



Unpaid Carers with Health Needs in the Workplace

Research Findings: Executive Summary

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Context for research



It is known already (via DWP) that unpaid carers with health problems are more likely to leave work. In addition, those providing intensive care are 2-3 times more likely to report ill health. Workplaces can play a pivotal role in mitigating carer-employee burden which may improve productivity, absenteeism and workplace experience. However, an in-depth understanding of the landscape of carer-friendly workplaces is currently lacking in the UK.

This project aims to explore the challenges that unpaid carers experience when balancing their own health needs with employment and caring responsibilities.

- The research also includes interviews with employers, to provide an understanding of what dedicated support currently exists within workplaces to enable unpaid carers to support their own health and wellbeing.
- Working in conjunction with Simplyhealth and Business in the Community (BITC), Carers Trust undertook three UK-wide quantitative surveys, to understand the landscape for unpaid carers in the UK. This included 1 survey with unpaid carers, one survey with employers and one survey of the general public. In addition, they commissioned Kate Wood Research to design and undertake post-quantitative in-depth qualitative interviews with a cross-section of unpaid carers and employers. This qualitative research phase drilled down into the lived experiences of unpaid carers as well as provided an opportunity to understand, via employer depths, to explore what the current support provision in the workplace looks like.
- This research will provide rich insight into the issues unpaid carers face, how employers support them and where the gaps are.

Core objectives



Overall aim:

Ultimately, the overall research outcome for this project is to **inform a set of workplace recommendations for employers**, that can help to:

- Improve employment and health outcomes for unpaid carers, to help them **balance caring responsibilities alongside their own needs**.
- **Improve employers' understanding** around the need for specific employment support for unpaid carers in managing their health and wellbeing.

This will be evidenced through:

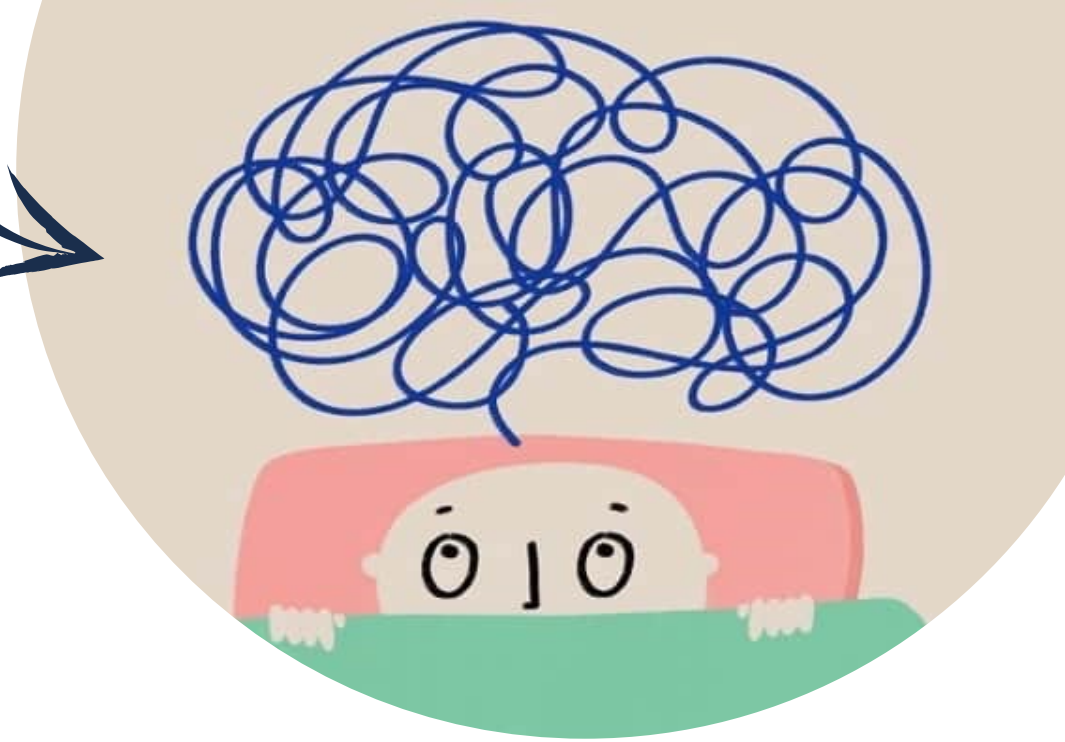
- The need to improve employment support for unpaid carers within the workplace, demonstrated through **case studies and impact stories of best practice**.
- The different types of support unpaid carers need within the workplace, as well as the positive/negative impact of having/not having this support.
- The need to improve the delivery of carer assessments/reassessments of their own needs and employment requirements.

