Older Workers and Work–Family Issues

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Abstract

This chapter discusses older workers and work–family issues. The chapter includes a review of research concerning both the negative and positive aspects of multiple roles and differences across the life span. Unique challenges for the older worker are discussed, followed by a review of organizational initiatives offered by employers to assist older workers. The chapter concludes with an agenda for future research.

Keywords: work–family, aging, dependent care, mature worker, work–family conflict, eldercare

Work–family research examines the intersection between the work experiences and the family lives of employees. Investigating work–family issues has been a topic of significant interest during the past several decades (Allen, in press). Despite the fact that balancing work and family responsibilities is a significant task for individual employees across all ages and stages of the life span, there has been relatively little focus on the work–family needs and challenges of older workers. This is surprising given that many decisions older workers face regarding work, such as retirement, are made in the context of family issues (Moen, Kim, & Hofmeister, 2001).

An in-depth consideration of older workers and work–family issues is important for several reasons. More individuals have dependent-care responsibilities at later stages of life than in the past. Birth patterns have changed over recent decades. American women are delaying childbirth until they are older. The average age at first birth rose more than three years from 1970 to 2000 (Mathews & Hamilton, 2002). In 1970 the average age was 21.4 for first birth, in 2000 it was almost 25, and in 2005 it was 25.2 (OECD Family Database, 2008). The number of women giving birth to children while they are in

their forties is also increasing. The birth rate for women aged 40 to 44 was 9.4 live births per 1,000 women in 2006 (Martin, Hamilton, Sutton, Ventura, Menacker, Kirmeyer, & Mathews, 2009). The rate for this age group has more than doubled since 1981 and has increased more than 70% since 1990. The number of births to women aged 45 to 49 has tripled since 1990. The number of births for women 50 to 54 is small but has increased an average of 15% annually since 1997.

Household family structures have also changed. For example, the number of Americans caring for grandchildren has steadily risen (Wang & Marcotte, 2007). Estimates indicate that approximately 4.5 million children are living in a household headed by a grandparent (AARP, 2007). The number of grandparents who are responsible for most of the basic needs of grandchildren living with them under the age of 18 and who are also in the labor force has been estimated at 1.4 million (U.S. Census Bureau News, 2008).

Finally, due to longer life expectancy, the number of individuals in the workforce who are providing care to elders is rising (Neal & Hammer, 2007). Many of these employees are simultaneously caring

for both aging parents and dependent children. Moreover, there are increasing numbers of elderly parents living with their adult children. It is estimated that 2.3 million elderly parents were living with their adult children in the year 2000. The number increased to 3.6 million in 2007 (U.S. Census Bureau News, 2008).

The objective of this chapter is to review work–family issues from the perspective of the older worker. We begin with a review of major work–family concepts and theories and their application at different ages. We then discuss work–family challenges for older workers, followed by a review of organizational initiatives offered by employers to assist older workers. The chapter concludes with an agenda for future research.

Review of Major Relevant Work–Family Concepts and Theories

Within the work–family literature it has been recognized that there are both positive and negative aspects to multiple role engagement. These same themes are applicable to the older worker. In this section we provide a brief overview of research that has examined the negative aspects of multiple role engagement (referred to as the "role conflict perspective"), followed by a review of the positive aspects of multiple role engagement (referred to as the "role enhancement perspective"). We then examine how role conflict and enhancement may vary across the life span.

The Role Conflict Perspective

Work–family conflict (WFC) research developed out of theories of role stress and inter-role conflict (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosental, 1964). WFC is defined as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985, p. 77). WFC is the mechanism that links constructs within one domain (work), such as job demands, with constructs in the other domain (family), such as family satisfaction (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992).

WFC is typically considered a multidimensional construct. Conflict can flow from work to family (work interference with family [WIF]) and from home to work (family interference with work [FIW]). FIW and WIF each have unique antecedents and consequences (e.g., Carlson, 1999). Research suggests that the family boundary is more permeable than is the work boundary in that individuals tend to report a greater degree of WIF than of FIW

(Bellavia & Frone, 2005). Three types of WFC have been proposed (Greenhaus & Buetell, 1985). Time-based conflict occurs when time spent on activities in one role inhibits the fulfillment of responsibilities in the other role. Strain-based conflict occurs when pressures from one role impede the fulfillment of obligations in another role. Lastly, behavior-based conflict occurs when behaviors necessary to fulfill one role are incompatible or incongruent with behaviors required in the other role. Of these three dimensions, greater emphasis has been placed on time and strain, often to the exclusion of the behavior dimension.

A large body of research has been devoted to investigating the causes and outcomes associated with WFC. On the predictor side, meta-analytic research indicates that job stress, family stress, and family conflict demonstrate the strongest meta-analytic effect sizes with both WIF and FIW (Byron, 2005). The number of children living at home also consistently relates to reports of both WIF and FIW (e.g., Bruck & Allen, 2003; Carlson, 1999; Hammer, Allen, & Grigsby, 1997; Kinnunen & Mauno, 1998). Research regarding gender differences is equivocal. Meta-analysis suggests that differences that do exist are small in terms of effect sizes (Byron, 2005), with men slightly more likely to report WIF than women and women slightly more likely to report FIW than men.

WFC is also associated with a variety of outcomes. Numerous quantitative and qualitative reviews of this literature exist (e.g., Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Dorio, Bryant, & Allen, 2008; Greenhaus et al., 2006; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). These reviews establish that both WIF and FIW are associated with work outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to leave), family outcomes (e.g., marital and family satisfaction), and physical and psychological health outcomes (e.g., depression, physical health complaints, substance abuse disorders). Although the vast majority of research has been based on cross-sectional research designs, a growing number of longitudinal studies support the relationship between WFC and job satisfaction (Grandey, Cordeiro, & Crouter, 2005), hypertension (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1997), depression (Frone et al., 1997), and well-being (Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001).

