

**Seminar 4 Report: Caring and Work-Life Balance in Recession and Austerity, at the School of Law
at the University of Reading, January 9th 2015**

Report assembled by Professor Grace James (University of Reading) and Professor Nicole Busby (University of Strathclyde).

Overview of seminar 4

This ESRC funded seminar series brings together researchers, practitioners and relevant user community representatives to seek solutions to a 'triple agenda': how to enhance employees' work-life balance (WLB), organisational effectiveness and social justice. It identifies changes in work arrangements and WLB policies and asks:

- Whether WLB is becoming more difficult for everyone, or is the impact uneven?
- Are economic pressures reducing employers' willingness to implement WLB initiatives or making it more difficult to do so?
- Which national and organizational WLB policies and services are resilient, which are adapting and which are being cut back?
- How do these developments impact on different groups of workers?

In this fourth seminar of the ESRC funded seminar series we considered how austerity and recession have impacted on caring and work-life balance. The seminar opened with three inter-related papers that questioned and analysed caring and work-life balance issues in a time of austerity - looking, for example, at employment policies, the impact on care workers and considering issues around job satisfaction, job demand and the care sector. In the afternoon, a break-out session discussed practical implications and possible solutions for care and work-life balance before our invited discussants, drawing upon their own experiences, views and knowledge, offered particular insights and suggest how we might improve the situation.

Keynote presentations

1. ***Caring in a Time of Austerity: Unpaid Care, Paid Employment and Gender***, Professor Nicole Busby, University of Strathclyde.

In the first keynote address of the morning Nicole Busby provided an overview of the UK's Coalition Government's austerity agenda, describing how it has provided justification for labour market deregulation alongside reductions in the welfare budget and cuts to public services. Nicole Busby demonstrated how the agenda has been enacted through public policy and, crucially, how it is inherently gendered as the particular decision-making

processes underpinning budget reduction have had a disproportionate impact on women who seek to balance unpaid care responsibilities with paid work. Pay freezes and the loss of jobs in the public sector have disproportionately affected women and employment law reforms have resulted in reduced protection for those engaged in low paid, precarious work. The reduction in availability of certain key public services also has a detrimental effect on female workers many of whom depend on finely-tuned arrangements in order to balance their family and professional commitments. Nicole's paper considered the impact of recent reforms on the reconciliation of paid employment and unpaid care and raised the possibility of challenging the underlying austerity rationale through legal means.

2. *The Care Act, a statute of austerity? The implications of fragmented control over caring labour*, Dr Lydia Hayes, Cardiff Law School

In the second keynote Lydia Hayes focussed on the Care Act and its implications. The context for this piece of legislation was explained and, specifically, how, since the financial crisis, there have been substantial cuts in the financing and provision of adult social care: how approx. half a million older people who would, prior to 2008, have been eligible for homecare services, are now rendered ineligible for support. Lydia Hayes explained how the state has re-defined the meeting of their needs to be a private family matter and how local authorities have absorbed a 26% cut in funding for adult social care and how this has negatively impacted on pay, particularly in the homecare sector. Hundreds of thousands of women are known to be paid less than the national minimum wage and zero-hours contracting is standard practice within the homecare industry. One immediate implication is that homecare workers need to work longer hours if they are to maintain their income levels. The increased prominence of non-payment for travelling time suggests that a greater proportion of homecare workers' time is unpaid and this damages their ability to support their own families.

Lydia Hayes explains how austerity is backed by all three main political parties and there is little to suggest that budgets will not be further reduced in the next Parliament and argues that pressure on homecare employers to comply with National Minimum Wage law appears to be at a tipping point. Drawing on recent decisions of the Employment Appeal Tribunal, more targeted enforcement by HMRC, and pronouncements by government ministers, Lydia suggest that the days of swindling homecare workers out of their lawful entitlements must come to an end. As the Care Act 2014 passed through Parliament, it was debated as an opportunity to address poor terms and conditions of employment in homecare work. The government claimed that specific measures to protect working time and wages were unnecessary and employment issues would be addressed in forthcoming statutory guidance. Lydia's presentation presented an overview of aspects of The Care Act which have the potential to detrimentally impact on terms and conditions of work in homecare. The Care Act 2014, Lydia explained, represents a step change in social policy developments since

