

Who is supposed to care for the elderly?

Sustaining elder care in Germany – the bread winner model revisited?

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The German society is ageing. Among the challenges ageing societies face, care issues, in terms of how care and in particular long term care can be provided and maintained, are of highest priority, as it is mainly the older and oldest generations that are in need of care. Germany, as a prototype of the conservative welfare regime (Esping-Andersen 1999) that strongly emphasizes a gendered division of labour, with women responsible for housekeeping and care work and men for income, is strongly relying on informal (that is care from spouses and children, mainly daughters) with regard to elderly care. This pool of potential carers, however, is likely to decrease, as with the ongoing decomposition of gender roles women are increasingly entering the labour market, working more and longer hours. This situation raises a new version of the old reconciliation question, namely how is care work and employment to combine: what strategies do carers use and need to reconcile both obligations. How are companies prepared with regard to the fact that their (female) workers not only are likely to take time off or reduce working hours to care for their children but also for the elderly. What implications does this notion have for womens' career perspective? To answer this question results (of qualitative interviews with various experts and 10 companies) of the international research project "Carers@Work": Between Job and Care – Conflict or Opportunity?" (funded by the Volkswagen Foundation) will be presented. There is evidence that there is a high awareness of the reconciliation topic already and that various measures (by both, the state and by companies) have been implemented. The paper presents and analyzes these measures with regard to the question whether they really meet the needs of employed carers and evaluates its implication with regard to gender equality. It will be shown that most of these measures underpin and consolidate the traditional and conservative family model and that Germany rather is strengthening this model when it comes to elderly care than actively looking for sustainable measures of reconciliation.