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## Work-family conflict across the lifespan

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## Work-Family Conflict across the Lifespan

### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** Research on work-family conflict has primarily focused on younger workers, with little attention paid to workers across the lifespan. To address this gap, the current study examined work-family conflict for individuals aged 18 to 70, focusing on explanations for why age is differentially related to work-family conflict at different points in one's life.

**Design:** Hypotheses were tested using data from two independent samples of working adults from the National Study of the Changing Workforce ( $N = 3,552$  and  $2,852$ , respectively).

**Results:** Results supported a curvilinear relationship with youngest and oldest workers having the fewest conflicting demands between work and home. Further, results demonstrated that family satisfaction and the age of youngest child help explain why these workers are less likely to experience family interference with work. Finally, work hours were found to mediate the relationship between age and work interference with family.

**Originality/Value:** One of the most substantial demographic transformations in the general population involves the aging of the workforce. This is one of the first papers to examine and provide insight into why age is related to work-family conflict.

**Keywords:** work-family conflict, age, lifespan

### **Work and Family across the Lifespan: Why Age is Related to Work-Family Conflict**

There is an abundance of literature on the intersection of work and family due to changes in the structure of work and workforce demographics (e.g., Allen et al., 2000). One of the most substantial demographic transformations involves the aging of the workforce. This “graying of the workforce” has prompted much research exploring the effects of aging on employee and organizational outcomes (Baltes and Finkelstein, 2011; Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004; Ng and Feldman, 2008). Although older workers were once seen as detrimental to organizations due to perceived performance degradation, these perceptions have since been dispelled (Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004). More researchers are now exploring the effects of aging on employee and organizational outcomes; however one area remains starkly understudied. Despite claims that individuals place more or less value on roles they fill (e.g., employee, spouse, parent) depending on which life stage they are in (e.g., Super, 1980), few researchers have examined how workers experience and manage conflict between their work and home lives across the lifespan (see Gordon et al., 2007, for an exception).

The purpose of this study is to understand why age would be related to work-family conflict. Baltes and Young (2007) stressed that it is “incredibly important to investigate differences between older and younger workers in regards to how they experience and react to juggling the two domains of work and family” (p. 253). With this in mind, we assess work-family conflict and capture changes within employees’ work and family roles throughout the lifespan. We propose that age itself cannot account for changes in work-family conflict, but it is the workers’ experiences typically consistent with different ages that influence this variation. We utilize conservation of resources (Hobfoll, 1989) and selection, optimization, and compensation

(Baltes and Baltes, 1990) frameworks to describe why, at different times in one's career, workers might experience different levels of work-family conflict.

### **Work-Family Conflict through the Lifespan**

Work-family conflict (WFC) occurs when pressures and demands of work collide with pressures and demands of family (Kahn et al., 1964; Kopelman et al., 1983). This conflict can originate in either or both domains, and therefore is conceptualized as work interfering with family (WIF) or family interfering with work (FIW; Frone et al., 1992; Grandey and Cropanzano, 1999; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). The source of the conflict is important as the consequences are unique depending on which domain (i.e., work or family) is experiencing the interference (Frone et al., 1992).

A great deal of research has been conducted on the antecedents and consequences of WFC (see Allen et al., 2000 and Byron, 2005 for meta-analytic reviews). The majority of these studies have examined younger adults, with little attention given to older workers. However, we argue that older workers are just as likely to experience WFC as are younger workers, but perhaps at different levels. Thus, the question is not whether WFC is experienced throughout the lifespan, but rather when is this conflict greatest, and what factors explain the relationship between age and WFC?

Baltes and Baltes (1990) developed a lifespan theory that provides a framework for understanding why WFC can change throughout one's life. According to their selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) model, as people age they use different strategies to successfully navigate their life goals. Baltes and Heydens-Gahir (2003) applied the SOC life management strategy (based on Baltes and Baltes, 1990's original theory) to the work-family

paradigm. In the following section, we provide an overview of how employees' behaviors can be explained through SOC in relation to changes associated with aging.

Traditionally, adulthood has been divided into three broad categories: young adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood (Levinson, 1986). There is strong agreement among developmental and vocational psychologist that stages are variable and dynamic, and should not be confined to specific ages (Sonnenfeld and Kotter, 1982). There is much overlap between stages, and therefore stages should be conceptualized more as "bands," and not static categories. That is, each stage should have overlap with the stages before and/or after the stage. Surprisingly, the literature does not provide guidance on stage estimates. With this in mind, we conducted a review of the literature of articles on career stages related to organizational psychology to inform our work on stage estimates. From theory (e.g., Super) and empirical work (e.g., Hall and Mansfield) we developed three bands of stage estimates. As shown in Table 1, career stage bands were exploration (ages 18-30), establishment (ages 25-49), and maintenance (ages 45+). Throughout this paper we refer to these career stage bands as well as to sub-categories of age estimates (early, middle, or late adulthood) to provide context for the reader.

In early adulthood (~ age 18-30, exploration), individuals focus on their identity (Erikson, 1968) which manifests through such tasks as furthering their education, beginning a career, or starting a family (Evans and Bartolome, 1984; McDaniels and Gysbers, 1992). These individuals frequently hold jobs with lower-level responsibilities and are just deciding when to embark on life course events such as marriage and establishing gender roles (Bauman, 2001; Beck, 1992). Rapoport and Rapoport (1976) suggested there is minimal role strain for individuals so early in their lives since they are less likely to have started a family. Thus,

although many workers in emerging adulthood will experience WFC, it will not likely be at its peak because workers will not yet experience the full gamut of responsibilities in each domain.

