

New forms of employment

Casual work, The Netherlands

Case study 63: Anonymous care organisations

On-call employment contracts are important in contexts where a certain staff to client ratio is mandatory, such as youth care, psychiatric care and childcare. This case study looks at the use of on-call contracts in the healthcare sector, in particular in childcare, youth care and psychiatric care.

Introduction

This case study focuses on practices concerning on-call contracts in the healthcare sector, in particular in childcare, youth care and psychiatric care. In an on-call contract the employee and employer have an agreement that (at certain times) the employee is available to be called in. This may, depending on the agreement, be some time in advance, or at very short notice. In general this type of labour agreement is characterised by a great deal of insecurity for the employee as they may or may not be called in. On-call contracts in the Netherlands usually take the form of either a zero-hours contract or a 'min-max' contract. Zero-hours contracts allow the employer to call the employee in when needed but without giving the employee any right to work. Min-max contracts are a type of combination contract where one part of the contract is fixed hours, whereas the rest of the contract is on-call. A min-max contract specifies an employee's minimum and maximum working hours. The minimum hours are the guaranteed hours, making these the fixed hours (although min-max contracts may legally be for a minimum of zero hours). Employees working under min-max contracts may also be called in for the rest of the hours up to the maximum but they are not entitled to these hours. All hours above the minimum in a min-max contract can therefore be considered as on-call hours.

Organisations in the care sector typically need a certain number of employees present at all times. This means that sick employees or those who are on leave must be replaced, typically by turning to on-call employees. The case study considers two employers in childcare and a total of three on-call staff in organisations operating in the care sector – in childcare, youth care and psychiatric care.

General characteristics of on-call contracts in the care sector

The nationwide childcare company was established in 2004 and merged with three other childcare companies in January 2014. Since the merger, the company has over 400 locations. The locations offer daycare for children and out-of-school care for children who attend school.

The company is led by a management board consisting of a president and a financial director. The president is responsible for different support departments, including human resources, communication, customer services and marketing. The company also has two regional directors, each responsible for the corresponding part of the Netherlands. These two regions are both split

up into seven subregions, led by regional managers who support the regional director in the business management of the different locations in his region. Finally, every location has its own location manager who is in charge of its operations and employees.

The childcare company has over 4,000 employees, including about 500 active on-call employees. Besides these active on-call workers, there are also what the company calls 'sleepers', meaning on-call employees who are registered in their database but who are either temporarily unavailable for work or are in fact never called in, because there are no shifts available at the times these workers want to work. All on-call employees are employed by the childcare company via a nationwide internal employment department for all the companies' on-call employees. This department is housed at the company's main office and is responsible for both hiring new on-call employees and organising the placement of on-call employees where they are needed. Employees that are included in this 'Flexpool' may either be regular employees that have become redundant or employees that are specifically hired for the Flexpool.

The on-call employees all have a zero-hours contract, which means that the company can call the workers in at short notice if necessary, but has no obligation to do so. Over half of the on-call contracts are for a fixed term of typically one year, and the rest are permanent contracts.

According to the HR manager on-call employees are usually called in for on average of 15 to 20 hours a week. But this may vary between on-call workers depending on their availability and it may happen that on-call employees are not called in for a couple of weeks.

As required by Dutch law, all the nationwide childcare centre's employees working in childcare, as well as the on-call workers, are certified educational workers (EQF level 3) and therefore generally have the same educational background as the regular employees working in childcare. Both the regular and on-call employees are mostly female. The on-call employees are on average slightly younger than the regular employees. The reason for this is that older employees usually prefer more stability in their job. The company has a works council that includes several on-call employees.

The location manager interviewed for this study works in a childcare centre that is part of a local foundation overseeing 18 primary schools and 16 childcare centres. The foundation employs about 330 people. Their childcare centres are staffed by small flexible teams. All their childcare employees have a min-max contract. Even though legally min-max contracts are considered as on-call contracts, the location manager does not think of these employees as on-call employees but rather as regular employees. At the beginning of 2014 they hired someone on a zero-hours contract, which in their opinion was their first on-call employee. The employees at this childcare centre have a similar educational background to the ones at the national childcare company.