Specifically, the qualitative work will enable the Carers Trust research team to build case studies and impact stories as well as provide a greater depth of understanding relating to the needs and experiences of unpaid carers and employers.

Key insights (1/9)

Carers can struggle to identify themselves, thus the term 'unpaid carers' needs clear context for them to engage with it and any support offered

- Many unpaid carers don't know they are carers: they feel they are just 'doing what's right'
- Some can struggle with the term 'unpaid carers' as it can feel cold, detached, impersonal
- This is further complicated by their health needs, as they don't want to tell employers too much, too soon about their complex lives
- This can lead to them failing to identify themselves as carers when completing 'tick box' exercises in the workplace. In turn, many employers don't know how many carers they have in their workforce, and consequently don't always know how best to support them
- Employers therefore either need a full contextual explanation to help unpaid carers with health needs identify themselves, and/or a re-evaluated term used in the workplace to help employers identify how many unpaid carers with health needs work for them.



Working, caring...my health.... It's all pressure and sometimes I feel overwhelmed.... But I don't say I'm an unpaid carer... maybe it would be different if it wasn't family.... I don't want her to feel a burden on me... I don't get any carers allowance either."

Carer, F, caring for relative, PH condition, works f/t in an office

Key insights (2/9)

This is an issue that needs more attention

- In our survey commissioned to YOUNGOV, 49% of the UK population sample disagreed that workplaces are doing enough to support unpaid carers in the workplace (n=487)
- 84% of carers in our survey said that they didn't think workplaces or the UK Government is doing enough to allow unpaid carers to be in employment (n= 171)

Supporting carers with a health condition in the workplace is not a niche issue. The 2021 Census found that almost half (49%) of carers reported at least one adverse health effect of providing care. This rises to 75% for those providing more intense hours of care per week (20-49 hours), 83% for those providing 50+ hours of care per week.

Carers are 1.4 times more likely to report they are not in good health compared to someone not in a caring role.

The Office for Budget Responsibility estimates that improving health outcomes among the working-age population, by reducing incidence of work-limiting ill-health by a quarter, would increase the size of the economy by 0.8% over the longer-term.



50% of carers we heard from said they did not feel confident talking about any challenges or support they need to help balance their caring role, their health and their work (n=97). There's a clear role to play in improving carers understanding and access to support.



I feel like a really incompetent plate spinner. When I'm in the workplace, that's all it is, it's work and nothing else is allowed to be mentioned or nothing else is allowed to happen. Because I don't think they care."

Carer, female, physical and mental health condition, carer for mum, working p/t in an office

Key insights (3/9)

