

## The commitment of personal assistants to their job role: Evidence from England

### The background

Many people in England receive support for their health and social care needs in their own homes. Some of these people will directly employ people to do this, who are called personal assistants. It is estimated that there are more than 100,000 people employed as personal assistants doing so in 135,000 jobs. Around 1 in 5 of these personal assistants will leave a job role in a given year. Given the care needs of those requiring support are generally ongoing, a personal assistant leaving their role is difficult and could cause negative consequences. However, there is a lack of evidence as to the factors that affect the recruitment and retention of personal assistants. A factor that will be important in the retention of personal assistants is their level of commitment to their job. In this study we looked to understand the factors that affected personal assistants' commitment to their role, which we measured using sick leave.

Past research from discussions with personal assistants and those that they support has found evidence of the difficulties that an employer will have in recruiting and retaining personal assistants and that there can be pressures in the working relationship, for example around boundaries of the role. This research has also found that a number of economic factors are likely to influence the difficulty in recruiting personal assistants or the chance of a personal assistant leaving their role, including local unemployment and availability of alternative employment opportunities in social care.

### The research

Previous economic research has linked staff voluntarily leaving a job to their efforts in their job, including their absenteeism. We looked to find out the factors that affected the chance that a personal assistant would be absent from work due to sick leave. We did this using statistical analysis of data from an anonymous survey of some personal assistants. We had information on more than 1,000 personal assistants from 2019. The data included information about the personal assistant, such as their gender and ethnicity, as well as information about their job role, for example pay and hours of work, and information about their employer, such as how many personal assistants they employ and how they pay for their care. We also included in the analysis data about the local job market to where the personal assistant was employed such as local unemployment.

### The results and policy implications

We found that the following factors increased the chance that a personal assistant would have sick leave: the more hours they worked, the more personal assistants supporting the employer and the greater the distance travelled to work by the personal assistant. We also found that the higher the level of local unemployment the lower the chance that a personal assistant would have sick leave. We did not find any evidence that the gender, ethnicity, disability of the personal assistant or the number of other jobs they had influenced the chance of them having sick leave.

For a number of years policy has increased personalisation and choice in social care. This includes the use of cash benefits so that those that require support can decide how best to receive the care they need. Many people employ personal assistants with direct payments or with their own money. However, research has shown that there are difficulties with recruiting and retaining personal assistants. There are also pressures that exist in the working relationship between personal assistants and those that employ them to support their care needs. This study looked to find out

what factors influenced the sick leave of personal assistants, which we used as a measure of their commitment to the role. Our findings provide evidence that the sick leave of a personal assistant is directly influenced by the conditions of their employment and by local job market circumstances. The study was limited in that only a small proportion of personal assistants in England were included in the data and we were unable to understand how representative those that took part in the survey.

Overall, policy needs to look at ways to help promote the role of personal assistants and make the role attractive so as to help achieve a good employer and employee relationship. This could include improving pay and access to training for personal assistants and the support available for the employers of personal assistants to help them to be good employers. More research is needed into personal assistants, how best to support those employing personal assistants and the relationship they have with those that employ them to support their care needs.