

Work and Family over the Life Course: Do Older Workers Differ?

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Abstract This study explored how older workers (age 55+) differed from middle-aged (ages 35–54) and young workers (<35 years) in their experience of the work–family interface. Data came from a subset of a survey conducted by a multi-national corporation in 79 countries ($N = 41,813$, $n = 2,700$). Older workers reported significantly less work-to-family and family-to-work conflict and greater work–family fit, life success, and work success than middle-aged and young workers. They reported significantly greater job flexibility and job satisfaction but were significantly less likely to be aware of and use work–family programs than young workers. Older men reported significantly less awareness and use of work-life programs and less family-to-work conflict than older women. Implications of this research are presented.

Keywords Job satisfaction · Older workers ·
Work–family conflict · Work–family fit ·
Workplace flexibility

Introduction

As baby boomers age, the proportion of older employees in the workforce is growing rapidly. The number of workers over age 55 is projected to increase at nearly four times the rate of the overall labor force in the US (Alley and Crimmins 2007). Because of low sub-replacement fertility rates,

many developed nations will soon have insufficient numbers of new labor entrants to replace workers who leave the workforce at typical retirement ages (Abdel-Ghany 2008; United Nations 2009). Therefore, this segment of workers is seen as crucial to global economic development.

How older individuals experience the work–family interface may influence the timing of their decision to disengage from the workforce. A growing body of literature suggests that older workers may differ from younger workers in their work–family needs and the coping behaviors they use to integrate these domains (Baltes and Young 2007). For example, older workers seem to be more adept at managing work and family demands because of their accumulated experience and more complex view of issues (Sterns and Huyck 2001). But older workers may also face increasing elder care responsibilities, declining physical health, and goals of personal development, presenting role demands that may influence the experience of work and family life (Staudinger and Bluck 2001). These may affect the decision to stay in the workforce.

Surprisingly, there is little empirical research directly comparing older and younger workers' experiences of work and family life. Well-tested models of the work–family interface have identified factors in the work and family domains that contribute to conflict between work and family life (Aryee et al. 1999; Erickson et al. 2010; Frone et al. 1992; Hill et al. 2004a, b). But these studies have largely treated age as a *noise* variable rather than a focal issue. A more explicit focus on age in research design could substantially contribute to understanding these differences and guide practices and policies aimed at meeting the needs of an aging workforce in today's global economy.

The purpose of this study is to explore how older workers (age 55 and over) differ from middle-aged (ages 35–54) and young (less than 35 years old) workers in their experience of

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the work–family interface. The study uses a previously tested model of the work–family interface for men and women at these three life stages using data from a large international sample of workers. The model (Fig. 1) is adapted from Frone et al.’s (1992) work–family interface model which was explored and validated cross-culturally by Aryee et al. (1999) and Hill et al. (2004a, b). Job and family factors are explored as predictors of work–family conflict, and work–family conflict is explored as a predictor of work–family fit which, in turn, predicts work and personal outcomes. The means of each are compared by age category and gender, and the differing strengths of the relationships among them are tested using structural equation modeling.

Conceptual Underpinnings

The family life cycle perspective is a useful framework for exploring differences in the work and family interface over the life course. From a family life cycle perspective, families in the same stages experience similar events, face similar crises, and accomplish similar developmental tasks (White and Klein 2008). Stages are distinguished by their structural complexity, which are defined by the numbers of persons involved; the number of interpersonal relationships and density (age homogeneity); the cognitive and prosocial competency of the members; the allocation of power, tasks and affection; the ratio of instrumental and expressive

resources to member needs; efficiency in the management of time, energy, and space; and links to work, schools, and support systems of kinship and friendship networks (Mattesich and Hill 1987). Gender is a central concept in the factors that define the complexity of each family life stage (Moen and Sweet 2004) and these life stage factors are directly reflected in work and family role demands. According to Voydanoff’s (2007) conceptualization of the work–family interface, these role demands are related to work–family conflict and work, family, and community role performance and individual well being.

Work–family conflict is defined as a type of inter-role stress that results from incompatible demands in the work and family domains (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985). Because inter-role conflict may originate from either the work or family domain, both *work-to-family conflict* and *family-to-work conflict* are important conceptualizations. Work-related factors, such as job responsibility, are generally associated with work-to-family conflict, conflict in which work pressures are incompatible with family demands. Family-related factors, such as care for dependents, are generally associated family-to-work conflict, in which pressures from family are incompatible with work demands (Frone 2003). Work-to-family and family-to-work conflict are both assumed to be predictors of work–family fit. Work–family fit is the cognitive assessment of whether work and family resources are sufficient to meet work and family demands (Karimi and Nouri 2009;