As workers move into middle adulthood (~ age 25-49, establishment stage), they begin to take on more responsibilities in both the work and family domains. Whether remaining in the same job for several years, or following the “boundaryless career” path (Sullivan and Arthur, 2006), workers have an increasing number of work-related responsibilities. Additionally, duties within the family lives of these workers are likely increasing. Despite high expectations and responsibilities in each role, relatively few resources are available compared to later years, and values that could help with coping and managing these role demands are not yet developed (Kram, 1983). According to scarcity theory (Chapman et al., 1994; Marks, 1977), resources are finite, and thus devoting more resources to one role means fewer resources are available for other roles (Sieber, 1974). Therefore, workers in middle adulthood likely experience excessive work and nonwork demands and limited personal resources which could heighten WFC.

The final career stage is maintenance (~ age 45+). During the early stages of maintenance, workers have more developed and stable leisure and work interests (Low et al., 2005; McDaniels, 1977). In many cases, workers within at the start of this career stage have been with an organization or occupation for an extended tenure, are experienced, and have multiple responsibilities. Extended tenure and experience can provide resources such as knowledge and familiarity with procedures. Responsibilities, on the other hand, may affect an employee both negatively (e.g., resource depletion; Sieber, 1974) and positively (e.g., control; Thomas and Ganster, 1995). Regarding family experiences, workers in this age range are less likely to have young children at home and are more likely to have more developed, supportive relationships (Moore et al., 2001). These workers, however, are also more likely to have elder-care

responsibilities, which can lead to WFC (Chapman et al., 1994). Thus, although moderate WFC is expected, the ability to better manage responsibilities at both work and home would lessen the anticipated conflict.

Finally, in the later stages of the maintenance stage, people begin integrating their life experiences (Erikson, 1982) and family and leisure become more salient (Evans and Bartolome, 1984). During this time, as suggested by SOC theory, goals change to focus less on work and more on personal factors. Responsibilities in work and family roles are lower, more resources are available, and values that can aid in coping with and managing multiple demands are more developed. As such, workers in late adulthood are less likely to experience high WFC. This age group is becoming more germane for vocational models due to the increase of employees in this age group now and in the future (Banerjee, 2012). For example, Banerjee examined U.S. employees' retirement attitudes and found that 14.8 percent reported that they expected to retire at the age of 70.

Based on the differences in resources, demands, and goals at these various ages, we offer the following hypothesis:

*H1: WFC-age relationship is curvilinear (an inverted-u) such that younger and older workers report lower WFC while workers in the middle report higher WFC.*

### **Explanatory Mechanisms for Work-Family Conflict**

Thus far we have suggested that there is some correlation between lifespan experiences related to the work-family interface and age. We further propose that there are experiences related to changes across the lifespan that explain *why* age is differentially related to WFC at different points in one's life. In this section, we provide hypotheses regarding specific demands and resources that help explain variations in the age-WFC relationship. SOC suggests that goals



change as workers progress through their lifespan (Baltes and Heydens-Gahir, 2003). Along with changes in goals, resources also change. We employ Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resources model to further understand how demands and resources differ for workers through their lifespan.

### **Demands as Mediators**

According to the conservation of resources model, "people strive to retain, protect, and build resources" which Hobfoll (1989) identifies as objects, conditions, personal characteristics, and energies (p. 1). These resources can affect WFC such that the fewer resources workers have, the more likely they will experience WFC (Grandey and Cropanzano, 1999). Specific to lifespan development, Heckhausen et al. (2010) developed a motivational theory that further explains how demands and resources could help explain the relationship between age and WFC. They suggest that a person's control over different life domains throughout their lifespan will lead to more adaptive development. As people age, they strive to obtain goals in different life domains in which they have optimal control. Furthermore, a person would be expected to disengage from activities that would produce negative side effects in the long term. Yet Heckhausen et al. point out that there are limitations (e.g., societal, biological) to goal achievement. In the work-family realm, these limitations could include opportunities to work and parenting status. Linking Heckhausen et al.'s lifespan approach of motivating factors to Hobfoll's (1989) contention that lost resources can lead to strain provides a framework to help understand conditions in which aging can lead to WFC. Key resources in the form of energies (time/work hours) and conditions (parental status) help explain why workers' WFC changes depending on their age.

The level of one's work demands is likely to change throughout one's life. Work hours are likely to be longest for workers up through the mid-stages of their career when they have

many responsibilities and are trying to prove themselves within their field (Jacobs and Gerson, 1998; Reynolds, 2003). Indeed, Pogson et al. (2003) examined individuals in three career stages (age ranges <31, 31-44, >44) and found that leisure time decreased at each stage. According to the rational view framework (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985), as more time is spent in one domain, workers will experience higher levels of conflict with that domain being the source of the conflict. Empirical research supports this perspective (e.g., Adams et al., 1996; Gutek et al., 1991).

