

Home-help staff stretch the rules for the good of the service

September 21 2009



This is Marie Hjalmarsson from the University of Gothenburg. Credit: University of Gothenburg

A new thesis from the University of Gothenburg reveals that out of loyalty to the people for whom they provide care, groups of home-help staff sometimes break the rules dictating how their work should be performed.

"Sometimes they do more work, or they do it differently, and as it delivers good quality care and keeps things moving the management turn a blind eye to it," says Marie Hjalmarsson.

Marie Hjalmarsson, lecturer in education at University West in Trollhättan, has conducted a case study of a group of employees within the home-help service in a municipality in West Sweden. The study was

implemented in connection with hand-held computers being introduced, primarily so that the home-helps could register the tasks they performed. This was initiated by the employer.

Control through checking-up

"The way that home-help staff utilize their working hours is called into question by management and politicians, and even though it is dressed up in different words, the main aim of the project was to control the staff's work performance by checking-up on them," says Marie Hjalmarsson.

She feels that the questioning is partly to do with the fact that home-help staff work out in the community and in other people's homes. There is a more clear-cut assumption that those who are located in a specific building while they work, for example old people's homes, devote themselves to their primary tasks while they are in the building. The attempt to register work performance using hand-held computers was abandoned due to technical problems. A system using mobile phones was instituted in its place.

Informal resistance

Marie Hjalmarsson's primary focus has been to investigate how the home-help staff create and utilize opportunities for action within the framework of their employment. She discovered that they have a loyal approach and weigh up to whom and what they should be loyal. They display loyalty towards their colleagues and loyalty towards the organisation and the management, but above all it is loyalty to those for whom they care that is important.

"There is a very profound [loyalty](#) towards the recipients of care that on occasion actually leads employees of the home-help service to break the

rules dictating how the work should be performed," says Marie Hjalmarsson.

A decision is in place for every care recipient that regulates what the home-help staff have to do, but they often do more than it stipulates. This is an example of a type of informal resistance displayed by the home-help staff.

"If the staff were to work precisely in accordance with the rules that are in force, then the system wouldn't function," says Marie Hjalmarsson.

Source: University of Gothenburg ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: Home-help staff stretch the rules for the good of the service (2009, September 21) retrieved 17 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-09-home-help-staff-good.html>

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