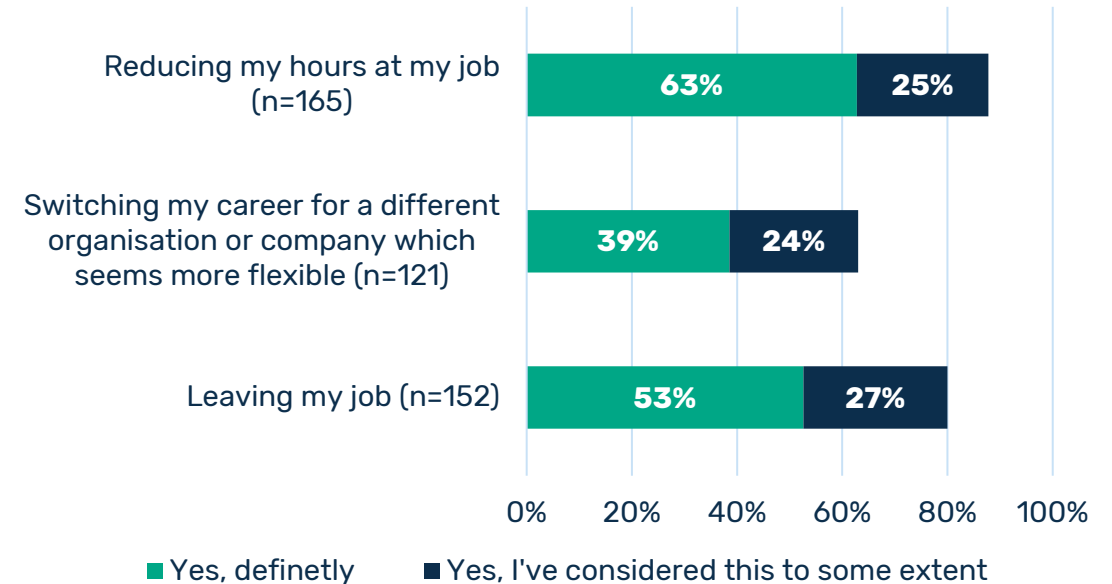
Many carers change workplaces, deskill or leave employment altogether

- Few people that find themselves in the position of being an unpaid carer with a health need feel comfortable remaining in their current workplace. This can be for several reasons:
 - Current work ethic may be too demanding, target driven or draining
 - Current workplace may require inflexible working, such as specific locations or hours that no longer fit the unpaid carer's requirements
 - The company culture may feel unsupportive and unaccepting
- Carers in our quantitative survey told us they had considered the following:

“

My caring role and health have diminished my motivation for career progression, as I prioritise flexibility over aspirations, accepting a job that allows me to manage my responsibilities.”

Carer, M, caring for parent, MH condition, working f/t, hybrid role



Key insights (4/9)

Seeking new employment can be challenging for both unpaid carers with health needs and potential employers

- Challenges are rife across CV building, job advertisements/applications, interviews, onboarding and ongoing reassessment of needs
- Unpaid carers with health needs can be concerned about disclosing too much information about their circumstance through fear of being rejected for the job
- Employers can be afraid of asking too many questions about personal circumstances, through fear of crossing legal boundaries and appearing discriminatory
- Some employers try to mitigate this through using open and inclusive language in their job descriptions, referencing flexibility, fair employment and policies that apply to all with potential vulnerabilities
- Conversely, other employers will try to *deter* carers with health needs due to concerns that they will be unreliable, impact targets, and lose clients. They do this by mentioning long hours, need to travel, office-based work expectations, etc.



“

I don't disclose my health issues when applying for jobs, as I believe it could lead to prejudice. However, I have to mention my caring responsibilities due to the significant gap in my employment history.”

Carer, male, caring for son, physical health condition, currently out of work

Key insights (5/9)

This is largely an issue of culture. Workplace culture is crucial in supporting an unpaid carer with health needs, and can make or break a work experience:

- A positive workplace culture helps the carer feel heard, supported, wanted and accepted. It offers tangible evidence of a setting with a good culture, such as:
 - ✓ Flexible working locations, based on where they need to be at any given time
 - ✓ A carer's community within the workplace
 - ✓ A carer's passport that is regularly reassessed
 - ✓ Access to numerous avenues of support: line manager, HR, mental health first aider, occupational health
- A negative workplace culture does the opposite: it makes the unpaid carer with health needs feel dismissed, untrusted and unwanted, through methods such as:
 - ✗ Set in stone, inflexible work hours and location that cannot be adapted
 - ✗ Highly target driven approach with a finite time to reach targets
 - ✗ No assessment or reassessment
 - ✗ Only one person to approach for support, such as the line manager (who may not be trained to support carers, and may be judgemental/ dismissive of requests for support)