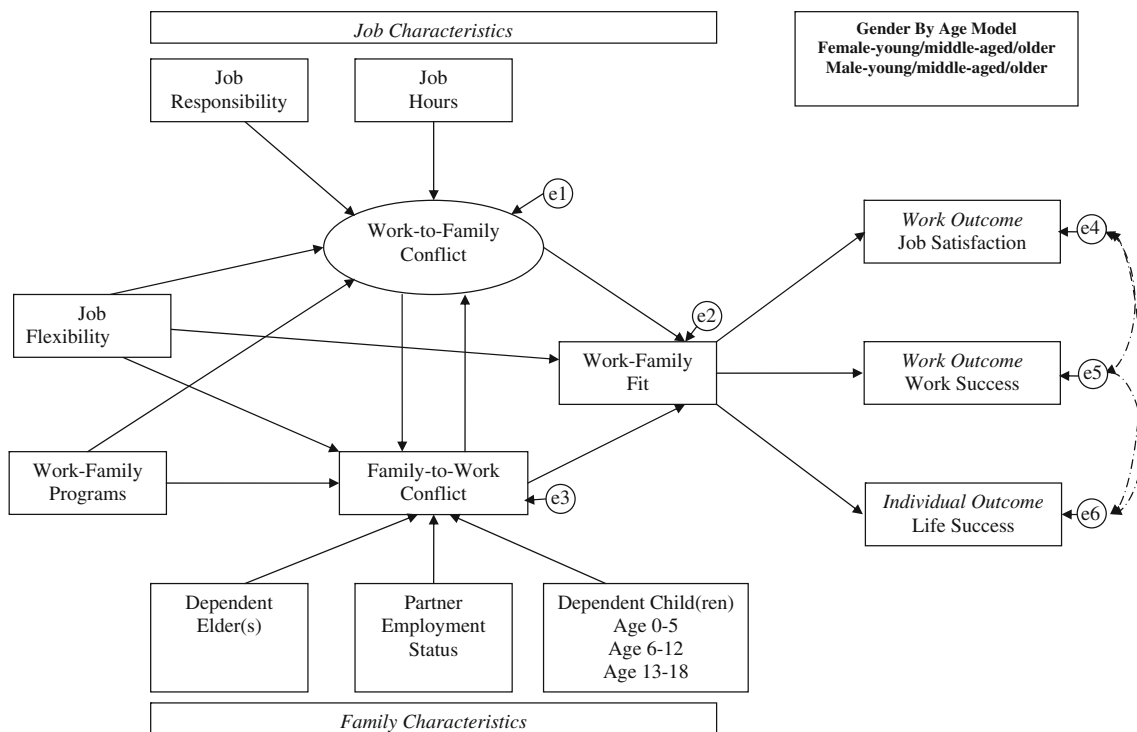


Fig. 1 Gender by age model

Voydanoff 2007). Work–family fit is seen as a predictor of both work and personal outcomes.

Empirical Evidence

We organize our review of related research around age and gender differences in work and family role demands and in the management of work and family demands.

Age Differences in Work and Family Role Demands

Work and family role demands have been identified as key considerations in understanding potential differences between older and younger workers in their experience of work and family life (Baltes and Young 2007). Older workers have been expected to experience less work–family conflict and greater work–family fit because they have fewer family role demands than younger workers. Specifically, older workers are less likely to experience the family role demand of caring for dependent young children. Family role demands experienced during the transition to parenthood may even become greater for parents with preschool-age children. A study comparing men and women with a child under the age of 6 with those who had an older child found higher levels of negative spillover from family to work associated with caregiving responsibilities for those with young children (Grzywacz et al. 2002).

In terms of work role demands, older workers are likely to experience increased job responsibilities and longer job hours (Bond et al. 2005). Age group comparisons of conflict in the work–family interface seemed supportive of the hypothesis of less work–family conflict and greater work–family fit due to fewer family role demands for older workers. Indeed, there appears to be a life course for conflict in the work–family interface, with decreasing conflict and greater fit as workers' youngest children age, in spite of increased job demands (Grzywacz et al. 2002; Higgins et al. 1994).

Cohort differences may also contribute to increased work and family role demands among younger workers. Expanded educational and occupational opportunities, independent control over fertility, and increased dependence on women's contributions to family incomes is likely to have influenced the type of employed women represented in each cohort (Hakim 2000). Women may be more represented in the workplace in the younger cohort relative to the older cohorts, and may have greater job level demands. Men in younger cohorts are also more likely to have a spouse who is employed, a factor which has been identified as an important contributor of increased work–family conflict for men (Nomaguchi 2009).

Further, younger cohorts of women may be more vulnerable to longer work hours and responsibilities that prevent

them from meeting their parenting expectations than women in older cohorts. Hays (1996) suggested greater dilemmas for women in younger cohorts today as they confront two opposing cultural ideologies: *intensive mothering* which defines good mothering as child-centered, expert-guided, labor intensive and emotionally absorbing, and the *rationalized market economy* with its logic of impersonal, competitive, self-interested, profit-maximizing relations. At the same time, women in younger cohorts may be doing less housework than women in older cohorts. Although some gap in the proportion of housework done by women and men persists in younger cohorts, men in younger cohorts have significantly increased the time spent doing housework compared with cohorts of comparable ages 30 years ago (Bianchi et al. 2000; Galinsky et al. 2009).

