## BACKGROUND

### Organizational and Personal Implications of Combining Work and Care

A fundamental question concerning people in the workforce who are simultaneously working and caring for aging family members is linked to mutual implications for the workplace and the family. One should investigate whether workers' contributions to the organization are being affected and what the capacity of the workplace services is to support working carers (Walker, 2000). Data in Israel show that about 45% of principal carers of frail older people were active in the labor market (Naon et al., 2004). A survey by the National Alliance for Caregivers/AARP (2005) in the United States found that the vast majority of carers for family members were simultaneously employed. Moreover, it was indicated that nearly 70% of women work full-time in the United States and most of them assume a variety of caregiving responsibilities (Wisensale, 2008).

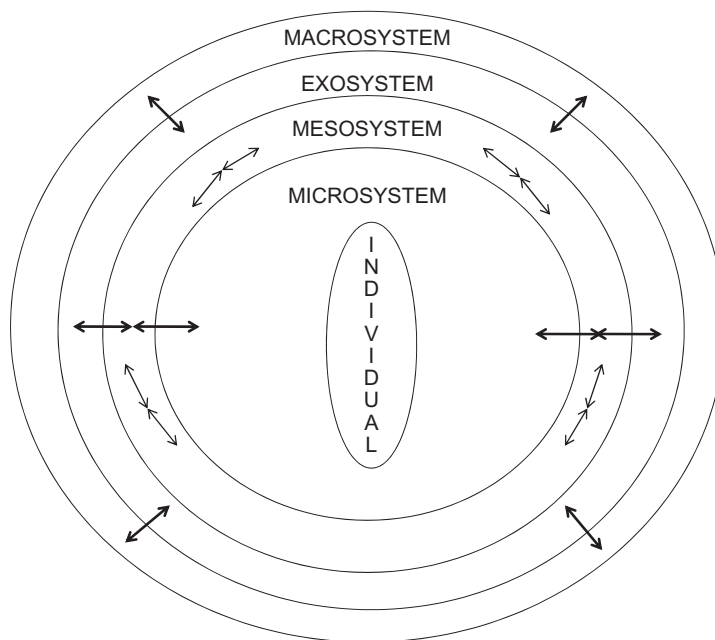
Studies consistently present associations between family-work conflict and the implications of such conflict on workplace performance (e.g., Evandrou & Glaser, 2004). The National Alliance for Caregivers/AARP survey (2004) revealed that 57% of working carers came to work late, had to leave early, or took time off. From the workers' viewpoint, these absences involve a loss of income as well as more long-term losses, such as pension

rights. From the organization's point of view, it was found that combining work with caregiving leads to absences, lateness, reduced productivity, and even resignation from work (Shoptaugh, Phelps, & Visio, 2004).

A wide population, mainly women, relinquish their right to paid work outside home due to family commitments. In a representative sample of recipients of long-term care insurance benefits (based on LTC Insurance Law [1988]) in Israel, Brodsky et al. (2004) show that 14% of working carers of older family members had to leave their jobs; 40% reported a subsequent need to reduce work hours; and 20% lost work hours or days due to care obligations during the 3 months prior to the interview. Primary carers lost an average of 3 working days a month and invested 20 to 45 hours a week in care.

### Ecological Model

The conceptual framework on which this study is based is Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which highlights the interrelationships and reciprocity between individuals and the various systems in their environments, as indicated in Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner advocates a dialectic between the individual and the environmental context; the individual can exert an influence over his or her environment at the same time that the



**FIGURE 1** Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. (Source: Bronfenbrenner, n.d., based on Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Part one, pp. 3–42.)

environment exerts an influence on the individual. This conceptual framework, with its concentric circles, can lead to good programmatic and policy decisions; a change in as many levels of the environment as possible is needed if serious change in workplace organizational policies is expected.

Workplace organizations are currently a central component in people's lives and influence individuals' welfare, as they contain essential resources for their existence and development. The ecological model assumes that individuals are influenced by elements in the immediate environment (microsystem)—their socioeconomic attributes—and by relationships between the different components within the close environment (mesosystem)—workplace organizations. They are also affected by more distanced environmental elements, such as social arrangements and legislation (exosystem), which are impacted by ideologies and cultural arrangements (macrosystem). Employers' attitudes investigated in this study were analyzed according to these systems: employers' personal background attributes, such as gender and education; the nature of the organization, such as its size and the sector to which it belongs; and legislation and family culture and welfare regime in Israel. The systems are detailed below in the context of social and organizational policies for working carers.

### Family Culture, Welfare Regime (Macrosystem), and Relevant Legislation (Exosystem) in Israel

In Israel, as in other western countries, changes have occurred in family structures. In spite of this, Israel is still a more family-oriented society than some other countries (Katz & Lavee, 2005), and family norms in the context of caring for aging parents are strong (Katz et al., 2003). Social policy in the context of responsibility for eldercare reflects the country's vision as a welfare state, its financial capacity to budget for this purpose, and the familial, responsibility-based values concerning care for aging family members.