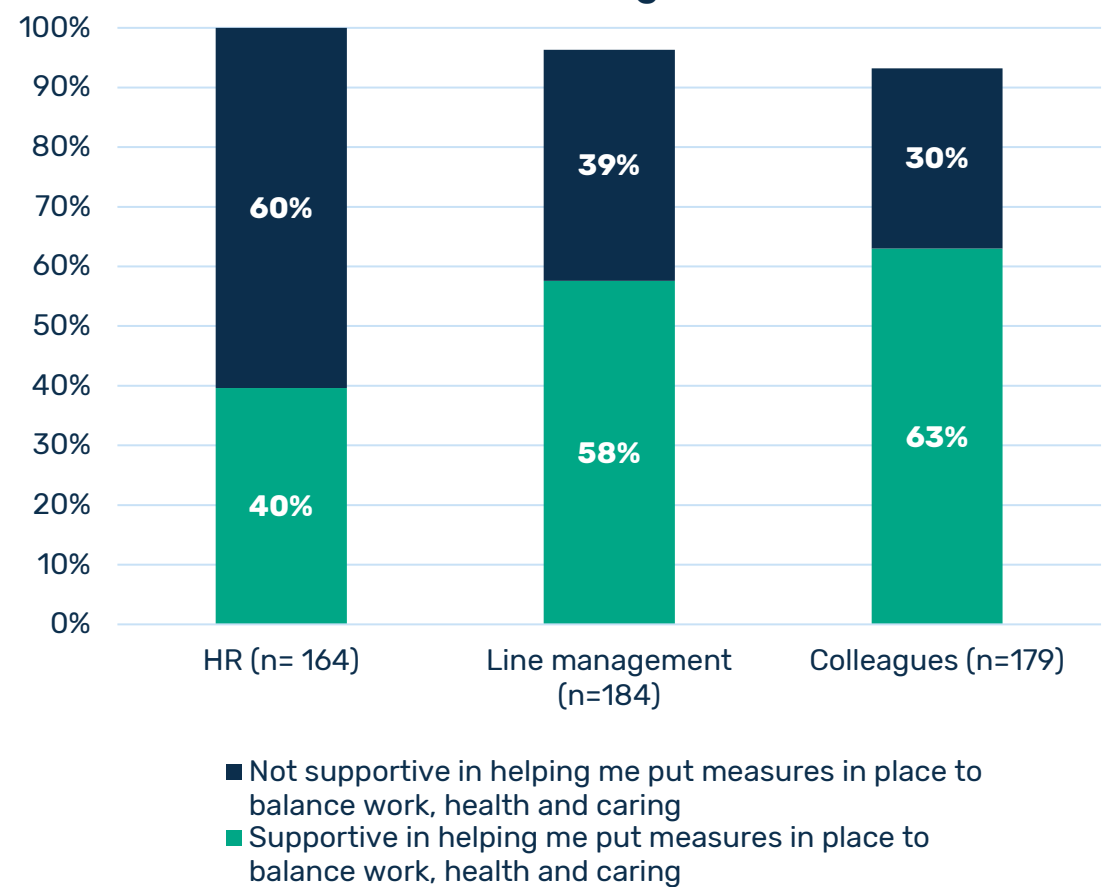
“

I think if I was going to another company completely, I very much doubt that I would get the same flexibility and the same support. I've built it up over years. They know what I can do for them. They know my worth to them. So, I think I've built up my own reputation within the company as being a good one. But I think if I suddenly went to a new company who didn't know me at all, who didn't know what I could do for them and what my worth was, I think maybe they would be a little bit more harsh and a little bit less understanding. They might not understand my need to suddenly say, "sorry, but I can't do this tomorrow because I've got to do X, Y, and Z". And I'm not sure that they would be as kind to me as my current employer is."

