

The Role of Migrant Care Workers in Ageing Societies: An International Comparative Research Project

Background

The migration of care workers (registered nurses and care assistants/direct care workers) from developing countries to western developed nations has long been evident, (Pittman et al. 2007; Lorenzo et al. 2007; Khadria 2007). Many receiving countries are now reliant on migrant workers to provide a significant part of their care infrastructure (Buchan 2007). This is increasingly the case in the provision of older adult care, where the shortage of host nation workers appears to be most apparent. In Ireland, the UK, Canada and the US anecdotal and observational evidence suggest that foreign national care workers provide a substantial recruitment pool for the older adult care workforce. However, research in this area is scarce and little is known about the exact proportion of migrant care workers in the sector and the implications of employing foreign carers for the delivery of care to older people in these four countries.

The role of migrant care workers in ageing societies is an international collaborative research project, involving Ireland, the UK, Canada and the US. These countries are of particular interest given that the migration of native care workers between the four sites has been considerable in the past, and each nation is now thought to be a significant participant in the global migration of care workers. The four countries also represent an interesting blend of established and recent immigration. Research partners include the Institute for the Study of International Migration (Georgetown University), the Community Health Research Unit (University of Ottawa), the Irish Centre for Social Gerontology (National University of Ireland Galway), and the Centre on Migration, Policy & Society (University of Oxford), which is the international project coordinator.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of the research is to explore the implications of the recruitment of migrant workers for the delivery of health and social care to older people, for the living and working conditions of the migrant carers, and for immigration and integration policies. The research involves the following set of objectives.

1. Analyse factors determining the current and likely future demand for migrant workers in the care of older people.
2. Explore current and future role of migrant care workers in the care of older people and their impact on the structure of care and the capacity of older people for independent living.
3. Investigate the impact of migrant care workers on older people and their families and the quality of care.
4. Examine the migration and work experience of care workers: the means and motivation for migration, role of recruitment agencies, choice of employment and working life.

Methodology

A mixed methodology across the four countries included quantitative and qualitative techniques and typically included the following.

- **Older Adult Focus Group Discussions:** Focus groups were organised with older adults to gather their opinions and experiences on migrant care workers caring for older people.

Participants included prospective users of care (community dwelling older adults) and those who are currently in receipt of care (nursing home residents and day care users).

- ***Migrant Care Worker Interviews:*** Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with migrant care workers to gather their experiences, opinions and future intentions concerning the older adult care sector. The participants were recruited from different source and different sites across each of the four countries.
- ***Employers' Postal and On-line Survey:*** A postal survey and on-line survey was distributed to older adult long-stay care institutions (including public and private facilities) and home care organisations. The purpose of the survey was to gather information on reasons for hiring, and experiences with, migrant care workers..
- ***Employers' Telephone Interviews:*** In-depth telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of employers to illicit more in-depth information regarding experiences with migrant care workers. The participants were selected from the survey respondents and were representative of the full range of employer organisations.

Research Outputs

Four national reports on the *role of migrant care workers in ageing societies* will be produced for the UK, Ireland, the US and Canada, with each focusing on the issues challenges and opportunities specific to each country. These reports are expected to be published in June/July 2009. An international comparative synthesis report will be published in September 2009 and will explore the differences and common themes across the four countries.

Contacts

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Funders

This project was funded with the assistance of the following organisations and foundations:

UK - Atlantic Philanthropies and the Nuffield Foundation, *Ireland* – Atlantic Philanthropies, *US* - John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, German Marshall Fund and the Rockefeller Foundation (US), *Canada* – Social Sciences and humanities Research Council of Canada, the Canada Research Chair in Comparative Health Labour Policy and the Community Health Research Unit.