Reviewer's report

Title: The impact of chronic conditions of care recipients on the labour force participation of informal carers in Australia: Which conditions are associated with higher rates of non-participation in the labour force

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Reviewer: Outi Jolanki

Reviewer’s report:

1. The study 'The impact of chronic conditions of care recipients on the labour force participation of informal carers in Australia: Which conditions are associated with higher rates of non-participation in the labour force?' addresses an important topic. The data is interesting, and the topic and the findings of the study have global relevance.

As the authors note there is little research of the relation of care recipients’ chronic conditions and informal carers’ labour force participation. It has been known that for example dementia and other cognitive disorders can be very burdensome not only to the person cared for but to the family carer too. The study provides new information on the importance of different chronic conditions, and thus it complements previous studies and gives material for further studies and to discuss the meaning of care recipients' health status on caregivers' situation. The authors make an important point when they note that health policy and employment policy in Australia have been designed and conducted in isolation from one another, and that this should be changed. To my understanding this is the case in many countries around the world. Employment policies do not really seem to take into account employees’ (or people searching for employment) care responsibilities; at least in regard to care of older people or care of adult people with disabilities. On the other hand, social and health policies (care policies in particular) do not necessarily take into account at all carers’ employment status or the type of work they do. So, the study gives material for further studies, and information which could be used to develop better ways to support working carers.

2. Discretionary revisions

In my mind, the article would benefit from some additional information on the social context of the study and the solutions taken to select the data.

In order to open up the Australian context for those readers unfamiliar with it, it would be beneficial to have more information on certain issues. It would help the readers better to understand the social context in which Australian working carers live, if the authors would provide more information of the availability of public or private care services and/or benefits for informal carers and working carers of adult people. Are there any, and if there are, what is known of the use
of these services and their relation to carers employment status? The availability of other carers or care services can have effect on working carers chances on reconciling work and care, but that is of course dependent on the availability and quality of the services/benefits.

In addition, it would be important to know about employment policy in Australia and whether working carers’ (of adult people) have any forms of support available in work life. Do working carers have chances for work time arrangements such as flexible work hours, part-time work or paid/unpaid care leaves? Is there information on use of these options among working carers?

Does the data of this study provide any information on the issues mentioned above? If this information is not available, it would still be useful to have some references added on these topics to the introduction.

Also, the authors do not really address care as a gender issue. Recent studies have shown that men act as carers more often than was previously assumed, and, as the authors note, that caregiving has effect on reduced labor force participation and lower household income among all carers. But previous studies also show that male and female carers differ in the sense that women more often reduce their work hours or leave work, and caring women’s career development, income and pension benefit suffer more than those of the caring men. It would be very important to have some information (from Australia) of the gender division of care such as amount of men and women as full-time carers, the type of care tasks they have etc. Very often women provide ‘hands on’ personal care which is more time consuming than managerial or organizational care typically provided by men. The type of chronic condition the care recipient has is likely to be linked to amount of care needed; memory problems and other cognitive disorders usually require 24/7 care.

It would interesting to see some discussion on these complex factors and the authors’ views on how the findings of their study adds to previous findings in this respect.

Finally, it would be important to have a more detailed explanation why only the cohabiting carers have been included to the study even though the data has material on both? The statistical data shows that in Europe and the USA cohabitation of adult children and older parents’ is a rather rare phenomenon (with some differences between Southern and Northern European countries). To my understanding this is the case in Australia too (?). The authors state that caregiving has effect on carers employment whether they live together or not. The statistics show that the amount of non-cohabiting carers is often much larger than those cohabiting with older generations. In this case, one could think that the authors would have had a much larger data if they would have included both groups of carers.

Also, the statistics show that the cohabiting adult child is very often unmarried but countries differ in this respect, and for example in some countries cohabiting child is either an unmarried son or a married daughter. It would be good to know the gender division of cohabiting and non-cohabiting carers in Australia.
In my mind, these minor clarifications and added information would broaden this interesting article and give the readers a better view of the situations of working carers in general and in Australian society in particular.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.