The childcare centre on-call employee who was interviewed works at a different childcare centre and is 53 years old. She has been working in childcare for about 17 years. Of these, she spent 7.5 years working for her current employer on a zero-hours contract. On average she works at the childcare centre for two to three days a week.

The on-call employee of the youth care organisation is 27 years old and got a degree in pedagogical sciences (EQF 7) in 2013. Since then she has been working at a youth organisation that gives shelter to young people who cannot function properly at home and who need counselling. She used to be called in for about 30 hours a week, but her hours have been lowered to on average 15 a week on her own initiative because she now combines this job with an internship.

The on-call employee from the psychiatric care institute is 28 years old and holds a degree in social pedagogical aid (EQF 6). She has a zero-hours contract and usually works eight hours every Monday. At the time of the interview she had been working on a zero-hours contract for two years. Before that she worked for the same company for four years on three consecutive

temporary contracts. In addition to the zero-hours, contract she currently also works at another facility for an average of 32 hours a week on a min-max contract.

Design and implementation process

Employers

The nationwide childcare company started working with on-call contracts in 2012 because of problems within the childcare sector that were partially triggered by the financial crisis. With people losing their jobs, parents' availability to take care of their own children increases, thus in general reducing the need for childcare. At the same time the government discontinued certain financial subsidies that used to help parents pay for childcare. This resulted in parents finding other ways to care for their children while working or withdrawing from the labour market altogether because the increased childcare cost cancels out the financial benefit of working. Due to this diminishing demand most waiting lists for childcare disappeared and several locations saw a decrease in demand for childcare services and, in turn, employees. At the same time, certain locations of the national childcare centre were still dealing with occasional short-term staff shortages because of staff on various types of leave and the resulting difficulty of filling vacant hours with in-house staff.

The management board came up with the idea that locations should be able to 'borrow' each other's employees. However, this required a more centralised system of staff planning to make it possible for locations with staff shortages to be matched with other locations with surpluses. In 2012 the company's directors came up with the plan to form a 'Flexpool'. Employees who were made redundant at their own location were offered a place in this Flexpool while the rest of the employees remained on the same contract as before. For the employees who were offered a place in the Flexpool, this meant a change from a fixed-hours contract to one with zero hours. For some of these employees this was a negative outcome, but they accepted it because it was a zero-hours contract or none at all. The company has drawn up an HR plan with a section on the Flexpool and how it should function. This includes information about when management can and cannot call in on-call employees and the conditions under which this may happen.

At the regional childcare company the location manager mentions similar reasons for working with on-call employees. More specifically, the company opted for on-call contracts to have more flexibility and the assurance that there will always be enough employees to take care of the children and keep the company running. In this company, most regular employees work on a min-max contract that can be considered an on-call contract for all the hours above the minimum. These contracts may be fixed-term or permanent and are usually for a minimum of 12 or 16 hours a week, but this may be more for some employees. The contracts typically have a difference of four hours between the minimum and maximum number of working hours per week. This means that an employee in a min-max contract may have a contract for 12 to 16 hours a week. Usually these employees are scheduled in for their minimum amount of hours.

When in the local childcare centre one of the employees who used to work 24 hours a week became sick for a prolonged time, it was no longer possible to solve this with the flexibility provided for by the on-call hours from min-max contracts. But because the sick employee would eventually return, they could not guarantee a minimum amount of hours to a new employee on a more permanent basis. Therefore, they opted to hire one employee on a zero-hours contract. This decision was made by the management team – the company's director, the interviewed location manager, a nursery assistant and financial administrator. At first, the on-call employee on a zero-hours contract worked for between 20 to 28 hours a week. Now that the sick employee is back, the on-call worker still works a minimum of 12 hours a week.

