Abstract title: The gendered effects of informal eldercare on health and sickness absence behavior in Norway

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Abstract

The gendered effects of informal eldercare on health and sickness absence behavior in Norway

Using a large representative survey of the Norwegian version of the UN-anchored Generations and Gender Survey (GGS), this paper investigates the health and sick leave costs of reconciling employment and informal eldercare. Population ageing in Norway, as other industrialised countries, will shrink the working-age populations relative to the number of pensioners, thus enlarge the need for both formal/informal eldercare. Norway also ranks among the countries in Europe with the highest rates of sick leave absence. On a typical working day, 6-7 per cent of
the Norwegian employees are absent from work due to sickness, where women tend to have higher sick leave absence than men. Norway faces a dilemma regarding simultaneous demand for an increase of the workforce, and an increase in the share of potential workers on benefits.

While a lot of research has investigated the link between informal childcare and female sick leave absence, less attention has been made to the effect of parental care on sick leave absence. However, it is reasonable to assume that the burden of reconciling work and parental care can affect the sick leave absence as well. There are no social programs in Norway targeted particularly at workers with care-needing parents. Unpaid leave is rather a costly option for offspring who might favour sick leave absence to avoid economic pitfall of parental care. Another reasonable outcome is health losses, medical and social sciences literature indicate that caregiving have negative effects on caregivers’ physical and mental health.

Using probit and tobit analysis, the results indicate that giving parental care in combination with fulltime employment have an effect on the probability of reporting poor health and high sick leave absence. The results also points in the direction of gender differences and that flexible jobs works as a “buffer” on sick leave absence when combining employment and demanding family situations. This paper adds to the existing literature by including the importance of job characteristics and occupation, with a special focus on female middle-aged employees. Understanding the costs of caregiving on health and sick leave absence is important to improve work and family policy and for ensuring that eldercare policies do not counteract other public goals.