Does residential aged care work offer attractive employment opportunities?

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1. Introduction

Australia’s population is ageing (Productivity Commission, 2013) and it is foreseeable that there will be increasing demand for all aged care services, including residential aged care services. In order to meet this growing need, increasing numbers of staff will need to be recruited and retained.

Previous research demonstrates the importance of adopting a systems approach to facilitate consideration of all factors that may impact on work performance and wellbeing, for example, job, task, organisation, and individual factors (Macdonald, 2012). Work-life interaction has been recognised as important for staff across the life course (Skinner, Elton, Auer, & Pocock, 2014), and one area that may affect the quality of the work-life interaction is the degree to which employees experience Work Family Conflict (WFC). WFC is conflict experienced where the general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the job interfere with family life, for example by interfering with performance of family–related responsibilities (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992). Work-life interaction and WFC may impact upon job satisfaction and an employee's desire to begin or continue working in an industry sector.

Bohle, Willaby, Quinlan, and McNamara (2011) explored the impact of working hours on work-life conflict and health in call centres and found that permanent employees experience greater work intensity than people in casual work, and that permanent work is associated with higher work-life conflict than casual work. In a study based in the corporate sector, Moen, Kelly, and Hill (2011) found that turnover is lower where employees have greater work-time control and flexibility. In current employment conditions in Victoria, Australia, staff working in particular direct care roles in residential aged care know they are able to obtain employment at residential aged care facilities with relative ease (King et al., 2012), so retention of staff is likely to be a concern for organisations.

The relationships between WFC, work-life balance and job satisfaction have not been fully explored in the residential aged care sector in Australia. This paper reports on part of a larger mixed methods study which examined employee well-being and organisational factors in residential aged care facilities. Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual model which hypothesises the effects of work and job demands, coping resources, organisational factors, and individual factors on employee health outcomes and organisational outcomes with WFC as a mediator variable. This research tests this model, investigating the relationships between work-life balance, WFC and job satisfaction in this sector.

2. Method

A quantitative paper-based survey was administered to approximately 800 permanent, fixed term and casual employees from eight residential aged care facilities in Victoria, Australia. The survey collected information on the demographic characteristics of participants, physical and psychosocial hazards in the work place, pain and discomfort, work ability, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and WFC.

For the analyses the independent variable was work-life balance and the dependent variable was job satisfaction. WFC was considered to be a possible mediator of job satisfaction.

3. Results

A total of 426 usable questionnaires were returned. In the residential aged care facilities that participated in this study, work-life balance was reported to be satisfactory by many participants, higher numbers of participants reported lower levels of WFC than reported higher levels, and the majority of participants were satisfied with their job. However, a number of participants reported dissatisfaction with work-life balance. Work-life balance and WFC, WFC and job satisfaction, and work-life balance and job satisfaction were significantly related.
4. Discussion

The relationship between work-life balance, WFC and job satisfaction is complex, and job satisfaction is influenced by many factors.

For many individuals, irrespective of where they are in their life course, it is important to experience satisfactory levels of work-life interaction and low levels of WFC. For organisations, designing work that is perceived to be satisfying and meets employees' requirements across a number of dimensions (including work-life interaction) is important when attempting to recruit and retain staff. Currently, residential aged care facilities are able to fill vacancies for some roles fairly quickly but have difficulty filling other roles, notably roles for Registered Nurses (RNs) and Personal Care Assistants (PCAs) (King et al., 2012). This means that it is important to ensure working conditions are satisfactory for these difficult to fill roles, as well as roles for other workers, to ensure staff retention and aid staff recruitment.

In line with adopting a systems approach, structuring work and work scheduling to enable satisfactory levels of work-life interaction and low levels of WFC for employees are ways to increase job satisfaction, and may contribute to the experience of a satisfying career for some people. This should make the sector or employer more attractive to employees and aid recruitment and retention of staff.

![Diagram](image.png)

Figure 1. Model showing effects of work and job demands, coping resources, organisational factors, and individual factors on employee health outcomes and organisational outcomes with work-family conflict as a mediator variable.

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References