Recent trends suggest that the current cohort of older workers increasingly face changes that contribute to greater family role demands including adult children returning home, parents or spouses becoming ill, and possible divorce and remarriage. In 2004, 35 % of older workers in the US had been or were responsible for care of their elderly parent, an increase of 9 % since 1998 (McNamara et al. 2006). Elder-care responsibilities are associated with work–family conflict, inter-role conflict and negative work, personal and family outcomes (Cullen et al. 2009; Hill et al. 2008). Living with parents can also influence a worker's type of employment and amount of hours (Kolodinsky and Shirey 2000). Older workers today are more likely than any other age group to have an elderly parent needing care and also be responsible for young children or grandchildren (Martinengo et al. 2010; Simon-Rusinowitz et al. 1996). Negative outcomes associated with caregiving have been greatest for those caring for both younger children and aging parents (Barrah et al. 2004).

In contrast to these findings, however, other evidence suggests that employment may serve as a resource and enhance well-being for caregivers by creating more energy and reducing stress in employment and caregiving roles (Martikainen 1995). Rozario et al.'s (2004) evaluation of women in midlife stages also found evidence for this role enhancement perspective. Women's perceptions of the quality of their roles as wife, mother, paid worker and caregiver were more important predictors of well-being than the number of roles. Productive roles seemed to have a positive effect on older caregivers. Those who worked and/or volunteered reported better self-rated health, with no evidence of role strain.

Gender Differences in Work and Family Role Demands

Gender differences have been an important consideration in evaluations of the relationship between family role demands and perceived fit in the work–family interface, particularly with elder care responsibilities. Entmacher

(1999) found that nearly 75 % of caregivers of the elderly in the US were women. Men who were caregivers were as likely as women who were caregivers to experience family-to-work spillover due to caregiving, but women were much more likely to be elder caregivers (Barrah et al. 2004).

Gender differences have also emerged in explorations of the relationship between marriage and conflict in the work–family interface. Being married has consistently been shown to be positively related to well-being among older people (Hilbourne 1999; Moen et al. 2001). Older workers may be particularly likely to benefit from marriage as they have reported paying more attention to their marriages, while younger workers reported focusing more on challenges with their children (Baltes and Young 2007; Cleveland 2009). But male older workers are more likely to be married or living with a partner than female older workers who are more likely to be single because they are divorced or widowed (Bond et al. 2005). As a result, older workers who are women may be less likely than men who are older workers to benefit from a marriage relationship, or to have a spouse or partner at home who is taking care of home and family responsibilities.

Age Differences in Management of Work and Family

Older workers are likely to have developed more effective coping mechanisms throughout a lifetime of communicating, solving problems, and integrating knowledge with practical experience. This serves as a resource in negotiating work and family demands (Baltes and Young 2007; Sterns and Huyck 2001). Middle-aged persons were perceived to be better workers because they had “a more complex, holistic view of issues, and are more attuned to their own contributions to both problems and solutions” (Sterns and Huyck 2001, p. 461). Age was found to be positively associated with work–life balance (Tausig and Fenwick 2001). Changes in central life interests and emotional functioning also contributed to an adjustment from overly idealistic aspirations to realistic ones, and a decrease in negative affect as workers age (Sterns and Huyck 2001). Thus, work and family role demands that have been related to conflict in the work–family interface for younger workers may not be as strongly related to perceptions of fit for older workers.

Structural coping mechanisms such as workplace flexibility may also contribute to differences between older and younger workers’ experience of work and family life. The availability of flexible work arrangements has consistently been identified as an important factor in older workers’ perceptions of and decisions to work (Pitt-Catsouphes and Smyer 2006). Surveys of older workers have identified a strong preference for being able to use a range of different flexible work options, especially part-time work options (Bond et al. 2005).

Gender Differences in Management of Work and Family

As with differences in work and family role demands, gender has predicted differences in the management of work and family life. Studies of older workers indicated that both men and women preferred to work fewer overtime hours but older women were more likely to want to cut back more, to part-time employment (Bond et al. 2005). Female older workers were also more likely than their male counterparts to report being overwhelmed by job responsibilities and to report greater job pressure from comparable job demands (Bond et al. 2005). This evidence suggests that women in the older workers’ life stage may experience more deleterious effects associated with work role demands. Older women are more likely than older men to experience family role responsibilities that made it difficult to meet work demands (Buffardi et al. 1999).

Research Questions

The theoretical and empirical evidence reviewed provides a framework for exploring potential differences between older workers (age 55 and over), middle-aged (ages 35–54), and young (less than 35 years old) workers using a previously tested model of the work–family interface. Specifically, four research questions were addressed:

- R1: How do older workers differ from middle-aged and young workers in their perception of variables in a previously tested model of the work–family interface?
- R2: How do employed older men and women compare in their perception of variables in a previously tested model of the work–family interface?
- R3: How do the strength and direction of paths in a previously tested model of the work–family interface differ for older workers compared to middle-aged and young workers?
- R4: How do the strength and direction of paths in a previously tested model of the work–family interface differ for employed older men and older women?

Method

Participants

Data come from the *IBM 2004 Global Work and Life Issues Survey*. The data set for this study consists of a randomly selected sample of IBM employees stratified by country and by gender. The questionnaire was originally developed in English and then translated into 11 additional languages.