The Israeli social security system combines four concepts: support, social insurance, categorical benefits, and social benefits related to employment (Gal, 2005). As such, Israel has well-developed systems of special services for the elderly, operated by public and private sectors. These services are anchored in several laws: Israel's strong familial culture is expressed through the Family (Alimony and Maintenance) Law of 1958, which obligates adult offspring to financially support parents and grandparents if they are unable to provide for themselves. Israeli law supports informal caregivers, with the assistance of several designated laws: support in the employment economic field, through entitlement to utilizing 10 sick leave days from work per year due to the illness of a child, parent, or spouse, based on the Sick Pay Law, 1993. Informal caregivers also have the option of taking time off from work without pay, where all entitlements are reserved, based on specific agreements between the employer and employee.

One of the central laws for the welfare of elders in the community and their care families is the Long Term-Care Insurance Law, 1988. This law enables frail elders to continue living in the community and receiving required services at home. The law provides in-kind services, which include assistance in personal and domestic care. In spite of these positive developments, there is still a shortage of institutional and community services (Brick, 2002), which makes the reality of working caregivers still difficult. In light of the above, employers' attitudes and willingness to implement organizational policies to support working carers are embedded in Israel's definition as a welfare society with a familial tradition.

### Organizational Characteristics (Mesosystem)

In some western countries, the need to facilitate a balance between work and family demands has led to formulating organizational policies for providing support programs for working carers (Sundstrom et al., 2008; Wagner, 2006). The number of workplaces supporting working carers has increased as a result of the incentive from workers' organizations that negotiated with employers to achieve shared goals: recruiting employees, keeping employees within the organization, and maintaining their loyalty (Wagner, 2006). Studies found that the size of the organization and the sector to which it belongs were among the variables that affected the organizations' attitudes toward a policy to support working carers.

Studies that examined organizational strategies for reducing the negative impact of caregiving on work (e.g., decreased job satisfaction, frequent turnover), found that instituting flexible work hours, reducing work hours, and helping to mobilize informal support from other family members, as well as formal assistance, succeeded in moderating negative outcomes (e.g., Chang, Brecht, & Carter, 2001). However, organizations have difficulty in defining their role as providing support for working carers and in identifying the most effective types of support (Shoptaugh et al., 2004).

### Individual Background Characteristics (Microsystem)

The individual microsystem according to the ecological model (i.e., the employers' demographic and social characteristics) can affect employers' readiness and ability to develop family-friendly policies and programs. Data from the United Kingdom from four projects within the "Work and Family Life" program that were conducted between 2000 and 2002 revealed that background attributes such as gender, age, family status, and experience with caring situations were influential factors in enabling managers to develop sensitivity to employees who are experiencing stress in managing work and family responsibilities (Yeandle, Phillips, Scheibl, Wingfield, & Wise, 2003). The present study examined the impact of five



sociodemographic factors: seniority at work, gender, age, educational level, and previous experience with working carers.

### Study Goals

Only a small number of studies have dealt with the perceptions of work-family conflicts from employer and organizational perspectives. Thus, many questions remain unanswered regarding difficulties and disruptions to organizations as a result of employing working carers and the organizational policy toward support of such workers. The current study took a step in this direction and focused on the following issues: (1) identifying difficulties faced by organizations caused by employees who care for older family members, (2) identifying existing policies in organizations to facilitate combining work with adult care, (3) examining employers' knowledge of and attitudes about instituting supportive policies for working carers, (4) analyzing employers' evaluation of feasible types of assistance for these workers, and (5) formulating recommendations for policy directions to enable integrating work and family responsibilities of employees caring for elders.

## METHODS

### Study Population and Sample

Response rate was 50%. The sample consisted of 100 employers in various types of organizations in Israel. The organizations were selected according to sector (public and private—43% public) and size. In each sector, the organizations were sorted into three categories: a small organization—up to 100 employees; a medium-size organization—101 to 800 employees; and a large organization—more than 801 employees (Samuel, 1996). The organizations were chosen from various lists, such as the register for nonprofit organizations and Manufacturers Association of Israel companies' list. Among the selected organizations were governmental, educational, welfare, and health services in various municipalities, universities, private business organizations (such as hi-tech), banks or production plants, and nonprofit (such as the cancer association). The interviews were conducted with managers (mean age, 48 ( $SD = 9.5$ ); mean years of education, 16 years ( $SD = 2.8$ ); 45% female) such as a factory director, director of human resources, and directors of large departments and units within organizations (mean years of seniority in the current organization, 11 [ $SD = 9.5$ ]).