In general, both these childcare companies deploy on-call workers on the same tasks as their regular employees (childcare). They usually hire on-call workers with equal qualifications (pedagogical work). But there might be differences in the way on-call workers are deployed. At the childcare centre where we interviewed the local management, employees on min-max contracts typically have a specific group of children that they take care of as they do have a minimum amount of hours every week. On the other hand, the employee on a zero-hours contract does not, meaning that she can be placed anywhere within the organisation based on need. At the nationwide childcare organisation some on-call employees are asked to perform other tasks besides childcare, such as administrative work, but this is only the case for on-call employees who have agreed beforehand to do administrative work if necessary. The main reason on-call employees are not often asked to do tasks other than those related to childcare is that only in the case of childcare is the continuity of the work important enough to hire on-call employees.

Although on-call contracts are used as a major instrument to increase flexibility for the company, the nationwide childcare centres' HR manager states that on-call contracts are not the only way the company can gain more flexibility from their labour force. One way is to ask the regular employees to be more flexible in their working hours, for instance by being available on more days a week so they can be scheduled in more flexibly. Furthermore, in 2013 a new collective labour agreement for the childcare sector was arranged, which introduced the possibility of a so-called 'year-hour system'. In this system employees who have a contract for a fixed amount of hours are allowed to work 20% more in one month if they compensate for this with less work in another month, as long as the total balance of extra worked hours at the end of the year is zero. This system is not allowed to exist alongside min-max contracts. If a company wishes to start working in a year-hour system it must, in consultation with the works council, replace min-max contracts with fixed-hour contracts. At the nationwide childcare company and other companies in childcare, this new instrument provides important new opportunities for bringing in more flexibility among the regular employees.

Employees

As evidenced from the interviews, working on an on-call basis is in many cases not a matter of choice, but of necessity for the employees. Although workers' preferences can play a role, it is often a matter of choice between either this type of work or no work and no income.

The on-call employees interviewed gave several reasons why they decided to work on an on-call contract. In general, all three use on-call work to increase their income. The on-call employee in childcare states that she has a permanent contract in a store where she works two days a week. Since this job does not generate enough income and she is a qualified childcare employee, she decided to work as an on-call employee in childcare as well. For the on-call employee working in youth care, her on-call work was her only form of income for over a year because since her graduation she had not been able to find a regular job. The on-call employee working at the psychiatric care institute has a temporary contract at another institute where she works on average four days a week. Her on-call work is not really necessary, though it is convenient because it increases her income.

Another reason for the employees to do on-call work is to increase their work experience. The on-call employee working in youth care does not have a lot of practical experience in her field and felt that this job could help her gain the experience she needs to be able to find a future job more easily. However, she is overeducated for the job she currently does as an on-call employee. Therefore she recently started working as an intern somewhere else, to increase her chances of finding a job that matches her level of education.

A future job is also on the mind of the on-call employee working in the psychiatric care institute. She used to have a fixed-term contract at the institute where she now works as an on-call employee. However, in recent years her employer has stopped giving employees permanent

contracts. The law states that an employee has to receive a permanent contract after three temporary ones at the same company. So after the third fixed-term contract she had to leave. After finding a new job she was asked to return to the company on an on-call zero-hours contract. She accepted this offer and she now works on a temporary contract for 32 hours at another company and on an on-call contract at the psychiatric care institute. The main reason she accepted the offer to work as an on-call employee was because she knows that after three temporary contracts at her current main employer she will again lose her job. She feels that staying at the company in an on-call contract will keep her connected to her former employer, where she hopes to be able to work again after her current main employment ends.

Working method, processes and procedures

As the nationwide childcare company is a very large organisation, on-call employees are organised within an internal employment department called the Flexpool. Whenever one of their locations needs an extra employee, this location can put in a request to the Flexpool. One of the employees administering the Flexpool will then see which of the on-call employees is available for that given day and time, and schedule in someone who is available. However, some other criteria also apply. For instance, they choose the available employee who lives nearest to the childcare centre that requested an employee. Furthermore, they will, if possible, choose an on-call employee who has worked in that childcare centre before, as they will know the children and the parents and because it is policy not to expose the children to too many different educational employees. Furthermore, the quality of the on-call workers is an essential criterion. According to the nationwide childcare centre's management, on-call employees should be the best employees in the company since they have to be flexible enough to adjust easily to a new work environment. After the on-call employee has been assigned to a specific placement, both the employee and the location manager are given notice of this.