Table 1 Sample demographics for young, middle-aged, and older workers

	Young workers (less than age 35) <i>n</i> = 900	Middle-aged workers (age 35–54) <i>n</i> = 900	Older workers (age 55 and older) <i>n</i> = 900
Average age (years)	29	43	58
% Male (%)	50	50	50
% Female (%)	50	50	50
Tenure at IBM (years)	5	14	21
% in Professional positions (%)	94	82	83
% in Managerial positions (%)	5	14	11
% in Executive positions (%)	1	4	6
% with Dependent child (%)	27	69	48
Child age 0–5 years (%)	26	22	2
Child age 6–12 years (%)	6	34	4
Child age 13–18 years (%)	1	38	45
% with Dependent elder (%)	26	29	42
% Spouse/partner works full-time (%)	5	51	36
% Spouse/partner works part-time (%)	8	16	15
% Spouse/partner not employed (%)	11	18	29
% No spouse/partner (%)	31	15	19

All available data were included after being screened for linearity, normality and outliers. All variable ranges and their distributions were identified to be normal. The maximum likelihood method was used to handle the missing data. Altogether 97,644 employees (31 % of the total IBM population) were invited to participate and 41,813 responded, for a participation rate of 43 %. Participants were from Europe (42 %), US (26 %), Asia/Pacific (19 %), Latin America (8 %), and Canada (6 %) and virtually all were native to the countries in which they took the survey. All job levels were represented in the sample: professionals (81 %), managers (15 %), and executives (4 %). The overall sample was 53 % male and 47 % female with an average age of 43. Participants reported an average of 1.97 children, and a tenure of 13 years with IBM.

Measures

Age Groups

Comparison groups were operationalized by age in years to enable a specific focus on older workers. Respondents were categorized as older workers (age 55 and over), middle-aged (ages 35–54), or young (less than 35 years old). Older workers represent the leading edge of the Baby Boomer Generation (Bond et al. 2005). Demographic features indicate that the age groupings specified for the current analysis approximate the family life course stages of family formation, parenting, and post parenting (Table 1).

Job responsibility represented an assessment of each respondent's work and people management responsibilities

within IBM (1 = *professional*, 2 = *manager*, 3 = *executive*). Professionals included employees such as programmers and marketers who had no people management responsibilities. Managers supervised groups of employees, and executives supervised groups of managers. *Job hours* were measured by the question, "How many hours per week do you TYPICALLY work for IBM? (Please make an average per week estimate covering the last 6 months)?"

Job flexibility was a latent construct with three indicators. The first two indicators were measured by reverse coding the questions, "How much flexibility (personal control) do you have in selecting WHERE (or WHEN) you do your work?" Ratings ranged from 1 = *no flexibility* to 5 = *complete flexibility*. The third indicator was measured by the question, "Working from home at least one day per week is acceptable in my work group." Ratings ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The *Aware of Work–Family Programs* and *Use of Work–Family Programs* variables were created by dummy coding responses to the following question, "Which statement best describes your awareness and use of company 'work/life' options?" (1 = *I am aware of them and have used them*, 2 = *I am aware of them but have not used them*, 3 = *I am not aware of IBM's work/life options*). This resulted in the following categories: 1) not aware of and don't use (referent); 2) aware of but don't use; 3) aware of and use.

Dependent elders and *dependent children* were assessed with the question stem, "Please indicate how many dependents you have in the following categories." If respondents indicated they had dependents who were "Elders (parents, relatives, or other elderly dependents)"

they were coded as having *dependent elders*. If participants indicated they had dependent children, they were coded as having a dependent child of one of the following ages: 0–5 years, 6–12 years, and 13–18 years. Although the question did not specifically ask if their dependent children lived with them, it is likely that these children were co-resident. Marital status and spouse's employment status were asked through the following two questions: "Which best describes your current relationship with a spouse or partner?" and "Which best describes your spouse or partner's work situation?" Responses were dummy coded to create the following categories: (1) married, spouse not employed (referent); (2) married, spouse employed part-time; (3) married, spouse employed full-time; (4) not married.

Work-to-family conflict was a latent construct with responses to five items, ($\alpha = 0.75$). The question stem was, "In the last 6 months, how many times, if any, have the following happened to you?" Sample items included: "Missed all or part of a scheduled vacation for work reasons" and "Missed dinnertime for work reasons." Frequency ranged from 1 = *never*, 2 = *once*, 3 = *twice*, 4 = *3–4 times*, 5 = *5–9 times*, 6 = *10–19 times*, 7 = *20–29 times*, 8 = *30–49 times*, 9 = *50+ times*. The measure used in this study has been used in multiple analyses previously and demonstrated robust psychometric properties including reliability ($\alpha = 0.75$) and age and gender equivalence in tests of the factor structures underlying the latent factor (Hill et al. 2004a, b).

Family-to-work conflict provided a frequency count of how often family or personal pressures affected emotional well-being at work. The question stem was, "How often do you feel drained when you come to work because of personal/family pressures and problems?" Responses included: 1 = *never*, 2 = *seldom*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *usually*, 5 = *always*.

Work-family fit provided an overall assessment of the management of work and family life demands and included two indicators ($\alpha = 0.75$). The first question stem was, "How easy or difficult is it for you to manage the demands of your work and personal/family life?" Ratings ranged from 1 = *very easy* to 5 = *very difficult*. This work-family fit measure provided an overall report that took into account both sources of work-family and family-work conflict. The second question stem asked, "All in all, how successful do you feel in managing the demands of your work and family life?" Ratings ranged from 1 = *extremely successful* to 7 = *extremely unsuccessful*. The items are consistent with measures of work-family fit used across current studies of the work-family interface.