Of the employers who responded to the quantitative questionnaire, 13 (7 men, 6 women) agreed to an additional, in-depth interview. They represent various kinds of occupational fields (such as education, industry, public services) and both public and private sectors. Using mixed methods allows for a better understanding of the complexities facing employers and organizations in coping with working carers among their employees.



## Research Instruments

The quantitative instrument included questions about employers' knowledge and attitudes relating to organizational and personal disruptions, difficulties, existing policy, and feasibility of future policy implementation. Most questions were taken from the employee survey (Neal, Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton, & Emlen, 1993) and from the national survey of dual-earner couples in the sandwiched generation (Neal & Hammer, 2007), both having been conducted in the United States. The questions were adapted twice: they were assessed for their relevance to the Israeli context by five employers in different types of organizations and adapted for interviewing employers (instead of employees). For example, employees in the original study were asked: "Have you reduced the number of hours you work per week at your job in order to care for your older parent?" In the questionnaire for employers, the question was rephrased: "Did workers in your organization/department reduce their working hours because of care responsibilities for an older parent?" Another question in the original study was: "To what extent do personnel practices in your department make it easy or difficult to provide care for your older parent?" The employers were asked: "What are the personnel options provided by your organization/department to assist working carers that make it easy or difficult to provide care for an older parent?" The questions were translated into Hebrew and then back-translated. Another set of questions were about policy options adapted from the questions on workplace supports. Some questions were not appropriate to the Israeli context, such as those relating to family health care insurance and programs that allow workers to set aside pretax dollars to pay for care of a parent and employees' assistance programs. We added other options such as productivity reduction or problems in job advancement.

Disruptions of employees' functioning were examined by first using a general yes/no question: "Do you think that elder care, in most cases, disrupts employees' functioning?" This was followed by 9 yes/no questions that asked about types of disruptions like absences from work, coming to work late, blocking an employee's advancement, and quitting a job. *Organizational policy* was examined using 6 yes/no questions on several options, for example, options to work flexible hours, use sick leave, take unpaid leave hours, take unpaid leave days, and take paid leave. Feasibility of introducing policy in the future was examined using 10 yes/no questions including different support options, for example, counseling services, flextime, "flexplace," part-time work, family leave, referral services, training managers, and subsidizing parents' participation in senior citizen day centers on site.

A qualitative interview guide was developed for the in-depth interviews, including questions that allowed deeper probing of topics of interest to the study and those which employers felt they wanted to elaborate upon further. It included strategies for organizational coping with needs of working carers;

attitudes toward adopting a policy to assist them; evaluating the implications of eldercare responsibility on outcomes to the organization, such as employees' functioning; and previous experience with working carers during their managerial positions. Employers were asked to describe such situations.

#### DATA ANALYSIS QUANTITATIVE

Descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies) were used to describe the sample, areas of disruptions, policy feasibility, and support options. A stepwise logistic regression was conducted to predict employers' support of introducing policy for working carers.

#### DATA ANALYSIS QUALITATIVE

The interviews were taped and fully transcribed. Data analysis was both inductive and recursive; that is, each transcribed interview was read as a whole for the purpose of analytic induction (Patton, 1987). Content analysis was performed by cross-case analysis and the constant-comparison method, in which core themes were identified and compared and analytical categories were derived. The coding and analysis was finished when saturation occurred (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