Working long hours acts as an energy drain, and takes time away from one's family. Thus, workers in the age range of those experiencing more family responsibilities and working long hours are more likely to experience more WIF. In other words, the number of weekly work hours explains the relationship between age (as a curvilinear relationship) and WIF. In the mid-stages of their career (establishment, 25-49 vs. exploration, 18-30 and maintenance, 45+), individuals are more likely to work longer hours, which increases the likelihood of WIF. With this in mind, we hypothesize:

*H2: Work hours mediates the (curvilinear) relationship between age and WIF.*

Whereas work constitutes a large part of one's life, family is also a considerable component. Parental status can affect one's resources due to demands and responsibilities associated with childcare. For example, in her meta-analytic review of WFC antecedents, Byron (2005) found that number of children was positively related to WIF ( $\rho = .09$ ) and FIW ( $\rho = .16$ ), and found a negative relationship between age of youngest child and both WIF ( $\rho = -.17$ ) and FIW ( $\rho = -.22$ ). Voydanoff and Kelly (1984) used presence of young children as a means to assess life-cycle stage and found that having younger children was related to more time demands on parents. We propose that age of youngest child at home is an indicator of having greater

childcare demands and responsibilities and helps explain the curvilinear relationship between age and FIW. Specifically, for young adults in the early part of the exploration stage (initial increasing slope of curve), young children at home increase the relationship between age and FIW. However, for the older workers, particularly those in the early part of the maintenance stage (decreasing slope of curve), the lack of young children decreases the relationship between age and FIW. Viewing young children as a potential resource drain, which would interfere with work, we hypothesize:

*H3: As an indicator of childcare demands and responsibilities, age of youngest child mediates the (curvilinear) relationship between age and FIW.*

### **Resources as Mediators**

One commonality in lifespan research is the idea that with human development comes changes in resources (Baltes and Dickson, 2001). Research suggests that individuals with greater resources throughout their lifespan are better able to adapt to age-related losses (Baltes and Lang, 1997). Resources are also likely to facilitate one's likelihood of decreasing WFC (Hobfoll, 1989). We propose that workers who are older and further along in their career have conditions within the family (family satisfaction) and work (tenure) domains that provide resources that buffer against stressors that can lead to WFC.

In many cases, workers within the maintenance career stage (~ age 45+) have been with an organization or occupation for an extended tenure and are more experienced. These factors provide resources such as knowledge and familiarity with procedures, as well as access to organizational resources such as mentoring (cf. Rotundo, 1999), and help explain why such workers are likely to experience less WIF. We suggest that the slope of tenure as a resource will display a positively accelerated slope such that the curve starts flat and becomes progressively

steeper as tenure progresses. This shape exists because the change of rate of the tenure slope at the beginning of one's career will be minimal. It is later in the career that employees will reap the benefits from tenure, and the resources associated with tenure will be much more extreme. As such, we hypothesize:

*H4: Tenure mediates the (curvilinear) relationship between age and WIF.*

Within the family domain, workers later in the maintenance stage have fewer stressors because the demands that once existed from having young children at home are replaced by support from adult children. Relationships, even those just emerging, are also built on a more mature foundation. Thus, although WFC is present, we would expect FIW to decrease and be similar to levels exhibited in emerging adulthood.

In addition, more matured families likely lend more resources to workers compared to young families. In terms of the conservation of resources framework, Rook (1984) stressed that it may not always be the condition itself that is a resource; it is also how the condition is qualified. With this in mind, we propose that older workers are likely to have more developed family systems that provide greater feelings of satisfaction. Indeed, Carstensen and colleagues have found that older adults more frequently seek out emotionally-close others such as spouses and siblings due to the satisfaction they bring about (Carstensen 1992; Lang and Carstensen, 2002) which is likely to result in less FIW. Thus, we suggest that the curvilinear relationship between age and FIW can be explained by family satisfaction. As such, we hypothesize:

*H5: Family satisfaction mediates the (curvilinear) relationship between age and FIW.*

### **Method**

Hypotheses were tested using data from two separate non-related samples from the 1997 and 2002 U.S. National Study of the Changing Workforce (NSCW). The NSCW is a survey of

representative samples of the U.S. labor force, conducted every five years. Data were collected through a computer-assisted telephone questionnaire, developed by the Families and Work Institute using stratified unclustered random probability samples. Currently employed workers over age 18 were offered \$25 to participate.

### **Participants**

*Sample 1.* A total of 3,552 employed individuals comprised the 1997 data. The sample was employed either part- or full-time and ranged in age from 18 to 70. The age estimates ranged from 771 in the exploration phase (18-30), 2351 in the establishment phase (25-49), and 1145 in the maintenance phase (45+). Approximately 54% were male and the ethnic composition of the sample was 80% Caucasian. Approximately 46% of the sample had children under 18 living with them, and the mean age of the respondent's youngest child under 18 living at home was 7.6 years ( $SD = 5.2$ ). Sixty percent of the respondents were legally married and living with their spouses and 82% were employed full-time in their primary job.

*Sample 2.* The 2002 data consisted of 2,582 employed individuals of whom approximately 43% were male and 80% were Caucasian. The sample was employed either part- or full-time and ranged in age from 18 to 70. The age estimates ranged from 568 in the exploration phase, 1600 in the establishment phase, and 1138 in the maintenance phase. Approximately 43% of the sample had children under 18 living with them, and the mean age of youngest child under 18 living at home was 9.77 years ( $SD = 7.1$ ). Over half of the respondents (58.1%) were legally married and living with their spouses, and 92.6% were employed full-time in their primary job.