Job satisfaction was measured by reverse coding the question, "Considering everything, how satisfied are you with your job?" Ratings ranged from 1 = *very satisfied* to

5 = *very dissatisfied*. *Work success* and *Life success* were measured by reverse coding responses to the following stem, "All in all, how successful do you feel in your work life and your personal life?" Ratings for each item ranged from 1 = *extremely successful* to 7 = *extremely unsuccessful*.

Analyses

Because our initial sample was so large ($N = 41,813$), there was a risk that many relationships would be statistically significant, even if they were not really meaningful. In order to ameliorate this problem, we randomly selected 450 cases from each age/gender demographic (the groups being young men, young women, middle-aged men, middle-aged women, older men, and older women). This subset of the population ($n = 2,700$) was used for all analyses.

To evaluate potential age and gender differences in variables of the work-family interface, means for each of the variables in the model were calculated using the raw data and compared across the six groups (male and female older, middle-aged, and young workers). *T* tests were used to calculate differences between means for older and middle-aged workers, older and young workers, and male and female older workers.

Structural equation modeling was performed using Mplus (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2010) to estimate the work-family interface model proposed in this study (Fig. 1). When estimating the model with the entire sample, it became evident that some of the regression paths in the proposed model (Fig. 1) were not significant in this model. These paths (dependent children, dependent elders, and partner status as predictors of family-to-work conflict, and job responsibility and family-to-work conflict as predictors of work-to-family conflict) were removed from the model for the sake of parsimony. This overall model presented a good fit to the data: $\chi^2 = 306.35$ (47), $p < .000$, RMSEA = 0.048, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.95. Although it is ideal to have a non-significant Chi square value, large sample sizes often inflate the Chi square, so this is not a necessarily an indicator that the model does not fit the data (Schumacker and Lomax 2004). We also used structural equation modeling to evaluate possible age differences via a Chi square difference test. We first tested for measurement invariance by performing a Chi square difference test before and after constraining factor loadings to be equal across groups). The Chi square difference test was significant ($\Delta\chi^2 = 21.75$, $\Delta df = 8$, $p < .01$) identified significant differences across factor structures, but given the size of the sample, this was expected. Then we compared regression paths using Chi square difference tests (i.e., by comparing the difference in Chi square when paths were constrained to be equal across groups and when they were allowed to be freely estimated).

The second research question pertained to gender differences within older workers. Thus, we also ran a multiple group comparison utilizing the method mentioned above with the smaller sample of just older workers, divided by gender. The same model had acceptable model fit for the sample of older workers, $\chi^2 = 155.94$ (46), $p < .001$, RMSEA = 0.056, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.94. Factor loadings were not significantly different across groups, ($\Delta\chi^2 = 4.40$, $\Delta df = 4$, $p > .25$) indicating measurement invariance.

Results

Demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all the study variables are presented in Table 2.

Research Question 1

To understand how older workers (age 55 and over) differed from middle-aged (age 35–54) and young workers (age 34 and younger) in their perception of variables in a previously tested model of the work–family interface (Fig. 1) means for these three groups were compared (Table 3). Compared to middle-aged workers, older workers were significantly less likely to have dependent children of any age, significantly more likely to have a dependent elder, significantly less likely to have a spouse employed, reported significantly less work-to-family and family-to-work conflict, and reported significantly greater work–family fit, life success, and work success. Compared to young workers, older workers were significantly less likely to have dependent children age 5 or less, significantly more likely to have dependent children age 13–18, significantly less likely to have an employed spouse, reported significantly greater job responsibility, were significantly less likely to be aware of or use work–family programs, reported significantly less work-to-family and family-to-work conflict, and reported significantly greater job flexibility, work–family fit, job satisfaction, life success, and work success.

Research Question 2

To understand how older men compared to older women in their perception of variables in a previously tested model of the work–family interface (Fig. 1) means for these two groups were compared (Table 4). Older men were significantly more likely to have a dependent child age 13–18, significantly less likely to have an employed spouse, significantly less likely to be aware or use work–family programs, and reported significantly less family-to-work conflict.