the 1990s which have encouraged service-user choice through direct payments. It is now a statutory duty that local authorities actively promote service-user control over the provision of care service, regardless of whether service-users take up the offer of direct payments. Herein, Lydia argued, lies the potential to undermine the earnings of homecare workers through the continuation of zero-hours contracts, the use of 'daily average' agreements for unmeasured work, exacerbating the rising problem of 'fake' self-employment and encouraging live-in 'family' employment. In particular Lydia focused on the duty to promote well-being, local authority market shaping duties and the inadequacy of statutory guidance on commissioning and demonstrated how the Care Act 2014 is a statute of austerity: providing statutory justification for further fragmenting and informalising the employment of homecare workers in ways which will frustrate access to basic employment protections, including entitlement to the National Minimum Wage.

3. ***Job satisfaction, stress and work-life balance in social care at a time of austerity***, Dr Shereen Hussein, Kings College London.

Shereen Hussein provided the third keynote address – drawing upon a Longitudinal care study funded by the Department of Health. Shereen Hussein outlined relevant background for the study: in particular, that the social care workforce is one of the fastest growing labour sectors in the United Kingdom, with an estimated two million jobs in 2013; that it is also one of the main low paying sectors with average hourly pay rates gravitating around the National Minimum Wage (NMW) and many workers estimated to be paid under the NMW; that care work is increasingly becoming fragmented in provision due to several policy directions as well as progressive local and central government cuts.

Shereen went on to outline how several studies have indicated that the majority of care workers report altruistic motivations in their labour choice and how, with continuous demand, the sector is becoming a magnet of employment to some who may find joining other labour sectors more challenging, such as migrants and women with no formal qualifications and with caring responsibilities. Within such structure, Shereen argues, many care workers face various stressors while providing highly emotional care work and in their daily lives outside their work domain. Continuous austerity measures and their consequences including increased privatization influence how care work is organized with increasing blurred borders between work and family/non-work time.

Shereen goes on to discuss emerging findings from the large longitudinal study of care workers' motivations, job satisfaction and experience of stress at work: Shereen uses data from a large survey to explore perception and expectations in relation to job satisfaction and links this to key job satisfaction theories: fulfillment, discrepancy, equity and two-fold theories. These are explored within the job demand and control framework measured by Karasek job content questionnaire. To contextualize the work-life balance strategies Shereen uses data from 20 in-depth interviews with male care workers conducted in 2012-13 as part of the same study to explore the experience of the minority male gender within the context of care work.

(Power Point presentations and short biographies of the Key speakers are available at the seminar series website – see <http://www.esrc-work-life-seminars.org/>)

World Café breakout session

Participants at the seminar were asked to attend a world café breakout session where certain aspects of caring and WLB in a time of austerity were discussed at each of the four tables, where a facilitator took down the key points raised: groups spent 10 minutes at each table and then rotated to the next table. The main purpose of the of the session was to identify key ideas/suggestions which would better enable carers and those who require high levels of care to balance paid work and home/family life against the backdrop of austerity (i.e. government cuts to public services and deregulation, etc.) For each topic, we considered responsibilities (i.e. the state/employers/third parties).

Table 1 - Carers and Employment: at this table we asked participants to identify key workplace-based initiatives/ideas that would help carers to balance care commitments with paid work.

Key points/initiatives:

- Need to make the argument for social infrastructure investment in different settings and to challenge the current neo-liberal agenda
- Leaders (CEOs and Senior / Line managers) should be more open to discussions relating to carer concerns so that workers are confident that engaging with employers over care issues will not will have a detrimental impact upon their working relationships.
- Employers, such as Local Authorities, should require in contracts to sub-contractors (such as care agencies) that they demonstrate equal opportunities/positive policies for carers in their employment agreements.
- Better informing working carers (or prospective working carers) of their legal rights (e.g. in job centres)
- Improving rights at work: e.g. carers leave rights and job security and pay, outlaw or stop abuse of zero hours contracts, a right to care?, improving quality of part time work, no opt-out of working time directive.
- More encouragement of male workers to care – raising awareness, support and include as a policy objective.
- To highlight the triple agenda for restructuring work to enable more flexibility for carers.