Carer, male, mental health condition condition, caring for parent, working p/t in an office

Key insights (6/9)

Q: '[job role] are supportive in helping you put measures in place to balance work, your health and caring'



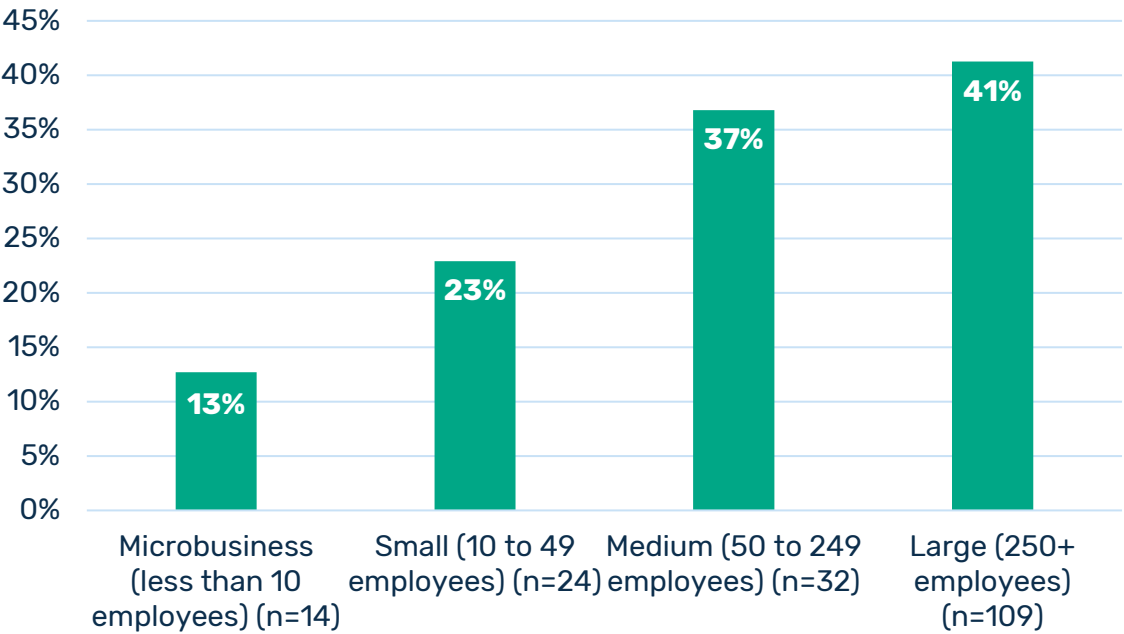
Culture (cont.)

44% of employers in our YOUNGOV survey felt that **culture in the workplace contributes to the challenge** that unpaid carers face in seeking support for their health and wellbeing (n=246).

Despite HR being the place that conversations about health and wellbeing support for unpaid carers take place most commonly, (34%) according to our YOUNGOV survey (n=192), 60% of unpaid carers told us that HR were not supportive in helping them put measures in place to balance their work, health and caring role (n=98)

Line management and colleagues were more likely to be seen as supportive. However, 31% of the UK public in our YOUNGOV (n=305) survey disagreed that line management are supportive of implementing practices and policies that support unpaid carers health and wellbeing in the workplace.

Key insights (7/9)



Paid Carers Leave

32% of businesses surveyed said they offered Paid Carers Leave (n=178). This was more common in larger businesses.

However, there are challenges for carers in taking these policies.

Some carers spoke about experiencing fear of judgement or repercussions in taking leave and others spoke about the fact that these policies often need to be 'cleared' with line managers or HR in advance, which often makes taking leave when urgent matters come up difficult.

Furthermore, some carers spoke about formal systems of approval being in place which hindered their ability to take leave.