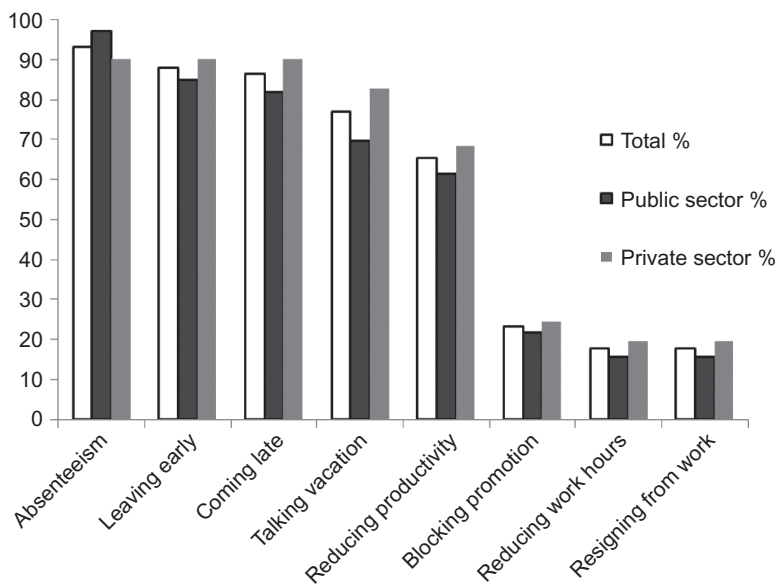
### RESULTS

#### Quantitative Phase

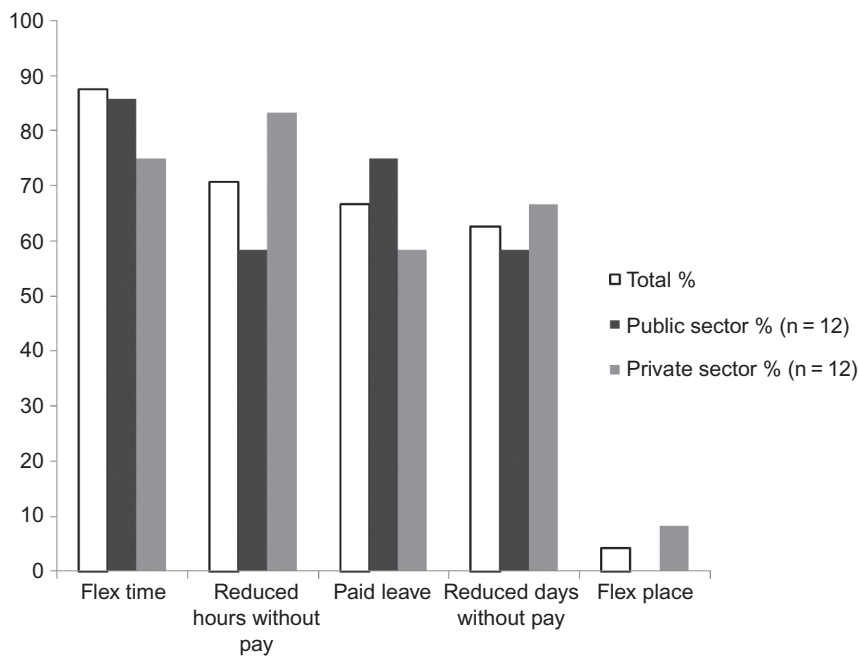
Areas of disruption to organizations related to work-caregiving roles. A basic initial finding revealed that caring for an aging family member was indeed perceived as problematic: three-quarters of the employers answered this question positively. Figure 2 presents data on the employers' responses to specific areas of disruption, comparing the public and private sectors. Most employers categorized disruption in the following areas: absence from work, leaving work early, and coming to work late. About two-thirds mentioned taking time off (family leave) and reduced productivity. Fewer than a quarter perceived the implications of caring for an older relative to result in blocking an employees' promotion. No differences were found between the public and private sectors.

#### EXISTING ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES FOR WORKING CARERS

Most employers (76%) reported that their organizations had no policy on this issue. However, personal arrangements exist that are usually expressed in flexible working schedules. Figure 3 presents the different options. Most employers allowed working carers to work flexible hours more so in the



