

More Canadian Employees Have Elderly Dependents

Canada's population is aging, influenced largely by the baby boom of the 1950's and early 1960's and the baby bust of the late 1960's and early 1970's (Foot, 1996). A continuing low rate of fertility has resulted in an age distribution characterized by an over representation of people in their prime working years, and a diminishing pool of young adults aged 15-24 (Statistics Canada, 1997a). It has been estimated that by 2001, 20% of Canadians will be over the age of 65 (Scott, 2000).

This aging of the population has a number of implications for Canada, not the least of which is the fact that a greater proportion of Canadian employees will be responsible for the care of an elderly dependent. The 1996 census found that 15% of Canadians provided some care to seniors (Scott, 2000) and the Vanier Institute (1997) noted that 66% of seniors over the age of 75 relied on family members for help with housework, cooking and personal care. The fact that Canadians are living longer suggests that many adults at increasingly older ages may need to provide dependent care for their own parents (Scott, 2000).

The Percent of Canadians Who Are Part of The Sandwich Generation Has Increased

It has been predicted that work-life conflict will become more problematic over the next decade as "baby boom" and "baby bust" generations assume responsibility for both dependent children and aging parents (Scott, 2000). Employees with these dual demands have become known as the "sandwich generation" and typically experience extraordinary challenges balancing work and family demands (Vanier, 1994). It has been estimated that one in four Canadian are in the sandwich group at this point in time (Duxbury and Higgins, 1998). Furthermore, research by the Canadian Council for Social Development suggests that the number of employees who are in the sandwich generation will increase over the course of the next decade. They base this prediction on the fact that Canadians are delaying family formation and childbirth. For example, the average age of first marriage for women was 26.3 in 1995, four years higher than was reported in 1961 (CCSD, 1996).

Smaller Families Mean Each Family Member Has Heavier Demands

Declining fertility rates mean that Canadian families are smaller today than they were thirty years. The average family size in 1995 was 3.01, down from 3.67 in 1971 (CCSD, 1996). These data taken to their logical conclusion suggest that smaller families will be required to support larger numbers of family members. These families members can be expected to report higher levels of work-life conflict.

Caring From a Distance Increases Work-Life Conflict

The challenges associated with caring for ones parents has also increased in complexity due to the fact that over the past couple of decades Canadians have become more mobile and many now live miles away from other family members and friends. In 1995 approximately 44% of Canadians lived 100 km. or more from their parents (General Social Survey, quoted in Scott, 2000).