Table 2 Means, SD, and correlations for model variables (N = 2,700)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Children 0–5	–													
2. Children 6–12	0.19*	–												
3. Children 13–18	–0.17*	0.05*	–											
4. Dependent elders	0.08	0.08*	0.13*	–										
5. Partner employment status	–0.13*	–0.11*	–0.17*	–0.05*	–									
6. Job responsibility	0.04	–0.02	–0.15*	–0.04	0.11*	–								
7. Job hours	–0.07*	–0.03	0.03	0.14*	–0.03	–0.28*	–							
8. Aware/Use W–F programs	–0.04*	–0.09*	–0.08*	0.05*	0.05*	0.11*	0.06	–						
9. Job flexibility	0.02	0.04	0.08*	–0.03	–0.08*	–0.09*	0.02	–0.32*	–					
10. Work–family conflict	0.05*	0.02	–0.02	0.18*	–0.02	–0.21*	0.48*	0.05*	–0.10*	–				
11. Family–work conflict	0.02	0.03	0.00	0.11*	0.00	–0.07*	0.33*	0.09*	–0.22*	0.46*	–			
12. Work–family fit	0.07*	0.06*	–0.08*	0.13*	0.02	–0.07*	0.31*	0.11*	–0.29*	0.50*	0.53*	–		
13. Job satisfaction	0.03	0.02	0.07*	0.00	–0.07*	–0.06*	–0.02	–0.12*	0.27*	–0.16*	–0.29*	–0.32*	–	
14. Life success	0.07*	0.01	0.07*	–0.07*	–0.11*	–0.04*	–0.13*	–0.11*	0.16*	–0.20*	–0.23*	–0.40*	0.21*	–
15. Work success	–0.02	0.00	0.09*	–0.02	–0.06*	–0.14*	0.09*	–0.13*	0.25*	–0.06*	–0.20*	–0.28*	0.52*	0.37*
Mean	0.17	0.15	0.28	1.87	1.69	2.83	48.59	1.80	3.27	3.34	3.30	3.23	3.70	4.99
Standard Deviation	0.37	0.35	0.45	1.07	1.03	0.46	9.87	0.74	0.99	1.47	0.84	0.91	0.88	1.25

* Correlations are significant at $p < .05$

Table 3 Mean comparisons of older workers, middle-aged workers, and young workers on variables of the work–family interface

Variables	Young workers <i>n</i> = 900		Middle-aged workers <i>n</i> = 900		Older workers <i>n</i> = 900		Older–Young <i>t</i>	Older–Middle-aged <i>t</i>
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
1. Dependent child 0–5	0.26	0.44	0.22	0.42	0.02	0.12	–15.87***	–14.39***
2. Dependent child 6–12	0.06	0.24	0.34	0.47	0.04	0.20	–1.85	–17.60***
3. Dependent child 13–18	0.01	0.08	0.38	0.49	0.45	0.50	26.37***	3.12**
4. Dependent elder	1.77	1.13	1.87	0.92	2.00	0.95	1.56	2.26*
5. Spouse employment status	2.00	0.92	1.62	0.96	1.44	1.11	–11.52***	–3.57***
6. Job responsibility	1.07	0.28	1.22	0.49	1.23	0.54	7.79***	0.37
7. Job hours	48.81	9.93	48.91	10.29	48.05	9.37	–1.57	–1.74
8. Aware/Use W–F programs	2.03	0.76	1.69	0.71	1.68	0.68	–10.20***	–0.43
9. Job flexibility	3.04	0.98	3.38	0.97	3.40	0.96	7.67***	0.38
10. Work–family conflict	3.50	1.50	3.45	1.46	3.06	1.41	–6.37***	–5.67***
11. Family–work conflict	3.35	0.85	3.33	0.84	3.23	0.81	–3.22**	–2.66*
12. Work–family fit	3.65	0.86	3.27	0.94	3.94	0.92	6.98***	4.94***
13. Job satisfaction	3.57	0.87	3.75	0.87	3.80	0.88	5.60***	1.16
14. Life success	4.86	1.29	4.99	1.21	5.12	1.22	4.48***	2.29*
15. Work success	4.59	1.10	4.84	1.08	4.95	1.06	7.13***	2.17*

* *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01; *** *p* < .001

Table 4 Mean comparisons of older men and women on variables of the work–family interface

Variables	Older women (<i>N</i> = 450)		Older men (<i>N</i> = 450)		Older men versus older women <i>t</i>
	M	SD	M	SD	
1. Dependent child 0–5	0.01	0.10	0.02	0.14	1.08
2. Dependent child 6–12	0.03	0.17	0.05	0.22	1.70
3. Dependent child 13–18	0.37	0.48	0.53	0.5	4.67***
4. Dependent elder	1.84	0.92	1.90	0.97	0.77
5. Spouse employment status	1.90	1.05	1.03	0.99	–12.73***
6. Job responsibility	2.80	0.50	2.75	0.57	1.56
7. Job hours	48.05	9.47	48.04	9.28	–0.01
8. Aware/Use W–F programs	3.39	0.66	3.34	0.95	–2.77**
9. Job flexibility	3.34	0.95	3.45	0.97	1.65
10. Work–family conflict	3.12	1.49	3.01	1.32	–1.15
11. Family–work conflict	3.31	0.85	3.15	0.75	–3.07**
12. Work–family fit	3.95	0.91	3.94	0.93	–0.06
13. Job satisfaction	3.82	0.91	3.77	0.84	–0.84
14. Life success	5.05	1.31	5.20	1.13	1.78
15. Work success	4.93	1.05	4.97	1.07	0.61

* *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01; *** *p* < .001

Research Question 3

To understand how the strength and direction of paths in a previously tested model of the work–family interface

(Fig. 1) differed for older workers compared to middle-aged and young workers the structural equation standardized path coefficients were compared using Chi square difference tests (Table 5). There were no significant differences in the direction of the 11 paths when comparing older workers to middle-aged workers. Comparing the strengths of the paths there was one difference: the positive relationship of work–family fit to job satisfaction was weaker for older workers than for middle-age workers. There were no significant differences in the direction of the 11 paths when comparing older workers to younger workers. Comparing the strengths of the paths there was only one difference: the strength of the positive relationship of work-to-family conflict to family-to-work conflict was weaker for older workers.