**FIGURE 2** Areas of disruption to the organization and the employee (% of employers).

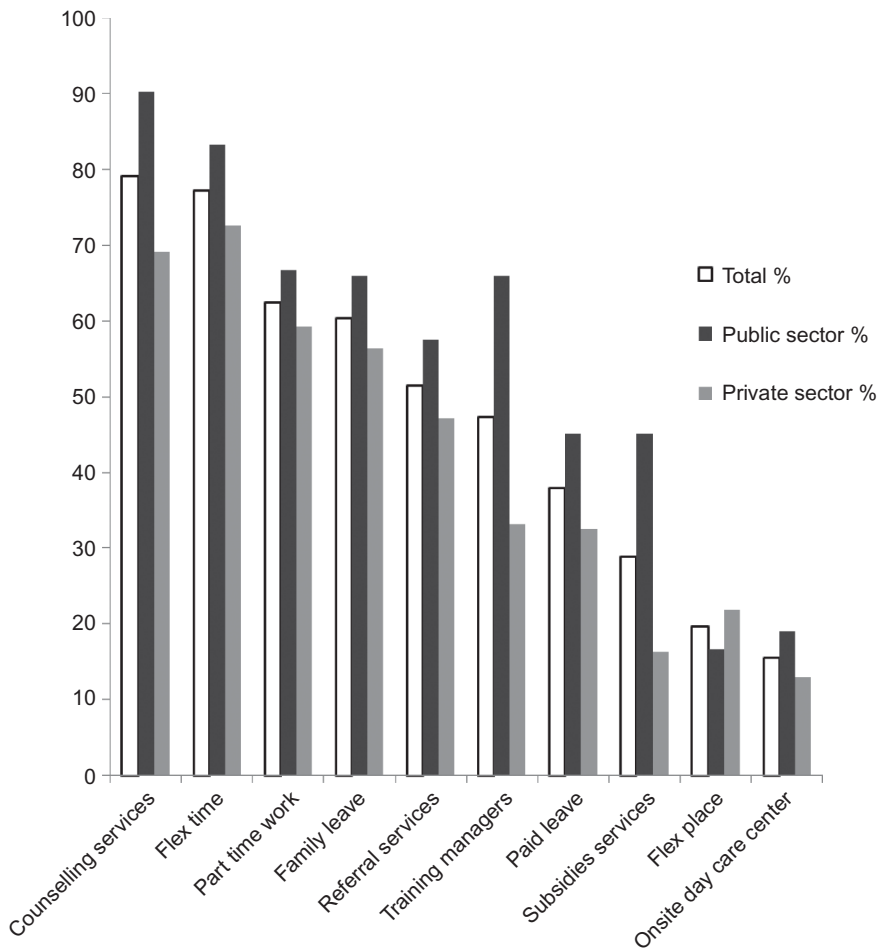


**FIGURE 3** Existing policies to support working carers (% of employers).

public sector, (significant at  $p < .005$ ) and to take several unpaid leave days or hours. About two-thirds allow paid leave for a limited period of time. The option of work from home is almost unacceptable. Another channel to deal with needs of these employees is through the organization's social worker, employed mainly in the public sector.

#### EMPLOYERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD FEASIBLE TYPES OF SUPPORT

The data as presented in Figure 4 indicate that the types of supports included placing consulting services (in the public sector, it was perceived as more feasible to implement, significant at  $p < .005$ ) and flexible work hours at the top of the list, followed by part-time work, family leave, referral services, and training team managers (more feasible, again, in the public sector, significant



**FIGURE 4** Attitudes toward support policies feasible for implementation (% of employers).

at  $p < .001$ ). Less feasible were paid leave, subsidizing services, establishing an adult day care center in the organization, subsidizing part of the care (more feasible in the public sector, significant at  $p < .001$ ), and working from home.

To examine which variables predict employers' support of introducing policy, a stepwise logistic regression analysis was performed (Table 1). The following variables were introduced: type of organization (public or private), size of organization (more or fewer than 800 employees), employer's gender, level of education, age, seniority in the organization, and experience with caregiving employees. The regression analysis revealed that 41.1% of the variance of positive attitudes for introducing policy to support working carers was accounted for by organizational characteristics (mezzo level) and type of organization (public), employer's attributes (micro level), gender of the employer (female), seniority in the organization (fewer years of seniority), and previous experience with working carers. Size of the organization, age, and level of education did not contribute to the explained variance.

### Qualitative Phase

In most cases, in-depth interviews with employers revealed their understanding of the difficulties and needs of employees caring for aging family members. Some were especially empathetic, as they experienced similar situations themselves.

Three main themes emerged from the qualitative interviews: obligation toward aging parents and its implications, coping strategies implemented in the organizations for working carers, and attitudes toward developing and establishing supportive policy.

**TABLE 1** Logistic Regression of Support for Policy for Working Carers

Predictors	<i>M (SD) or %</i>	Odds ratio	<i>SE</i>
Organizational sector (public)	43	5.406*	.702
Organizational size (large: 801+)	53	2.275	.607
Employer's gender (male)	55	.286*	.630
Age	48.4 (9.5)	.995	.036
Education	15.9 (2.8)	1.059	.117
Seniority in the organization	10.5 (9.5)	.911*	.040
Experience with working carers	38.4	5.370*	.706
Constant		1.235	2.40
Model $\chi^2$			30.031***
<i>N</i>	86		

Note. \* $p > .05$ ; \*\*\* $p > .001$ .

$\chi^2(7) = 30.031$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Percentage of explained variance, 41.1%.

## OBLIGATION TOWARD AGING PARENTS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

A central theme, expressed by most employers, was the sense of obligation toward aging parents. For example, A., a manager at a large-scale public organization, said, *"Just as our parents cared for us, we need to care for them,"* expressing a positive feeling toward the phenomenon of caring for an aging family member. The phenomenon was familiar to most employers: *"These days, people are coping with parents who are seriously or terminally ill. Recently, we have seen a considerable number of cases."*

Some employers had personal experiences with eldercare and were aware that this reality could apply to anyone. B., a human resources director at a medium-size private organization, said, *"Caring for an aging parent or other family member is a task that most of us will have to deal with at some time or another."* Nevertheless, several employers felt that family and work obligations should remain separate. For example, P., a manager at a large-scale public organization, said, *"In my opinion, just as child care never affected my functioning at work, neither should care for aging parents."*

## STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH THE NEEDS OF WORKING CARERS

Knowledge, tools, policies, and procedures to assist employers and employees facing these kinds of difficulties seem to be lacking in most organizations studied. D., a human resources director at a medium-size public organization, said, *"In my view, we don't know how to care for old people; we need an organization that can help with the care, a professional organization."* His colleague, a vice-director of that organization, added, *"This is an important area that has received insufficient attention, in most work organizations."*