### **Measures**

Measures were the same for both samples with the exception of the conflict measures. Because each data set came from a single source, we assessed the threat of common method bias. We conducted Harman's single factor test (Golden, 2006), which assumes that if a single factor emerges from a factor analysis that explains the majority of the variance then there is evidence of common method bias. Results showed that one factor did not account for the majority of variance with the three factors (Sample 1: 31.8%, 13.42% and 10.48%; Sample 2: 36.18%, 12.13%, 8.19%) suggesting common method bias was not a concern.

*Age.* Participants were asked the month and year of their birth. This number was then standardized into age based on when they completed the survey (1997 vs. 2002).

*Work-family conflict.* In the first sample, WIF was assessed with four items ( $\alpha = .81$ ). Examples include, "How often have you not had enough time for your family or other important people in your life because of your job?" and "How often have you not been able to get everything done at home each day because of your job?" FIW was assessed with five items ( $\alpha = .80$ ). Sample questions include "How often has your family/personal life kept you from doing as good a job at work as you could?" and "How often has your family/personal life drained you of the energy you needed to do your job?" Scale responses ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*).

For Sample 2, WIF was assessed with five items ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Examples include, "How often have you not had the energy to do things with your family or other important people in your life because of your job?" and "How often has work kept you from doing as good a job at home as you could?" FIW was also assessed with five items ( $\alpha = .80$ ). Sample questions include "How often has your family/personal life kept your from concentrating on your job?" and "How often have you not been in as good a mood as you would like to be at work because of your family/personal life?" Scale responses ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). These scales have

been used in other work-family research (e.g., Andreassi and Thompson, 2007; Thompson and Prottas, 2006).

*Work hours.* Respondents reported the approximate hours worked per week in their main job.

*Age of youngest child.* If respondents endorsed that they had children, they then reported the age of the youngest child living at home.

*Tenure.* Participants reported the number of years they have worked for their current employer or in their current line of work.

*Family satisfaction.* Family satisfaction was measured using two items: “Overall, how satisfied are you with your family life?” and “All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your relationship/marriage?” Responses ranged from 1 (*not too satisfied*) to 4 (*extremely satisfied*). Pearson’s correlation between the two items for Sample 1 was .57 and for Sample 2 was .59.

## Results

Table 2 depicts correlations and Table 3 displays descriptive statistics. All analyses were tested at the .05 significance level.

Hypothesis 1 stated that the WFC-age relationship is curvilinear such that younger and older workers report lower WFC while workers in the middle report higher WFC. Since we were predicting curvilinear relationships, we added a quadratic term into the model. First, we centered the predictor (age) to prevent multicollinearity (Aiken and West, 1991). We also created an interaction term between the centered variable and itself. Next, we conducted a regression by entering the predictor variable (age) and the squared predictor variable ( $age^2$ ) in step two. The final  $R^2$  had to be significant for a curvilinear relationship to be significant. Results revealed  $age^2$

was significantly related to WIF (Sample 1:  $\beta = -.12$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Sample 2:  $\beta = -.12$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and FIW (Sample 1:  $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Sample 2:  $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ). To further interpret the relationships, we conducted a mean split based on age. The mean age was 39.73. (Sample 1) and 41.51 (Sample 2), therefore we conducted two separate regression analysis based on: (a) workers younger than 39.73 or 41.51 (for Samples 1 and 2, respectively); and (b) workers 39.73 or 41.51 or older (for Samples 1 and 2, respectively). As shown in Table 4, for the younger groups there is a positive relationship between age and both WIF and FIW (Sample 1 only) and for the older groups there is a negative relationship between age and both WIF and FIW. Figures 1 and 2 provide graphic depictions of these four relationships for Sample 1 and Sample 2, respectively. Results provide support for Hypothesis 1.

For Hypotheses 2 through 5 we conducted mediated regression analyses using Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediational analysis procedure, as well as a formal test of the indirect effect using the more conservative Sobel test (Preacher and Hayes, 2004). Since the predicted relationship was curvilinear, we examined age as a curvilinear ( $age^2$ ) variable. Hypothesis 2 stated that work hours mediates the relationship between  $age^2$  and WIF. Regression analysis showed that  $age^2$  was significantly related to work hours (Sample 1:  $\beta = -.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Sample 2:  $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Additionally, work hours was significantly related to WIF (Sample 1:  $\beta = .12$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Sample 2:  $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Finally, the beta for  $age^2$  dropped (Sample 1:  $\beta = -.13$ ; Sample 2:  $\beta = -.10$ ,  $p < .01$ ) when work hours was added to the equation to predict WIF, suggesting mediation. A Sobel test provided further evidence of a partial mediating relationship (Sample 1:  $z = -4.40$ ; Sample 2:  $z = -4.56$ ). Overall, results support Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 stated that the age of the youngest child living at home mediates the relationship between  $age^2$  and FIW. For this analysis, we first selected individuals who had



children (Sample 1:  $N = 1801$ ; Sample 2:  $N = 1756$ ) and then similar to the other analyses, conducted our mediated regression analysis. Following Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach, we first demonstrated that, for Sample 1,  $\text{age}^2$  was significantly related to the age of the youngest child living at home ( $\beta = -.06, p < .01$ ). Next, age of youngest child was significantly related to FIW ( $\beta = -.09, p < .01$ ). Finally, the beta for  $\text{age}^2$  dropped and the beta was nonsignificant ( $\beta = -.04, ns$ ) when the age of the youngest child was added to the equation to predict FIW, suggesting full mediation in Sample 1. A Sobel test provided evidence of a partial mediating relationship ( $z=2.52$ ). Age of youngest child was not significantly related to FIW in Sample 2 so we did not conduct the full mediation analysis. Thus, results showed support for Hypothesis 3 in Sample 1, but not in Sample 2.