Research Question 4

To understand how the strength and direction of paths in a previously tested model of the work–family interface (Fig. 1) differed for older employed men compared to older employed women the structural equation standardized path coefficients were compared using Chi square difference tests (Table 6). There were no significant differences in the direction of the 11 paths when comparing older men to older women. Comparing the strengths of the paths there was only one difference: for older men the relationship between awareness and use of work–family programs was not significantly related to work-to-family conflict, but for older women this relationship was significant and positive.

Table 5 Structural equation standardized parameter estimates and differences at different life stages

Variable paths	Young workers n = 900		Middle-aged workers n = 900		Older workers n = 900		Older–middle differences	Older–young differences
	β	SD	β	SD	β	SD	$\Delta\chi^2 (\Delta df = 1)$	$\Delta\chi^2 (\Delta df = 1)$
Job flexibility → W–F conflict	−0.20*	0.04	−0.18*	0.04	−0.22*	0.04	0.05	0.03
Job flexibility → W–F fit	0.15*	0.03	0.18*	0.03	0.13*	0.03	1.38	0.09
Job flexibility → F–W conflict	−0.13*	0.03	−0.14*	0.03	−0.09*	0.03	0.34	0.62
Aware/Use W–F prog → W–F conflict	0.08*	0.03	0.08*	0.04	−0.02	0.04	0.58	2.68
Job hours → W–F conflict	0.59*	0.03	0.60*	0.03	0.53*	0.03	0.58	1.40
W–F conflict → F–W conflict	0.62*	0.03	0.55*	0.03	0.56*	0.03	0.73	16.29*
F–W conflict → W–F fit	−0.22*	0.04	−0.24*	0.04	−0.23*	0.04	0.15	0.00
W–F conflict → W–F fit	−0.35*	0.05	−0.44*	0.04	−0.35*	0.05	0.10	0.16
W–F fit → Job satisfaction	0.13*	0.10	0.48*	0.07	0.31*	0.10	7.97*	0.24
W–F fit → Work success	0.17*	0.06	0.23*	0.03	0.22*	0.05	0.31	0.44
W–F fit → Life success	0.48*	0.03	0.51*	0.03	0.48*	0.03	0.00	2.80

* Indicates that the path was statistically significant, $p < .05$

Table 6 Standardized parameter estimates and differences by gender for older workers

Variable paths	Older women n = 450		Older men n = 450		Gender differences significance
	β	SD	β	SD	$\Delta\chi^2 (\Delta df = 1)$
Job flexibility → W–F conflict	−0.21*	0.05	−0.17*	0.06	0.47
Job flexibility → W–F fit	0.15*	0.04	0.11*	0.04	0.31
Job flexibility → F–W conflict	−0.14*	0.04	−0.12*	0.04	0.33
Aware/use W–F prog → W–F conflict	0.14*	0.05	0.03	0.05	5.80*
Job hours → W–F conflict	0.64*	0.04	0.53*	0.04	3.28
W–F conflict → F–W conflict	0.60*	0.04	0.65*	0.04	0.68
F–W conflict → W–F fit	−0.27*	0.04	−0.16*	0.06	0.92
W–F conflict → W–F fit	−0.47*	0.05	−0.58*	0.06	0.36
W–F fit → job satisfaction	0.19*	0.15	0.08*	0.12	0.56
W–F fit → work success	0.17*	0.07	0.17*	0.09	0.07
W–F fit → life success	0.47*	0.04	0.49*	0.04	0.29

* Indicates that the path was statistically significant, $p < .05$

Discussion

In an era of below-replacement level fertility throughout the developed world, the contributions of older workers will become more and more important if the global economy is to flourish on the long term. Understanding how older workers experience the work–family interface may provide valuable input to business and government leaders as they create policies to maximize their productive involvement in the workplace.

The purpose of this study was to explore how men and women who are older workers (age 55 and over) differ from men and women who are middle-aged (ages 35–54) and young (less than 35 years old) workers in variables used in an established model of the work–family interface. We also explored how older workers differed in the direction and strength of the paths in this model. These

differences may point to important reasons for why older workers would choose to continue contributing to their organizations instead of retiring.

Comparing Means for Variables in the Model of the Work–Family Interface

Overall we found that older workers differed significantly from their middle-aged and younger counterparts on most variables in mostly positive ways. The general theme of these differences was that older workers were perhaps the most valuable and well-adjusted of the three age categories: they had the greatest job responsibility; they had the highest morale; they had significant caregiving responsibilities yet did the best job managing work and family responsibilities. Also, they felt the most successful both at work and in life. Older workers appeared to be responsible,

fulfilled, happy employees who contributed much to their organizations.