Size and sector (private or public) of the organization seem to have important roles in an employers' ability to be flexible and to design individually fitted solutions in each case. The strategies were many and varied and seemed to have a common theme: each individual case should be treated separately and according to the employers' good will. Y., a department head at a large governmental organization, said, *"We try to accommodate the employee and treat each case individually, and I allowed and even encouraged one of the employees to leave whenever necessary."* F., a manager at a small private plant said, *"We are a relatively small factory, a family-friendly organization, and we give as much individual attention as possible; we hold one-on-one conversations, meetings to assess the needs and ways to help."* This manager also talked about the economic problems of working carers: *"Because we are a family organization, when an employee has a financial problem, we try to help from our workers' distress fund."*

Public or government organizations, though, have to act within their strict framework, as S., a director at a medium-size organization, says, *"The special case was treated in supportive manner and with understanding, providing assistance according to the civil service code."*

In organizations where such assistance is possible, allowing flexible work hours is another strategy for assisting employees to cope with the burden of work and care. This strategy, though, depends not only on the good will of the employer but even more on the size and type of the organization: For example, E., a departmental manager at a medium-size private organization, said, *"In my unit, we consider the employees' needs and, if possible, we offer flextime. However, if an employee has to leave early, he will have to make it up on the next shift."* In smaller organizations, however, flextime was not allowed. C., a manager at a small organization, said, *"In that case, we allowed the employee to be absent if he arranged a substitute. When this continued, he was forced to resign."*

A limited number of organizations were in a position to apply "flex-place" to some of their employees, mainly to work from home: *"We provide a laptop to help people who can work part of the time from home."* A small number of employers mentioned the organization's social worker as an additional source of assistance. As one manager stated, *"I dealt with this case by turning to the organization's social worker, which is a free service, to receive advice on how to cope."*

#### ATTITUDES TOWARD POLICY TO SUPPORT WORKING CARERS

Attitudes toward developing and establishing a policy for employees caring for aging family members were divided between two extremes. On the one hand, seven employers rejected established policy, thinking that the problem was personal, to be dealt with by the individual, and not a social or organizational one. R., a director at a large hi-tech company, said, *"Caring for an aging parent is a task that most of us will have to cope with at some time or another, and the organization for this should not be at the cost of the workplace, but at the cost of the employee."* Some others believed that introducing a formal policy would raise bureaucratic difficulties and create a barrier between the organization and the employee: *"There is no need for a policy, because each case is unique. We relate to the employees on an individual basis, as is necessary."*

The other six employers felt that introducing a policy would raise awareness of the existing problem, which still receives inadequate attention. N., a human resources director at a large public organization, said, *"As soon as legislation exists, the issue is on the agenda and must be given attention,"* adding, *"Formal policies should be introduced so that the employee will know the boundaries and will act accordingly."* W., a manager at a large governmental department, stated, *"A welcome initiative, an excellent idea—an organization for mediating services—administrative services vis-à-vis the authorities. I understand this from personal experience—it demands so much time and energy, and aggravation . . ."*



## DISCUSSION

This study offers new data regarding employers' knowledge and perception of needs and services for working carers with eldercare responsibilities, as well as possible policies and programs that workplace organizations provide in the Israeli context. Based on the ecological model, four system levels were examined: employers' personal attributes (micro), organizational type and size (meso), legislation in this field (exo), and family culture and welfare regime (macro). Such a conceptual framework contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the linkages among the worker, the organization, the employer, legislation, and policy. By doing so, the study followed the Davey and Szinovacz (2008) line of thinking that care issues require a contextual perspective in order to develop appropriate programs and policies.

Employers were well aware of disruptions to the organization's functioning due to their workers' care responsibilities. Main disruptions were reflected in absence from work, leaving work early, arriving late, taking time off (family leave), and reduced productivity. No differences were found in this respect between public and private sectors. Mutschler (1994) coined the term "stolen hours" from the employer, as a direct outcome of caring for family members, which comes, in many cases, at the cost of the employer's work hours, regardless of the employee's type of work or status in the organization.

In most organizations, no clear-cut policy exists to deal with work-family issues. More than half of the employers opposed policy development. Due to a lack of sufficient economic resources to develop services for working carers, it is reasonable that employers' willingness or ability to establish new policies and/or programs for working carers is limited. In most cases where employers were asked to rank the feasible types of support in their organizations, they placed at the top of the list those that did not require any financial investment on the part of the organization (e.g., flexible hours). The more expensive the types of assistance (e.g., paid leave, subsidized care), the less feasible they were perceived to be. In a recent U.S. study about employers' perceptions of eldercare assistance programs, it was also revealed that the high cost of certain programs was among the factors that impeded their adoption (Dembe, Dugan, Mutschler, & Piktialis, 2008).