Hypothesis 4 stated that tenure mediates the relationship between  $\text{age}^2$  and WIF. Regression analysis showed that  $\text{age}^2$  was significantly related to organizational tenure (Sample 1:  $\beta = -.04, p < .01$ ; Sample 2:  $\beta = -.04, p = .01$ ). Tenure was related to WIF for Sample 1 ( $\beta = -.04, p = .04$ ), but not for Sample 2 ( $\beta = -.03, p = .12$ ). As such, we discontinued the mediation analysis for Sample 2. For Sample 1, tenure became nonsignificant when we added it to the equation with  $\text{age}^2$  ( $\beta = -.01, p = .72$ ). Neither sample showed evidence of mediation, thus, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Hypotheses 5 stated that marital satisfaction mediates the relationship between  $\text{age}^2$  and FIW. Regression analysis showed that  $\text{age}^2$  was significantly related to marital satisfaction (Sample 1:  $\beta = -.06, p < .01$ ; Sample 2:  $\beta = -.07, p < .01$ ). Additionally, marital satisfaction was significantly related to FIW (Sample 1:  $\beta = .21, p < .01$ ; Sample 2:  $\beta = .35, p < .01$ ). Finally, the beta for  $\text{age}^2$  dropped (Sample 1:  $\beta = -.04$ ; Sample 2:  $\beta = -.07, p < .01$ ) when marital satisfaction was added to the equation to predict FIW, suggesting mediation. A Sobel test provided further

evidence of a partial mediating relationship (Sample 1:  $z = -2.68.19$ ; Sample 2:  $z = 2.95$ ). Results support Hypothesis 5. Mediation analyses are presented in Table 5.

### **Discussion**

Baltes and Baltes (1990) stressed that “the adaptive task of the aging individual is to select and concentrate on those domains that are of high priority and that involve a convergence of environmental demands and individual motivations, skills, and biological capacity” (p. 27). The current study provided evidence that work and family demands differ across the lifespan, and these demands and motivations are in turn related to different levels of WFC.

Workers in the midst of their career (in the establishment career stage, ~ age 25-49) appear to experience the greatest WFC compared to workers of other ages. During this time, factors at work and home are the most taxing on resources. Further, our findings demonstrated that work hours and age of youngest children living at home mediate this relationship. Workers are in the stage of their career in which they are likely to be working longer hours and trying to define themselves as workers. They are also more likely to experience greater job demands, supporting previous findings that this increases the likelihood of WIF (e.g., Adams et al., 1996; Gutek et al., 1991). Workers at this point in their lifespan are also more likely to be starting a family and have more responsibilities such as having young children at home, which has been linked to greater WFC (Higgins et al., 1994; Voydanoff and Kelly, 1984) and would be expected to strongly relate to FIW as was found in Sample 1 in this study. We should note that the null findings for Sample 2 could be related to the fact that the mean age of the youngest children was lower for Sample 1 ( $M = 7.57$ ) than Sample 2 ( $M = 9.77$ ). Nevertheless, having young children at home adds to the demands at home, which is likely to contribute to higher rates of WIF.

Our results also demonstrated that family satisfaction was able to explain why workers at the beginning and end of their careers are less likely to experience FIW. These findings extend on previous work by Rauschenbach and Hertel (2011) suggesting a curvilinear relationship between age and stressors/strain. Researchers (e.g., Rook, 1984) have suggested that whereas having a condition (in this case family) could either provide or deplete resources, valuing and being content with the condition is also a resource. In this case, higher family satisfaction was the condition which led to lower FIW and helped explain why age was curvilinearly related to FIW.

We should note that we also proposed that tenure would act as a resource and lessen WIF. Whereas tenure was related to WIF, it did not help explain why workers in the maintenance career stage experience lower conflict. We offer two reasons for this. First, the question addressed one's "current job/line of work," which could have led to more variability in responses. It could be that workers' organizational tenure might not reflect their experience within the occupation. For example, an individual could have worked as a sales person for his or her current company for just one year, but might have been a sales person for thirty years. Thus, the tenure variable may not have fully reflected the resources and experience in the job domain. Second, although tenure provides resources (e.g., experience, control), it also can lead to more demands such as greater work responsibilities.

### **Implications**

This study is one of the first to examine WFC across the lifespan. Our results suggest that age-related variables should not be treated as linear. Overall our results showed that there is a positive relationship between age and WFC for younger employees and a negative relationship

between age and WFC for older employees. Previous studies that have included age into a linear model may not have found age effects due to this reason.

Organizations vary in terms of the age of their workers. For example, some organizations target recent college graduates as their recruitment base. Similarly, organizations with low levels of turnover and retirements may eventually find their demographic make-up to include primarily workers in the later years of their lives. Awareness that work-family issues can differ depending on where workers are in their lifespan can help organizations better meet employee needs and yield positive organizational outcomes. For example, our results showed that age of youngest child living at home as an indicator of high family demands and responsibilities mediates the relationship between age and FIW. Organizations that have many workers with young families might implement on-site childcare to help alleviate work-family stress associated with young parenthood (Dawson et al., 1984). This might also increase family satisfaction, which was related to lower conflict in this study.