Employees are called in for a minimum of three hours. This is something the company finds important to offer to their on-call employees. The minimum of three working hours is also legally dictated by the Flexibility and Security Act. This law states that all employers with on-call employees have to pay them for a minimum of three hours every time they are called in. This is to protect on-call employees from only being called in for a very short time as this would be unfair to them considering the time and energy it costs employees to come to work. The company also tries to avoid what they call 'broken shifts'. This would mean having to work for a couple of hours in the morning and then having to come back later in the afternoon for a few more hours of work. The nationwide childcare organisation only offers these types of shifts to employees who have requested it themselves. These shifts can for instance be convenient for parents who have children to take care of at lunchtime.

At the nationwide childcare organisation there is no minimum amount of time between the moment an employee is called upon and the time they have to start work. However, locations are asked to request an on-call employee as soon as possible. In case of, for example, holiday or maternity leave, two weeks' notice is preferred. However, in the case of illness or other unforeseen situations, this is not possible and it might happen that an employee is needed within an hour.

The local childcare company is much smaller and only has one employee who is truly on-call five days a week. The rest of the employees work on min-max contracts and are considered regular employees instead of on-call employees at this organisation. On-call contracts are not executed through a Flexpool, but are generally organised more informally. The employees on min-max contracts typically work according to a schedule that is available to them four weeks in advance. Employees in min-max contracts usually have fixed days they are available to come in to work, and the schedules will adhere to that. The reason employees in min-max contracts can get their schedules four weeks in advance is that the hours above the minimum for employees on these

contracts are used to fill in the shifts that can be predicted well in advance, for instance because of an employee's planned vacation. The on-call employee on a zero-hours contract is scheduled wherever necessary at different locations of the childcare centre, also usually with four weeks' prior notice. However, she may also be called in at the last moment as she is expected to replace colleagues on sick leave. She has to be available for this five days a week and in general cannot refuse shifts. She can, however, notify the company in advance of days she would rather not work, and the company generally takes this into account when drawing up the schedule.

In the local childcare company payment for regular hours, extra hours and on-call hours is arranged differently and is partly a matter of mutual agreement between management and workers. The employee on the zero-hours contract will usually be paid by the month. The employees on min-max contracts are paid the minimum amount of hours they work on a monthly basis. The frequency of payment for hours worked above the minimum depends on the employees' preference and is agreed between the manager and the employee. In general, the employees who only work very few hours over their minimum will ask to have these hours paid every three or every six months. Employees on min-max contracts who have had to work more hours will usually ask to be paid for these extra hours on a monthly basis. It may, of course, also depend on how much the employee needs the money for these extra hours.

The on-call employee working for a childcare organisation typically works two days a week on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. If her availability is different she needs to notify her employer at least a week in advance via email. The schedule is also received via email about a week in advance. Only in more urgent instances will she be called in to work by phone. This on-call employee mentions that whereas before she was able to give preferences of the times and locations she would like to work at, this is a right that has been taken away from the on-call employees at her childcare centre. Furthermore she mentions being offered more broken shifts, meaning a couple of hours' work in the morning, then more than an hour with no work and some more work in the afternoon. The on-call youth care employee used to work 30 hours a week on her on-call contract. As she recently started working as an intern somewhere else, she now works on average 15 hours a week. She is not part of a schedule but is called to ask if she would like to work a certain shift. In case of holiday leave this can be some time before she has to work. However it can also happen that she is not called until a few hours in advance.