Table 2 - Social Care: at this table participants were asked to make suggestions for improvements to social care which would better facilitate work/life balance for both carers and those requiring care.

- Care needs to be recognised as employment and valued in society
- Repeal the Social Care Act / Social care responsibility back to the Local Authority and budget provided to enable this
- Develop solid career structures for carers with achievable progression and ensures high standards of care.
- End zero hours contracts.
- More joined up thinking – better understanding of how social care initiatives impacts on other social policy areas – e.g. NHS.
- Greater regulation of carers – in terms of providing a proper set of legal rights and information to carers about their rights / support
- Greater workplace flexibility but also greater stability – move away from current culture of fear and risk.
- Viewing care-giving as a vocation but also as profession that should be adequately remunerated.

Table 3 - Individual Care Needs: at this table participants were asked for key suggestions for improvements in identifying and meeting the care needs of individuals to enable independent living (i.e. employment opportunities, etc.).

- Create mechanisms that allow individuals to enter the labour market and be open about their needs – requires a cultural shift to open communications to identify caring needs and carer needs.
- Employment policies should be formulated to maximise care capacity
- Investigate the use of technology to enable care needs to be met whilst working – e.g. homeworking.
- Address the over specialisation between the various agencies involved in providing care that need to work together.
- Shift focus from the individual to a more community oriented system.

Table 4 – Care Work: here, key suggestions for how to improve the quality, experience and terms and conditions related to care work were considered.

- Valuing care – providing equal pay for equal value work; not just economic but social value of care and valuing informal and family care as well as (paid) care work.
- Training / qualifications and progression potential for carers. Learning about care – demystifying the work in order to show that it is meaningful and satisfying.
- Improving quality standards and pay.
- Challenging generational norms/assumptions re care-work – e.g. the juxtaposition of the elderly AND the carers.
- Learn from other countries – Nordic and Japan?

Discussants' Roundtable

The seminar ended with a roundtable discussion, led by the invited discussants – all of whom reflected on the day and provided insights into what they felt the challenges were for those of interested in care and WLB in a time of austerity.

Jill Miller, a Research Adviser at the CIPD, Wimbledon, spoke of the need to make a good case why it's important for employers to engage with carers at work and for employers to better understand the finely tuned arrangements that often exist between carer and recipient of care and for line managers to be aware of the potential use of right to request legislation in this context.

Sue Cohen, who from 1990 – 2013 was CEO of the Single Parent Action Network, and is currently a Management Committee member of the Women's Budget Group, highlighted the role of lawyers – to challenge unacceptable approaches to care, wherever possible, and spoke of the need now for a movement for "carers" rights more widely, as opposed to focus on childcare.

Susan Himmelweit, Professor Emeritus in Economics at the Open University, spoke of our disengagement with the capitalist class in our welfare state and how at a time when finance capitalism is dominant, living standards and standards of care have reduced to a degree that is unacceptable but is not being adequately challenged. Sue spoke of the need to value care and see it as an important part of our social infrastructure

Gloria Mills, member of UNISON's Senior Management Group, a past President of the TUC Vice-President of the ETUC Women's Committee, spoke of (i) how the state must have a central role in relation to care and how we must challenge views of care as a private issue, (ii) the importance of pay for care – of regarding care as a job and (iii) the need to create a movement that fights this aspect of exploitation of women.

Katherine Wilson, Strategic Manager of Employers for Carers at Carers UK, spoke of how we need to view care as part of the infrastructure of work and re-consider the conditions of employment of carers. Katherine also spoke of the importance of analytical analysis and prompting an emotional response to care work and how academic engagement with this issues helps push the debate forward in this field.

(Short biographies of the discussants are available at the seminar series website – see <http://www.esrc-work-life-seminars.org/>)

Many thanks to all who contributed to this seminar.