The current study's findings also indicated that, for workers towards the end of their career, higher family satisfaction was a condition leading to lower FIW. Although managers may feel powerless to influence such aspects of an employee's life, this is not necessarily the case. Indeed, managers can influence factors that may lead to family satisfaction. For example, organizational policies that allow flexible schedules may allow workers to spend time with their families. Similarly, organizations might want to sponsor events that allow workers and family members to share experiences.

Finally, the U.S. culture has associated aging with declines in skills and performance (Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004). Whereas there are physical and cognitive detriments related to aging, there are also additional resources associated with aging. The current study provides

evidence that conditions such as satisfaction with family provide older adults with additional resources to assist them in coping with work and family demands.

### **Limitations and Future Studies**

We used a lifespan approach to examine factors related to aging and how different experiences of workers at different points in their lives are related to WFC. Yet we should note that life experiences are very fluid in relation to age (Cooke, 1994). Thus, it is possible that workers experience differences in demands and resources at various times. In fact, in more specialized labor forces, the individual has much control over their own lifespan progression, and is in control of their own timetable and path (Heckhausen et al., 2010). Although we provided estimates instead of specific age groups, it should be noted that lifespan progression is not necessarily a linear process.

The focus of our study was to examine processes that help explain why age is related to WFC. It would also be helpful to understand under what conditions this relationship is strongest. For example, it might be expected that whether workers have children or not would influence the relationship between age and WFC. Post-hoc exploratory analyses did not show this to be the case for this study, and it may be that age-related work demands and resources more strongly affect these relationships. Furthermore, sex may influence some of the hypothesized relationships. For example, some researchers have suggested that dual-earner men work more hours per week than dual-earner women (Levine and Pittinsky, 1997), and that women are more likely to experience the care-giving responsibilities associated with both child- and elder-care (i.e., the “sandwich generation;” Riley and Bowen, 2005).

We suggested that two demand-based (work hours and age of youngest child at home) and two resource-based (tenure and family satisfaction) variables help explain the relationship

between age and WFC. Nevertheless, there are many other resources that could be examined as explanatory or mediating variables in the relationship between age and WFC. For example, future researchers may examine other mediators of the relationship between age and WFC, such as values and actual support. Past research (Schnittger and Bird, 1990) has shown that coping strategies change depending on family life cycle. Future studies might want to assess whether changing of coping styles is related to resultant WFC.

According to Kanfer and Ackerman (2004), individual differences are key determinants of motivation that might be affected by age. For example, some personality characteristics (i.e., agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability) appear to strengthen with age (Jones and Meredith, 1996). Additionally, older workers experience declines in fluid intelligence and increases in crystallized intelligence, which affects choice of tasks and motivators (Kanfer and Ackerman, 2004). These differences in personality and intelligence could potentially impact work stress levels and coping factors. As such, future researchers should include individual difference variables when examining conflict across the lifespan.

It has become more common for workers between the ages of 45 and 55 to be considered in the “sandwich generation” (American Association of Retired Persons, 2001; Cullen et al., 2009). That is, workers are responsible for both children at home and the care of their parents. Studies have shown that individuals who are responsible for both children and parents are more likely to report less work-family balance (Buffardi et al., 1999). In the current study we only examined the demands associated with having children living at home. We did not examine elder care, an issue that is becoming much more prominent to families today (Baltes and Young, 2007; Cullen et al., 2009; Neal and Hammer, 2007).

Finally, our study was limited by its exclusive examination of workers employed in the United States. Although the impact of an aging workforce is certainly relevant to this population, the extent to which the results from this study can be generalized to other countries is unclear. The U.S. is frequently classified as being individualistic as opposed to collectivistic (e.g., Hofstede, 1983), yet whether our findings generalize to other individualistic versus collectivistic countries remains unknown. Additionally, other countries (e.g., UK, Spain) have mandatory retirement laws precluding older workers from staying in the workforce. Nevertheless, these requirements might change due to the changes in demographics and the need for labor (Fraccaroli and Depolo, 2008). Clearly, more research is needed to establish the relationship between aging and WFC in countries beyond the United States.

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Table 1

*Summary of Career Stages in Organizational Psychology Literature*

<b>Stage 1</b>		<b>Stage 2</b>		<b>Stage 3</b>		<b>Author(s)</b>
Age Ranges	Name of Stage	Age Ranges	Name of Stage	Age Ranges	Name of Stage	
<b>18 – 30</b>	<b>Exploration</b>	<b>25 - 49</b>	<b>Establishment</b>	<b>45+</b>	<b>Maintenance</b>	<b>Current Study</b>
15 – 24	Exploration	25 - 44	Establishment	45 – 66	Maintenance	Super (1957)
20 - 30	Early Career	35 - 49	Mid	50 +	Late	Hall & Mansfield (1975) Rabinowitz & Hall (1981) Raelin (1985)
> 30	Trial	31 – 44	Stabilization	45 +	Maintenance	Gould & Hawkins (1978) Slocum & Cron (1985) Morrow & McElroy (1987)
25 – 30	Establishment	30 - 45	Advancement	45 - 65	Maintenance	Hall & Nougaim (1968)
18 – 29	Early	30 – 39/ 40 - 49	Developing / Consolidating	50 +	Pre-retirement	Darcy, McCarthy, Hill & Grady (2012)