According to the on-call employee of a psychiatric care institute, the organisation she works for has 25 on-call employees who will usually work at least one shift of eight hours in a given week. The company administrator notifies on-call employees two weeks before the start of the month of shifts that have not yet been filled by regular staff, and communicates updated staff shortages every week. The on-call employees can then register for the shifts for which they are available. This means that on-call employees have some influence on how much they work. However, it is the company that in the end decides whether the on-call staff really get to work the shifts they want as certain departments may prefer a particular on-call employee. Furthermore, the company tries to minimise the hours on-call employees work to a maximum of 16 hours a week, as after three months on-call employees are legally entitled to request a contract for the average worked hours if they have been working regularly; that is, every week or a minimum of 20 hours a month, during the last three months. The interviewed employee herself combines this work with another job and therefore usually only works at this company eight hours a week.

All three on-call employees state that they are allowed to reject a request to come in to work. However this may have consequences. The on-call employee in a childcare organisation states that she needs a valid reason to turn down a request to work. Furthermore, it is better not to refuse work too often as this may mean no longer being called in. The on-call employee in youth care speaks of an unofficial rule that one is not allowed to refuse more than four times in a row. After this it is likely you will no longer be called in. The on-call employee in psychiatric care feels the organisation likes to build in some security by having the same on-call employees

circulate in the same group of patients. According to her it is therefore best to always be available on the same days as this may mean you will be first on the administrators' list if they need someone for those days and thus increases your chances of being scheduled in.

On-call employees typically perform tasks with limited responsibility. The on-call employee in childcare states that she handles most of the tasks related to childcare. However, she does not do administrative tasks, admission interviews, observations, meetings or parents' evenings as these tasks are more suitable for employees who always work a certain amount of hours a week with the same group of children and therefore have more knowledge about the individual children and the parents. The employee in youth care has a similar story. At her job the regular employees typically have mentor tasks where they will help one of the young residents to achieve set goals. But because the on-call employees usually work with different groups, they do not have enough knowledge of the youths in these groups to fulfil this task. She does mention that when she spends more time with one specific group she will in some cases be allowed to help with the mentoring tasks. The on-call employee for the psychiatric care institute states that the responsibilities of on-call employees mostly depend on the worker's professional experience. As she used to work at the psychiatric care institute as a regular employee she knows a lot about how things work and therefore has slightly more responsibility in comparison to the other on-call employees.

External support

Companies do not need external support to introduce on-call contracts. On-call contracts are usually part of internal company staffing policy. At the nationwide childcare organisation and the other organisations in this case HR management itself is responsible for recruitment and deployment of on-call workers.

Outcomes and effects

For employers the increased flexibility is an important outcome of the use of on-call contracts. The nationwide childcare company's HR manager states that the Flexpool is indispensable in cases where unforeseen circumstances mean the company needs extra help. Because there is a specified minimum child to care worker ratio this is very important. Otherwise, if for example two employees call in sick at the same time, there may not be enough care staff to take care of all the children who come in on a given day. Having access to on-call employees in this way offers security to the company. For the nationwide childcare company, another possible outcome is that by hiring some of the employees they had to make redundant as on-call employees, they retained these workers for their company and for the childcare sector. In this way, if they need them again as regular employees in the future, they will still be available for the company and will still have, to some extent, up-to-date knowledge to do their job. Retaining qualified staff as 'reserve' is not only an advantage for the company itself, but also for the childcare sector as a whole. The sectors' staff remain competent despite lower liquidity in the companies for the moment.

According to the national childcare company's HR manager a zero-hours contract can sometimes lead to a regular job. When there is a vacancy and an on-call employee applies, they are usually preferred over external applicants. There are no official rules regarding this, but according to him this is how it usually turns out because managers already know the internal applicant and know he or she does a good job, eliminating some of the risks of hiring someone new. This is a practice that is approved and encouraged by the HR department.

However, in general on-call contracts result in a lot of insecurity for on-call employees. According to the on-call employee working in psychiatric care, it is sometimes hard to combine work and private life. She states that because the work is so insecure people tend to accept whatever they can get, even if this means having to cancel personal plans. On a more positive

note, this flexibility can in some cases also help balance work and private life, for instance broken shifts allowing mothers to be available during their children's lunches, or to balance work and other activities such as an internship, mentioned by one of our interviewees. According to the HR manager some employees consciously decide to work on a zero-hours contract as they enjoy the variety provided by working at different locations and having a flexible work schedule.