In addition to financial constraints, there may be at least two additional explanations regarding employers' unfavorable attitudes toward a supportive policy for working carers. First, without binding formal regulations and policies (exosystem), employers are able to utilize informal decision making and to wield power in dealing with employees' difficulties. Second, in Israel, there are well-developed legal policies and benefits for young families raising children that are in force and even expanded in most organizations. The

case is different for workers caring for older family members. Thus, ageism (the macrosystem) might be another possible explanation.

Employers perceived flextime as an effective tool that is relatively simple to implement; they believed that using flexible hours was the most feasible kind of support in their organizations. Previous research found that flextime was positively received by employees, while simultaneously contributing to organizational aims. A study that examined the implications of work-family care issues for organizations found that employees who were allowed flextime and flexplace were more positive in their coping with work and family issues (Hill, Hawkins, & Weitzman, 2001). In yet another study, it was found that higher levels of workplace support in unsupportive work-family cultures were associated with the greatest levels of job satisfaction for workers with eldercare responsibilities (Shaibzada, Hammer, Neal & Kuang, 2005). Findings from the National Study of the Changing Workforce suggest, however, that times are changing, and working with flexibility will become as commonplace as working with technology (Galinsky, Bond, & Hill, 2004).

Employers from large and public organizations (mesosystem) tended more to favor introducing policy that supports working carers, and their attitudes towards various programs were more positive. Large organizations are better able to provide a broad base of benefits and support for working carers than small organizations. Differences were found in the work environment between these two types of organizations: in the private sector, the environment was more pressurized and cost-effective, whereas in the public sector, the reporting and control systems were more rigid and demanded increased accountability (Zeffane, 1994).

Bond et al. (2005) identified certain characteristics in organizations that provided support for their working carers, among them the type of occupation—with financial, insurance, and real estate organizations the most generous in providing support—and the size of the organization, with the largest organizations (1,000 employees) assisting their employees to a greater extent. Most small organizations lack the resources to provide a wide variety of support programs (Neal & Hammer, 2007). It is reasonable to assume that the larger the organization, the more room there will be to initiate various arrangements of assistance designed for a larger number of workers. Employing an organizational social worker, for example, makes sense in a large organization. In other words, some types of supports and policies can be feasibly implemented in large organizations, just as the feasibility of others depends on the kind of occupation. For example, flexible work hours or working from home will be available only in organizations with the appropriate type of work.

Employers are aware of the strong need of working carers for information and counseling. Information on legal matters, insurance, and other services were the most popular types of assistance that employers perceived feasible to implement, followed by flexible hours. It seems that from their

experience with employees who have eldercare responsibilities, employers conclude that working carers have no information regarding available care-related options and alternatives. A study conducted in England found that only a small number of workers caring for aging family members were aware of their rights or utilized them on a regular basis (Phillips, Bernard, & Chittenden, 2002). Similar data were presented in a recent U.S. study that found that only 16.7% of employees reported high usage of any service other than flextime and leave programs (Dembe et al., 2008).

Regarding the microsystem, the presence of women in senior managerial positions, working relatively few years in the organization, and having previous experience with working carers was found to predict more positive attitudes toward organizational support of employees. A possible explanation might be related to women's role as the traditional caregiver in families. Thus, women managers, especially those with previous experience with working carers, are more sensitive to the difficulties of working carers.

The discussion would not be complete without mentioning the ethical aspect of the controversy about whether the family or the state is responsible for eldercare. A common argument is that by transferring the responsibility to the state, the family will neglect its responsibility to its members. Litwak, Sikverstein, Bengtson, and Hirst (2003) and Daatland and Lowenstein (2005) respond, however, that developing programs by the state or by various organizations, whose aim is to assist the family to fulfill its roles in caring for family members, did not lead families to shirk their responsibilities.

Regarding the macro- and exosystems, in most industrialized countries some kind of welfare policy exists (Esping-Andersen, 1999). The type of welfare policy determines the state's attitude toward work-family organizational arrangements. Different variations exist on the axis between minimum state interventions, for example, in Anglo-Saxon countries such as the United States, Australia, and England, which have liberal regimes. Such regimes provide means-tested benefits at a low level. On the other hand, in countries like Germany, Denmark, and Sweden, which have social democratic regimes, the state guarantees universal benefits and services at high levels, combined with state and family cooperation in caring for family members in need (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Neal & Hammer, 2007). In countries with liberal regimes, the employee is expected to rely on personal resources to care for family members, whereas in social democratic countries, the responsibility to meet the needs of employees and their families is both private (of the family) and public (of the state) (den Dulk, 2005). In social democratic countries, employers are not expected to assist their employees in managing family care issues (Andersson, 1999), whereas in countries with liberal governments, employers may choose to offer support to their employees (den Dulk, 2005).