Table 2

*Correlations for Variables of Interest for Both Samples*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	--	.18**	-.10**	-.05**	-.04	-.58**	.50**	-.10**
2. Age <sup>2</sup>	-.04	--	-.15**	-.09**	.04*	-.13**	.08**	-.07**
3. Work interfering with Family	-.08**	-.12**	(.81, .86)	.40**	.03	-.07*	-.03*	.24**
4. Family interfering with Work	-.09**	-.08**	.52**	(.80, .80)	-.01	-.09**	.00	.21**
5. Work Hours	.05*	-.15**	.14**	.04	--	-.02	.03	-.04
6. Age of Youngest Child	-.25**	-.15**	.08**	-.02	.02	--	-.22**	.03
7. Tenure	.47**	-.06**	-.03	-.02	.12**	.29**	--	-.10**
8. Family Satisfaction	-.06**	-.08**	.24**	.35**	.02	.10**	-.04	(.57, .59)

*Notes:* Left of diagonal = 2002; Right of diagonal = 1997. Reliabilities are shown on the diagonal (1997/2002): For work interfering with family and family interfering with work scales Cronbach's alphas are presented, and for family satisfaction scale Pearson's correlations are presented (scale consists of 2 items).

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations of Variables of Interest*

	Sample 1		Sample 2	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Age	39.73	11.14	41.51	11.93
2. Work interfering with Family	2.94	0.98	2.53	0.88
3. Family interfering with Work	1.88	0.72	2.16	0.73
4. Work Hours	39.40	7.07	38.28	6.81
5. Age of Youngest Child	7.66	5.22	9.77	7.08
6. Family Satisfaction	1.93	0.79	1.88	0.77
7. Tenure	7.47	8.06	8.09	8.51

Table 4

*Relationship between Age and Work-Family Conflict Comparing Young versus Older Workers  
(Hypothesis 1)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
<b>Sample 1 – WIF</b>			
Younger (under 39.73)	.01	.00	.08*
Older (39.73 or over)	-.03	.00	-.19**
<b>Sample 2 – WIF</b>			
Younger (under 41.51)	.01	.00	.06*
Older (41.51 or over)	-.02	.00	-.17**
<b>Sample 1 – FIW</b>			
Younger (under 39.73)	.01	.00	.06*
Older (39.73 or over)	-.01	.00	-.10*
<b>Sample 2 – FIW</b>			
Younger (under 41.51)	.00	.00	.01
Older (41.51 or over)	-.02	.00	-.17**

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ . WIF: Work interfering with family; FIW: Family interfering with work.

Table 5

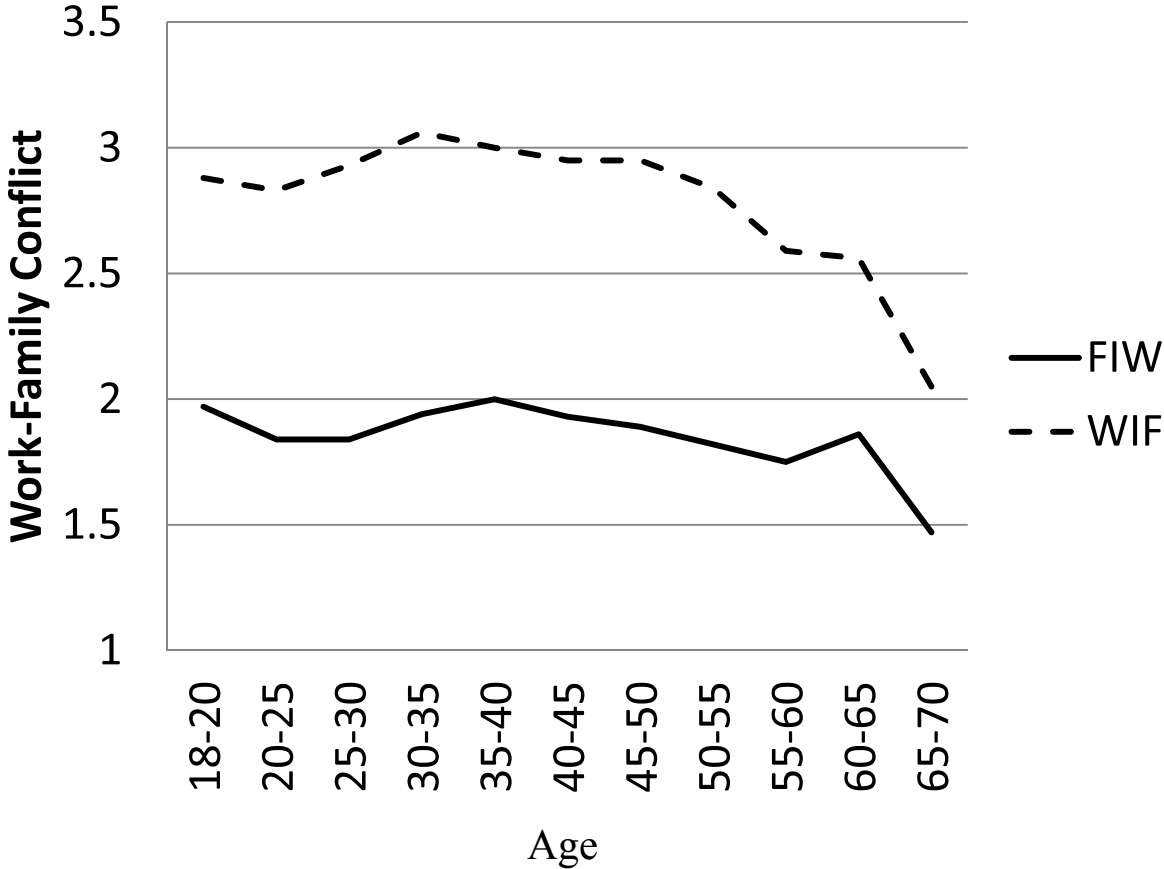
*Mediating Regression Analyses for Age<sup>2</sup> and WFC*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
<b>Hypothesis 2: Work hours mediating Age<sup>2</sup>-WIF</b>			
			Hypothesis 2: Model 1
Age <sup>2</sup>	-.00/ -.00	.00/ .00	-.14**/ -.12**
			Hypothesis 2: Model 2
Age <sup>2</sup>	-.00/ -.00	.00/ .00	-.13**/ -.10**
Work Hours	.01/ .02	.00/ .00	.10**/ .13**
<b>Hypothesis 3: Age of Youngest Child mediating Age<sup>2</sup>-FIW</b>			
			Hypothesis 3: Model 1
Age <sup>2</sup>	-.00/ -.01	.00/ .00	-.08**/ -.09**
			Hypothesis 3: Model 2
Age <sup>2</sup>	.00/ .00	.00/ .00	-.04/ -.06*
Age of Youngest Child	-.02/ .04	.01/ .02	-.12*/ .05
<b>Hypothesis 5: Family Satisfaction mediating Age<sup>2</sup>-FIW</b>			
			Hypothesis 5: Model 1
Age <sup>2</sup>	.00/ -.01	.00/ .00	-.08**/ -.09**
			Hypothesis 5: Model 2
Age <sup>2</sup>	.00/ .00	.00/ .00	-.04*/ -.07**
Marital Satisfaction	.19/ .32	.02/ .02	.21**/ .34**