The insecurity is also expressed by the on-call employee working in childcare, as she experiences a general lack of autonomy and control. She feels that because many people have lost their jobs, the employers can ask whatever they want. The on-call employees have no other choice but to accept because they feel they will no longer be called in if they do not. She states that whereas before on-call employees had the right to communicate preferences about the location and the number of hours they would like to work, these rights have been taken away. Furthermore, she now sometimes gets broken shifts where she needs to work in one location for a couple of hours in the morning and then one more hour at another location later that same day, further increasing her feeling of lack of control. The other on-call employees also feel that the employers have a lot of power over them. However, their employer does seem to take their wishes into account more, confirming that on-call employees are dependent on the employers' goodwill to treat them fairly, and some employers will while others may not.

On-call employees have certain rights to protect them from being taken advantage of by their employers; however, enforcement of the legislation is dependent on the goodwill of the employer or the effort of the employee. The law states that on-call employees who have a regular number of working hours for a period of three months have a right to a contract for these regular working hours. However, when the employer does not give this new contract to on-call employees on their own initiative the on-call employees have to request it themselves or obtain it through a legal procedure. The on-call employees interviewed do not plan on doing this as they are afraid to lose the hours of work they do have. There is also the sense that forcing an employer to give a more regular contract with a certain amount of hours would cause conflict with the employer. The on-call employees in general do not want to be in a conflicted relationship with their employer and generally stay put and hope the amount of work does not change.

In general on-call employees fall under the same collective agreement as regular employees. This means they have equal rights to arrangements concerning social security. For instance, on-call employees will also build up a pension in relation to the hours they work. An important difference is that the interviewed on-call employees work on zero-hours contracts and therefore have no rights at work and only get paid for hours worked as opposed to having minimum working hours contractually specified. And even though the interviewed on-call employees all have fairly fixed working hours, this of course makes it a very insecure job.

There is very little investment in the future of on-call workers. Both employers in childcare state that they try to include on-call employees in training sessions. For the employees on min-max contracts, for instance, training is organised within a year-hour system where there are a certain amount of working hours set aside for training each year. So indirectly they are paid for their participation in training. However, for employees on zero-hours contracts, participation in training is not always possible according to the HR manager. If, for instance, an on-call employee has not been called in for a couple of weeks and in those weeks a new methodology was introduced, they miss the relevant training, as on-call employees are not called in specifically to attend training. In the other childcare organisation the on-call employee on a zero-hours contract is invited for training sessions. However, these sessions are not obligatory for her and she does not get paid for attending. The interviewed on-call employees paint a similar picture. In general they only receive the training that is absolutely essential to perform their current job. For instance, the youth worker did receive the mandatory training on dealing with aggression. Moreover, according to the on-call employee in psychiatric care, on-call employees follow the

same orientation as regular employees when they start their job. However, it never goes any further than that.

However, considering that for many on-call workers unemployment would be the alternative, it can be said that on-call work does contribute to future employability. On-call employees stay on the labour market and have a chance to build up and maintain their skills. Even though they work less frequently and with less security, they are better off now than if they were unemployed.

Strengths and weaknesses

An important advantage of on-call contracts for employers is the increased flexibility. It ensures there are always enough employees available to work to keep the company running, without having to take the risk of hiring too many employees who may end up redundant and therefore cost the company money. In the end, flexible labour for employers is an effective way to keep their company running while still making a profit.

The nationwide childcare organisation is facing a few challenges with the use of on-call contracts. Because of the merger in January 2014 there are now more locations that can use the Flexpool. A problem the company is currently facing is that the Flexpool in some locations is not yet big enough to handle the demand. This can lead to a request for an employee not being handled straight away. Another problem that sometimes arises is that the information on employees in the Flexpool is not correct or no longer current. This can cause problems if an employee in the Flexpool cannot be reached when necessary. Finally, one problem relates to the way some locations use the Flexpool. Some locations only schedule in a minimum number of regular employees with the intention of completing the crew with on-call employees from the Flexpool. However the Flexpool does not always have enough capacity for this. The on-call employee working in psychiatric care mentions that the high number of on-call employees is having a negative effect on her company. Because the on-call employees usually move between different departments within the company, they are not as experienced in one specific department as the other employees. She therefore feels that the use of on-call employees comes at the expense of the quality of the team, making the atmosphere less pleasant for the regular employees.