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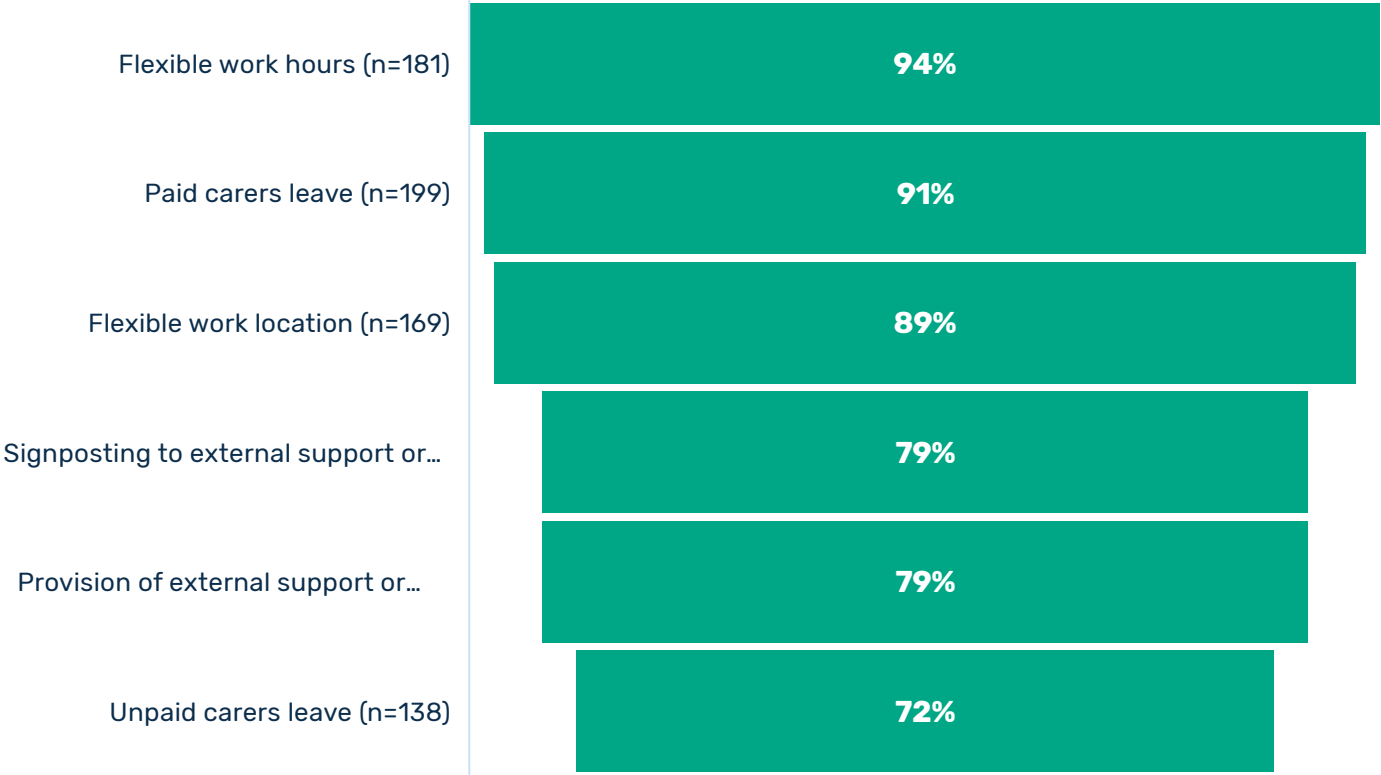
I did try to get paid leave but I just had to use my holiday. HR said I had to speak to my line manager and they kept cancelling the meetings. There has been no interest in supporting me!”

Carer, F, caring for son with Autism, has neurological condition themselves

Key insights (8/9)

What carers told us they want their employer to offer to support them, to support balancing caring and work, and to support their health and wellbeing

'This support feels important to help me balance my caring role and work'.