*Note.* For each coefficient, the first number represents Sample 1 and the second number represents Sample 2. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

Figure 1.

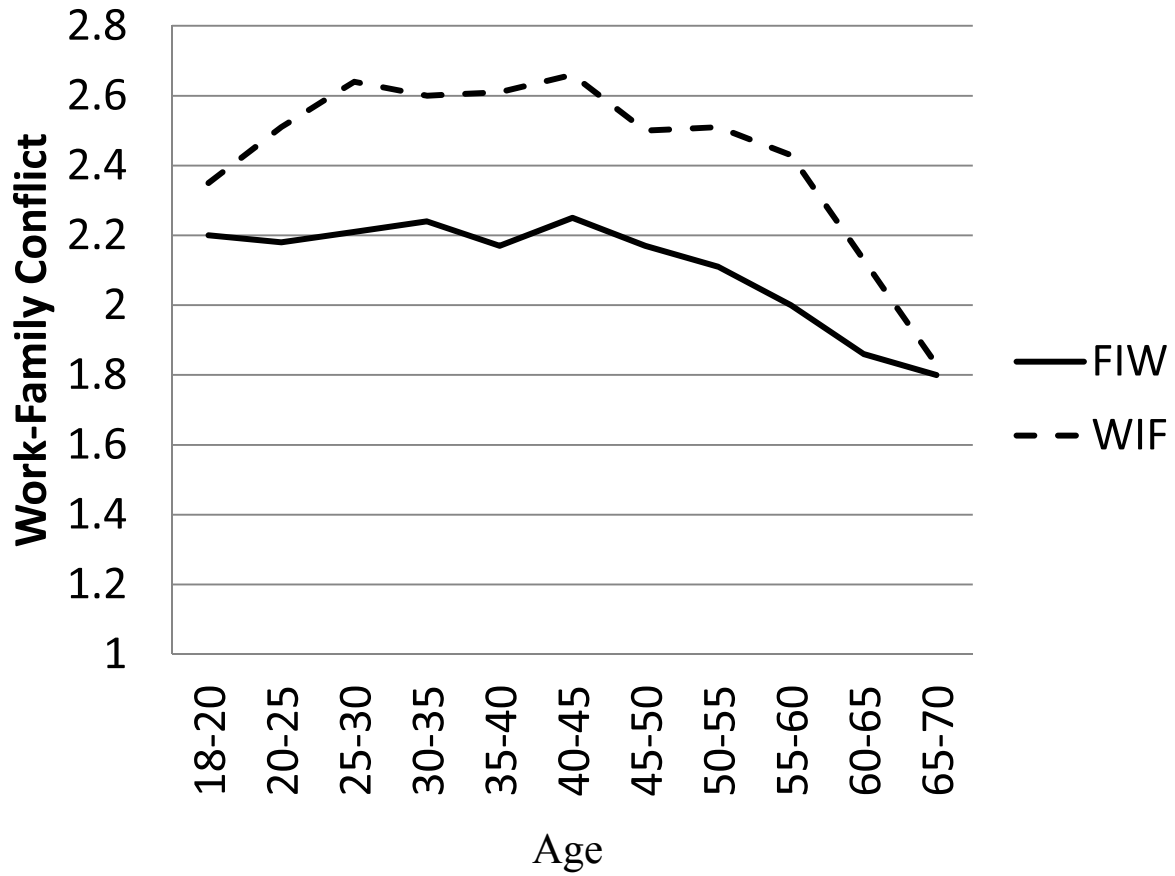
*Relationship between Work-family Conflict and Age (Sample 1)*



Notes: FIW = family interfering with work; WIF = work-interfering with family

Figure 2.

*Relationship between Work-family Conflict and Age (Sample 2)*



Notes: FIW = family interfering with work; WIF = work-interfering with family