For the employees, working on an on-call contract mostly has disadvantages. The nationwide childcare organisation's HR manager feels that a disadvantage for on-call employees is that contact with colleagues is more brief, because someone will for instance work at a location for a couple of days and then not return for several weeks. Even though attempts are made to involve the on-call employees as much as possible, it is not the same as actually being there for a few days a week as a regular employee.

The employees themselves mostly mention the insecurity of the job as a weakness. Employees never know for sure when they have to work and what their income will be. And since they work on a zero-hours contract, the employer could just decide to stop calling them in for work without having to fire them. This causes a certain dependency on the employer that can take a slightly abusive turn. For instance, in the case of the on-call employee working in childcare, she is no longer able to give her preference for where she would like to work. She notes that if there are locations she would rather not work because of a conflict with the employees working at that location, she is still forced to work there. She was also recently notified that from now on, on-call employees at her company need to be available four days a week, instead of the three days she is available now. However, she does not want to work at the childcare centre four days a week because she also works somewhere else two days a week in a permanent position. This demand from her employer makes her feel insecure about her job.

Even though the employees are in general not very positive about their on-call contract, it does have some advantages. The first is that the on-call employee working in psychiatric care experiences it as positive that she gets to work at different departments and in different teams at

her job. This way she learns a lot about what is going on in different parts of the company. This makes her job more diverse and in her opinion more pleasant. The on-call employee working in youth care states that a positive part of the insecurity is that she is able to plan her own time. If she does not want to work she has no obligation to.

Future plans

Both employers interviewed are content with their use of on-call employees. They plan to continue their use and their process of handling on-call contract work. The only thing the nationwide childcare organisation would like to change is to fix some of the problems encountered with their Flexpool that were mentioned above.

As far as the employees are concerned they would in future like more security by working on a regular labour agreement. This is, however, not something the employees are counting on. They feel that insecurities in the sector they work in will prevent them from getting a regular contract, as it is increasingly the companies' policy to not hire employees on regular and/or permanent contracts.

Commentary

Following this analysis it can be concluded that on-call work mostly offers great advantages for the employers. They reap the benefits as they have the security of always having access to enough workers, without bearing the obligations that usually come along with this. It is, however, important to put the employers' position into the perspective of harsh times in the care sector, characterised by budget cuts, reorganisations in the sector, an increase of scale due to mergers and a decrease in staff in the care organisations, mostly caused by the crumbling welfare state. As the government continues making budget cuts and quarrelling over whether more budget cuts are necessary and how these should be shaped, the insecurity within the sector worsens. That makes employers hesitant about tying down workers to their organisation in permanent, fixed-hour contracts.

The less favourable consequences of this process are experienced by the employees working in these sectors. They are forced to trade in their secure fixed-hour contracts for insecure on-call zero-hours contracts as refusing would mean unemployment. When working on these zero-hours contracts workers have no other choice but to go along with whatever the employers ask of them, as the multitude of unemployed workers guarantees the employers an easy replacement. This disrupted relationship between on-call workers and their employers can in some cases become an exploitative relationship as employees are afraid to speak up. As a result, many on-call workers remain in their insecure position when in fact labour legislation dictates that on-call employees after some time gain the right to trade in their insecure position for more secure contracts either by an informal procedure or legal steps if necessary.

On a more positive note, because employers at first have no long-term obligations towards their on-call employees, the possibility of on-call contracts may take away some of the obstacles employers face in hiring new personnel. Even though this is an insecure contract, it can be argued that for employees insecure work is better than no work at all. They can gain work experience, often of a variety of different types of work, because of their flexible deployment in various locations and work settings, which might strengthen their future position in the labour market.

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