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Hidden Heroes

America's Military Caregivers

Military Caregivers in the Workplace

In the United States, 5.5 million men and women are providing assistance for a current or former service member who has a disabling injury or illness. We term these individuals *military caregivers.* Of these, 4.4 million are caring for a veteran who served prior to September 11, 2001 (pre-9/11 caregivers) and 1.1 million are caring for a veteran who served after that (post-9/11 caregivers).

Though it can be fulfilling, caregiving can also be demanding and difficult. Military caregivers report elevated rates of physical and mental health problems, and married caregivers report lower rates of satisfaction with marital and family relationships. Many caregivers are also attempting to balance their caregiving duties with work. This balancing act can pose challenges for military caregivers—especially post-9/11 caregivers—and their employers.

Caregiving poses a financial burden for caregivers…

About 30 percent of post-9/11 caregivers spend 40 or more hours per week providing care. The value of the duties they perform amounts to nearly $3 billion each year—money that, were these individuals not providing caregiving support for free, would be spent by society to care for our nation's post-9/11 veterans.

Percentage of post-9/11 caregivers answering "Yes" to "As a result of caregiving, did you ever…"

Take unpaid time off from work or stop working temporarily?	**48%**
Cut back on the number of hours in your regular weekly job schedule?	**39%**
Quit working entirely?	**28%**
Take time off from school or cut back on classes?	**26%**
Move to a job that pays less or provides fewer benefits, but that fits better with your caregiving schedule or responsibilities?	**16%**
Take retirement earlier than you would have otherwise?	**11%**

Nearly half of post-9/11 caregivers have had to make adjustments to their work lives as a result of caregiving, and 62 percent report that caregiving has caused financial strain. One cause for this financial strain is, of course, costs associated with caring for the veteran that are not otherwise covered. But another clear cause is lost wages from cutting back at work. Sixty-three percent of post-9/11 caregivers have jobs; as shown in the table above, many caregivers who are employed cut down on the time they spend working, quit their jobs or retire early, or transfer to more accommodating jobs.

…And for employers

On average, employed post-9/11 caregivers miss 29 hours or 3½ days of work each month. This results in lost wages for the employee and also affects businesses that cannot identify a substitute for the employee or who suffer lost productivity and missed deadlines because of absenteeism. This translates to approximately $6 billion in lost productivity each year.

Businesses honor our veterans by supporting employees who are military caregivers. Here's what the business community can do to support military caregivers:

1. **Let caregivers know that you support them.** Caregivers often serve in the shadows. They may not tell employers or colleagues about their caregiving duties. Employers can help raise awareness by promoting messages that support military caregivers. Because support services vary by state, employers can help identify support services and encourage caregivers to use them. They can also advocate for better support services, like expanded respite care.

2. **Offer support services for caregivers.** Offer wellness programs or employee assistance programs (EAPs) that caregivers can access through the workplace. Research shows that wellness programs help employees manage chronic conditions, and might support caregivers in the same way. It is also estimated that EAP programs can reduce absenteeism and enhance work productivity among caregivers.

3. **Work with employees to accommodate their caregiving duties**. If possible, try to offer flexible work arrangements to accommodate the competing demands of military caregivers. This may include flexible schedules and telework arrangements. Encourage employees with competing demands to request such arrangements.

4. **Hire caregivers!** Show your support of military caregivers by hiring them. If well supported, caregivers can bring their caregiving skills to workplaces in ways that can benefit both themselves and their employers.

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In 2014, RAND conducted a nationally representative survey of military caregivers and a comprehensive review of programs and support resources available to address the many needs of military caregivers. The results of this study, the first of its kind, are fully documented in Ramchand R, Tanielian T, Fisher MP, Vaughan CA, Trail TE, Epley C, Voorhies P, Robbins MW, Robinson E, Ghosh-Dastidar B, *Hidden Heroes: America's Military Caregivers,* RR-499-TEDF, 2014 (available at www.rand.org/military-caregivers).

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