This support feels important to help me balance my caring role, health and work



Key insights (9/9)

Employer policies need to illustrate that they understand the needs of unpaid carers with health needs and encourage them into the workplace. They can do this by offering support over four key elements:

- Identification of, and conversations with, unpaid carers with health needs in their workplace
- Accessibility to the appropriate information on how carers can gain support
- Autonomy over how, when and where carers do their work (where the job allows)
- Acceptance of their role as a carer and celebration of the unique skillset they can bring to the workplace

“

My employer is aware of my caring role and health needs, offering reasonable adjustments for my eyesight issues. However, there is no clear Carer's Policy in place; sometimes I'll just take unpaid leave or annual leave to manage my responsibilities.”

Carer, F, caring for relative, has PH condition, works f/t in an office

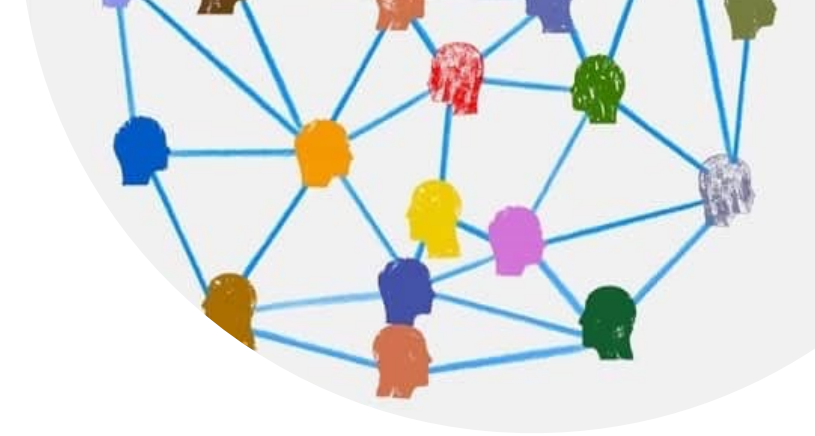
There is an opportunity for employers to make a promise to current and potential carers in their workplace based on these four elements, to reassure and welcome these individuals.

Doing so will benefit both parties, by encouraging application, loyalty to the workplace, and decreasing absenteeism.

“

People have a lot to offer, even if it was shorter shifts, maybe, big companies could offer half shifts or job shares or something, I don't know, they don't seem to offer, once you're in this situation, and you're not out in the world, it's quite hard to go out there and say well I'd like to offer something, but I haven't got full-time hours, and I'm exhausted.”

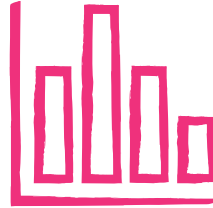
Carer, F, MH & PH conditions, caring for son, working p/t in hospitality sector



Methodology

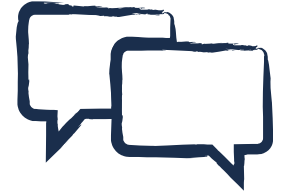
Quantitative phase – secondary focus of this report

- Carers Trust conducted three online UK-wide surveys (one through their own network, and two commissioned to YouGov). This included a sample size of:
 - 317 unpaid carers
 - 561 employer decision-makers
 - 1000 members of the UK public
- The results of the surveys have been analysed by Carers Trust and are included in this report to support the emerging key themes.



Qualitative phase – primary focus of this report

- 32 x 45-minute online interviews:
 - 17 x with unpaid carers with health needs
 - 15 x with organisations across a range of sectors and job roles (e.g. colleagues, line managers and HR professionals)
- Interviews were carefully designed to be sensitive to the personal and potentially challenging topics, especially for the unpaid carers with health needs
- All interviews were recorded
- The audio from these recordings were transcribed, and any identifying information was redacted
- A detailed thematic analysis was conducted to explore the intersection between carers, with health needs, in the workplace
- This process facilitated the generation of this report, where we outline the key themes that emerged during the research process.



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