Specifically, older workers differed significantly from middle-aged workers on 10 of 15 variables and differed significantly from young workers on 12 of 15 variables. We found that older workers continued to have extensive caregiving demands in their later career. They were more likely to care for adolescent children as well as dependent elders than middle-aged or young workers. Many had these responsibilities at the same time and were part of the so-called sandwich generation. Given that most older workers in this sample were married with good professional incomes, the demands from these caregiving responsibilities might be onerous and provide an impetus for leaving the workplace altogether via retirement. Surprisingly, given these care demands, older workers reported less work-to-family conflict, less family-to-work conflict, and greater work–family fit than middle-aged and younger workers. What would explain these findings? It did not appear that the overall suite of work–family programs was providing extra help: older workers were less likely to be aware of and use these programs. An answer may be found in workplace flexibility. Older workers reported that they have greater flexibility in when, where, and for how long they work. The employing organization for this study offered many options for work-at-home and schedule flexibility home during regular business hours. It may be that this was a good fit for the care needs of older workers because their adolescents and elders did not often need minute-by-minute hands-on supervision, but they may have required attention or assistance during the time they were home or with their scheduled activities. Work-at-home and schedule flexibility may have enabled them to intersperse care and work successfully. Offering work-at-home and schedule flexibility may be an effective strategy to retain the contributions of older workers.

Some interesting differences emerged when comparing older men to older women who were in the workplace. First, older women were more likely to be aware of and use work–family programs than older men. There may have been an unspoken cultural assumption that work–family programs were for women and not for men (Hill et al. 2012). Companies and organizations should make sure that their collection of work–family programs are designed with men in mind as well as women. Typically men of any age preferred work–family programs that did not reduce their salary (e.g., schedule flexibility, work-at-home) over options that did reduce their salary (e.g., part-time employment, leave) (Hill et al. 2004a, b). However, there was some evidence that older men were more likely to choose part-time retirement than were women, which seems to contradict our findings (Kim and DeVaney 2005). Older men seem to have had both more demands than older

women (more likely to have dependent teenage children) but also more resources (more likely to have had a spouse and more likely to have had a spouse who worked part-time). These extra resources appear to be sufficient for the extra demands as indicated that older men reported less family-to-work conflict than older women. It is important to note that weekly work hours were nearly identical for older men and older women. At earlier life stages, men typically have longer work hours than women (Hill et al. 2012). This again suggests that older male workers may be interested in shorter work hours than at earlier life stages.

Comparing Direction and Strength of Path Coefficients Model of the Work–Family Interface

Though older workers differed from middle-aged and young workers on many of the variables in the model of the work–family interface, the direction and strength of the paths between variables in the model differed little. It appeared that, in general, the same work–family interface model may be used interchangeably for older, middle-aged, and young workers. That is important because it seemed to indicate that we can generalize the results of a lot of work–family research to older workers. Specifically, the directions of the path coefficients were significant in the expected direction for 10 of the 11 paths. In addition, comparing older workers to middle-aged workers the strength of the path coefficient differed significantly in only 1 of the 11 paths: the positive relationship of work–family fit to job satisfaction was weaker for older workers. Comparing older workers to young workers, the strength of the path coefficient again differed significantly in only 1 of the 11 paths: the positive relationship of work-to-family conflict to family-to-work conflict was weaker for older workers. These are minor findings. The overall theme is that the same model of the work–family interface is almost identically applicable to older workers, middle-aged workers, and young workers.

Likewise, the model of the work–family interface was well-supported for older women and older men. For older women, all 11 paths were significant in the expected direction. For older men, 10 of the 11 paths were significant in the expected direction. The only significant difference was that the strength of the positive relationship of awareness and use of work–family programs to work–family conflict was stronger for women than for men. This again pointed to a need to make work–family programs more relevant to men.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it was composed of self-report, cross-sectional data from one corporation.

Additionally, several of the variables were single-item measures. The limitations of this study generally reflected the problems associated with collecting data from corporations who placed limits on the type and number of questions asked of employees. The use of single item measures for some of the study variables is problematic because single item measures include an error in the analysis. This trade-off was necessary in order to gain access to broad corporate data which allowed group comparisons on a range of factors that would have been impossible with a more common dataset.

It is important to consider generalizability of the findings. The data came from only one corporation, and IBM employees tend to be more highly educated, have higher salaries, and have more experience with computer technology than the general population (Hill et al. 2004a, b). As such, IBM employees represented a body of professionally employed, college-educated individuals working for high-tech, multi-national companies. Although this includes a growing number of individuals around the world (Roach 2005), findings may be different for less advantaged workers.

Conclusion

The success or failure of today's global economy may well hinge upon older workers remaining in the workforce and continuing to contribute to their organizations. This study contributes in several significant ways to understanding how older workers differ from others in their perceptions related to the work–family interface. First, older workers distinguish themselves by being better able to manage work–family demands while bearing greater job responsibilities as well as more responsibility for elders and adolescent children. They seem to do this by leveraging workplace flexibility and reap greater work and life success as a result. All of this points to the general well-being of older workers and their positive influence in the workplace and at home.

A second contribution of this study is to recognize that results for older workers are quite similar as far as the direction and strength of the paths on an established model of the work–family interface. Employers and researchers interested in understanding and retaining the expertise of the aging work force could benefit from applying these findings to the development of work policies attentive to the needs of older workers. It appears the work-at-home, schedule flexibility, and part-time employment may be valuable in enabling older workers. It is also imperative to make sure work–family programs meet the needs of older workers, and not just younger workers.

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