The welfare policy in Israel (macrosystem) and its legislation (exosystem) is perceived as a "mixed model" or exceptional case, combining aspects

of a social democratic and social liberal policy. The service infrastructure is still strong, but welfare policies emphasize the importance of the family in caring for dependent family members (Daatland & Lowenstein, 2005.) At a time when the development of welfare services in many states was halted, the welfare state in Israel continued to develop in several central social service areas and assisted families caring for disabled elders. However, in recent years, Israel has been influenced by processes and trends that occur in Western welfare states, which reinforce the neoliberal perception expressed, for example, through cuts in social expenses and processes of privatization, especially in individual welfare services (Katan & Lowenstein, 2009).

### Study Limitations

The study was cross-sectional, based on self-reported data provided by employers: company directors, human resources directors, and heads of departments. The data, however, were not verified with employees' organizational records. The response rate was 50%, mainly because of managers' lack of time or because those who did not respond were less interested in eldercare issues. Thus, the results should be interpreted with caution.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of demographic, social, and economic changes, including longer life expectancy, marriage and childbirth at a later stage of life, and increased entry rates of women into the labor market, society is faced with new challenges. These challenges include assisting families to continue supporting their aging members. More generations within intergenerational families are living alongside each other for longer time periods, where the "sandwich generation" (family members supporting their parents and children) has expanded to include not only young people caring for elderly parents and young children but also people in middle age who are caring for parents, adult offspring, and even grandchildren. A large segment of this population is in the workforce, and society is facing the need to support and help them cope with the (often conflicting) roles of work and eldercare. In other words, there is a need to find ways to make a transition from a "work-care conflict" to a "work-care balance" for many employees. This necessitates developing suitable policies that will pave the way to such a transition. In the United States, for example, The Family and Medical Leave Act (1993) provides unpaid leave for working carers. As Wisensale (2006) outlines, "A key component is its intergenerational structure, permitting employees to take time off from work to care for an infant as well as an ill elderly parent." He further argues that, "In reforming leave policy in the future, the leave should be paid, remain intergenerational, and cover more workers" (p. 79).

Such policies will improve labor market retention and reduce employer costs for hiring and training new workers (Pavalko, Henderson, & Cott, 2008).

Based on the results of our study, it appears that to support working carers policy needs to be sensitive to differences between organizations and meet both the employees' needs and the available options and nature of the organization. The programs should be anchored in clear procedures or regulations to enable their implementation in different types of organizations and for various kinds of working carers. Solutions must be tailored to the operational needs of each organization and adjusted to fit the roles, needs, and abilities of different employees.

Efforts should be made to convince employers of the beneficial outcomes of establishing a policy for both parties: employees and employers. The insight gained from this study can assist in developing strategies for workplace policy that can reduce unfavorable organizational attitudes. Any attempt to change the present situation will have to deal with employers' resistance by creating appropriate climates for such change. As employers from large and public organizations tended more to favor introducing pro-elder care policy, more efforts should be invested in the private sector and in small organizations.

The main programs and services that employers in this study assessed as feasible to implement can be grouped into four clusters: *counseling and referral services*, which will help working carers in their eldercare role; *flexibility* in the workplace, such as flextime, part-time work, family leave, and flexplace; *training managers*; and *subsidies for services* like day care centers. Regarding counseling and referral services, employers should be encouraged to provide employees information about eldercare resources and available community and long-term care services. Flexibility can reflect how and when work gets done and is the most common avenue to encourage employers to support their employees with family needs. However, recent U.S. data show that only 27% of employers studied report that the organization makes a real and ongoing effort to inform employees of available supportive programs (Galinsky, Bond, & Hill, 2004).

Training managers is a strategy that should help raise their awareness and sensitivity to needs of working carers. In addition, they should be trained to become familiar with eldercare assistance programs. Subsidies for services were the lowest priority mentioned by employers as a feasible way to assist working carers, probably because of its higher costs. An important service that might alleviate the burden of working carers is a subsidy for a home care worker. Israel was the first country in the world that legislated a LTC Insurance Law (1988) that provides weekly hours of home help to very frail elders in the community. However, families have still to complement the services out-of-pocket or reduce working hours, use vacation time, etc. It is thus recommended that one of the criteria for providing benefits under the law should consider employment status of carers (Katan & Lowenstein, 2003).

We suggest replicating the study in a comparative perspective to explore the validity of the results to other countries as well.

## CONCLUSIONS

The current study provides the beginning of an understanding about employers' attitudes and knowledge regarding working carers of older persons. The phenomenon of global aging will result in an increase in the numbers of middle-aged adults who would have to be involved in parent care, along with their responsibilities in the workplace. The study shows a gap between employers' knowledge about disruptions to the organizations due to employees' care responsibilities and their willingness to introduce large-scale policies to answer the needs of these employees. Thus, shedding light on the employers' attitudes about the options available to working carers might facilitate workplace policy development to assist this group.

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