



Flexibility or Security? U of T Personal Homecare Study, Phase 1 Security with Limited Flexibility in Toronto Attendant Services Summary Report – 2014

Dr. Cynthia Cranford

Principal Investigator – Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Toronto

Background

Personal homecare is non-medical paid care work for adults with physical limitations who receive assistance in their homes. This important work is organized in different ways, with different implications for workers, recipients and society, so my study compares different models of personal home care in California and Ontario. This comparative study is based on interviews with key informants and with personal care recipients and workers, and the analysis of relevant labour legislation and policy. This summary report centers on Attendant Services within the Independent Living Model in Toronto, Ontario and reports on interviews with key informants.

Why study flexibility and security in personal homecare?

Most workers in flexible employment, such as temporary and self-employment, are not well protected because labour legislation and policy are based on the factory model: a direct and continuous relationship between a worker and a single employer at a single, large and formal workplace. This mismatch between flexible employment and labour legislation results in low wages, few benefits and poor working conditions for those in flexible employment. These insecurities are even more profound for immigrant workers, who are a majority in personal homecare. Yet flexibility for personal homecare recipients is necessary, given the intimate nature of personal care services –assistance with eating, toileting and bathing –and varying needs. My comparative study shows how the relationship between flexibility and security varies with the organization of personal home care. This analysis allows us to imagine new regulations and new forms of labour organizing that can bring flexibility for care users and security for care workers.

Who was interviewed?

In 2006-2007, I interviewed 34 key informants in Toronto Attendant Services including the 16 employers providing attendant services, all of whom are non-profit, 10 Board Members within these organizations who are also recipients, users or ‘consumers’ of personal support services and 8 representatives from the unions in the personal care sector.

Key Findings

Demographics

Attendant Service Workers

- Women and men: some organizations hire mostly women; the majority have more equal numbers of women and men
- Workers are primarily permanent resident immigrants (ranging from 40% to 97%), but some organizations also employ white, Canadian-born workers
- Immigrant workers are primarily from Caribbean countries and the Philippines with fewer numbers from South Asian, Latin American, and African countries

Recipients of Attendant Services

- Non-elderly people with long-term physical disabilities who can direct their own services
- Both women and men
- A range of racial and ethnic backgrounds
- Services are based on physical need, rather than ability to pay, but people with disabilities are disproportionately poor
- There are two programs in Ontario:
 - **Social Support Living Unit (SSLU) services:** supportive housing apartment buildings that include regular “bookings” for one’s daily routine, and on-call services.
 - **Outreach services:** scheduled visits are provided to people in their individual homes

Limited Flexibility for Recipients

Little Recipient Flexibility in the Labour Market

- Non-profit agencies are contracted by the government to hire and schedule workers
- Recipients' personal preferences for who provides services are not accommodated in initial worker assignment or in requests for a change in worker, except temporarily in cases of extreme conflict; changes in workers are more likely in Outreach Services than in the SSLUs

Mediated Flexibility in the Labour Process: recipient flexibility is mediated through funding levels and employer policy

- Employer policy requires workers to provide not defined *tasks*, but rather their *time* including both personal care and housework; SSLU managers emphasize time over task policy more than Outreach ones
- Funding is insufficient, limiting recipient flexibility in what is done
- Employer policy requires workers to accept recipients' direction on how the work is done
- Employer policy requires workers and recipients to try to resolve conflicts individually but provides mediation when necessary

Job Security for Workers

- **Representational Security**: Attendant Services are highly unionized, primarily through the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), Local 40
- **Pay Security**: wages are generally higher and benefits better than in other personal homecare sectors although still lower than in nursing homes or hospitals. Wages range from \$12 to \$20 an hour, depending on seniority.
- **Social Security**: workers are employees with statutory benefits such as Worker's Compensation, Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance; full-time workers have extensive extended benefits and part-time workers have some pro-rated extended benefits
- Union strategies reflect primarily an industrial model of **job security** for workers with a single employer
 - The seniority system in place works best for full-time workers who work in a single SSLU but this is largely a part-time industry and much of the work is dispersed across multiple work-home places
 - The threat of a strike is the key tactic used to improve conditions, despite its potential impact on recipients

Policies of limited Racialization

- A recipient's racialized preference for a worker are not tolerated by employers; employers require mediation in cases of racialized conflict in the labour process; failure to change could result in cutting off services
- Employers face potential grievances and charges of human rights violations in unionized workplaces

The Need for Flexibility with Security: New Models of Regulation and New Types of Unions

Flexibility with security is possible although it requires a rethinking of what a union is and does and new legislation. There is a need for multiple forms of unionism at multiple levels

- **Labour Market Unionism** to organize workers with multiple jobs in the personal homecare labour market bringing employment security as opposed to job security with a single employer
- **Social Movement Unionism** through alliances between worker and recipient organizations to mobilize public opinion and pressure the state for more funding and for changes in labour legislation that recognize multiple employers
 - CAW alliances with other community groups to support public health and social care should be extended to disability groups
- **Community Unionism** to support and sustain the daily relationship between workers and recipients at the work-home place and to fit new regulations and organizations to their experiences
 - Precedents for a worker-centered community unionism may be found in CAW traditions of worker education and democracy, yet more micro level alliances with recipients also need to be considered
 - Future research with workers and recipients is essential to bring about flexibility with security

Acknowledgements and Publication

Funding for the collection and analysis of these data was provided by the University of Toronto Connaught New Staff Matching Grant, "Personal Care-Work in Context: Ontario and California 1970 to Present." Funding for additional analysis and writing of this summary was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada #895-2012-1021 "Gender, Migration and the Work of Care." I thank the key informants who participated but this analysis does not necessarily reflect their views. I thank Angela Hick for helping to write this summary. These findings are published in Cranford, Cynthia. 2014. "Towards Flexibility with Security for (Im)migrant Care Workers: A Comparative Analysis of Personal Home Care in Ontario and California." In *Care and Migration: Theory, Policy and Politics*, edited by Bridget Andersen and Isabel Shutes. Palgrave. These findings along with those on other models and gleaned from interviews with workers and recipients, form the basis of a book in progress titled *Flexibility or Security?*