The Role Enhancement Perspective

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in investigating the positive side of the work–family interface. Multiple roles can provide individuals

with greater psychological and financial rewards (Barnett, Raudenbush, Brennan, Pleck, & Marshall, 1995). Several unique but highly related concepts have been developed with regard to positive aspects of work–family engagement, such as positive spillover (Hanson, Hammer, & Colton, 2006; Kirchmeyer, 1993; Small & Riley, 1990), work–family facilitation (Wayne, Musica, & Fleeson, 2004), and work–family enrichment (Carlson Kacmar, Wayne, & Grzywacz, 2006; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). While a review of the nuanced differences between each of these constructs is outside the scope of this chapter (see Allen, in press, for a more thorough description of definitions and differences), all reflect the perspective that combining multiple roles can result in beneficial outcomes for the individual. For our purpose of providing an overview, we use the generic term *enhancement* as a way to denote research on the positive benefits of multiple role engagement. Like current research regarding WFC, work–family enhancement is typically studied in terms of direction—that is, positive benefits can flow from the work domain to the family domain (WFE) or from the family domain to the work domain (FWE).

A limited number of predictors of work–family enhancement have been examined. The antecedents of WFE/FWE are thought to be resources acquired from the originating domain (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Family factors such as psychological involvement in the family and marital role commitment are predictors of FWE (e.g., Allis & O'Driscoll, 2008; Graves, Ohlott, & Ruderman, 2007) whereas work-related factors such as skill level, job involvement, greater decision latitude, variety, and complexity have been associated with WFE (Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, 2005; Grzywacz & Butler, 2005).

Individual differences associated with enhancement also have been examined. Women tend to report greater enhancement than do men (Aryee et al., 2005; Rotundo & Kincaid, 2008; Roehling, Moen, & Batt, 2003; van Steenbergen, Ellemers, & Mooijaart, 2007). Personality is associated with enhancement (e.g., Grzywacz & Butler, 2005; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Wayne et al., 2004). Specifically, higher extraversion relates to greater WFE as well as to greater FWE. A secure attachment style has been associated with greater WFE and FWE (Sumer & Knight, 2001).

Many of the outcomes associated with WFC are also associated with enhancement, but the relationships are in the opposite direction—that is, enhancement tends to positively associate with job-related attitudes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (e.g., Aryee et al., 2005; Boyar & Mosley, 2007; Geurts, Taris, Kompier, Dikkers, van Hooff, & Kinnunen, 2005; Hanson et al., 2006). Greater enhancement has also been associated with greater marital satisfaction and family satisfaction (Hill, 2005; Voydanoff, 2005). There is some indication that enhancement may be associated with positive health outcomes such as sleep quality (Williams Franche, Ibrahim, Mustard, & Layton, 2006) and general well-being (e.g., Allis & O'Driscoll, 2008).

Life Course and Life Stage Theoretical Perspectives

The ways in which individuals view and experience their work and family roles are likely to change throughout the life span. Theories regarding family development suggest that families progress through a life cycle or a series of family stages: early marriage, families with young children, families with school-age children, the launching of children out of the home, the empty nest years, and retirement (Baltes & Young, 2007; White & Klein, 2002). Careers too can be conceptualized as a series of stages: occupational choice, organizational entry, early career/establishment and achievement, mid-career, and late career (Greenhaus, Callanan, & Godshalk, 2000; Levinson, 1986). Each stage is characterized by a unique set of issues, themes, or tasks.

The application of such developmental stages may seem anachronistic in this day and age. Divorce and remarriage may produce family structures in which new children are born after older children have left the home (e.g., Donald Trump has been married three times; his oldest child was born in 1977, his youngest in 2006). Adult children leave the home only to return. Linear career paths are no longer the norm, and individuals may change careers throughout the life span (Mirvis & Hall, 1996). Despite these deviations from a common pattern, families and careers can still be thought of as having defined beginnings, transitions, and endings.

The career building years tend to co-occur with the expansion of the family through marriage and the arrival of children. It is during these years that opportunities for WFC can be expected to be at their peak. WFC should subside as the age of the youngest child increases. Research generally supports this supposition. Staines and O'Connor (1980) reported that work–family interference was greatest for parents with children younger than 6,

followed by parents of children aged 6 to 18. Higgins, Duxbury, and Lee (1994) examined WIF and FIW across three family stages: parents with children all under the age of 6, parents with children all aged 6 to 12, and parents with children all aged 13 to 19. They found a significant interaction effect between gender and WIF such that WIF remained comparable across the family stages for fathers. However, WIF was significantly less for mothers with children 13 and older than for mothers of children in the two younger age groups. Similar findings were reported for FIW. Byron's (2005) meta-analysis also shows that age of children relates to WFC. Specifically, she reported an effect size of -0.17 between the age of the youngest child and WIF and an effect size of -0.22 between the age of the youngest child and FIW.

Age itself is rarely studied as a substantive variable in the WFC literature. While multiple meta-analytic studies have been conducted in recent years, none has included age (Byron, 2005). Data from the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce indicate that managing work, personal, and family demands is easy or very easy for 69% of workers age 60 and older versus 41% of younger workers. Older workers are also less likely to report negative spillover from work to family and negative spillover from family to work (Roundtree, 2004). Baby Boomers (ages 36 to 54) were more likely to report feeling overworked than were Generation Xers/ Millennials (ages 18 to 35) and mature workers (55 and older) (Galinsky, Kim, & Bond, 2001).

In research that focused solely on women, it was also found that older individuals reported less difficulty managing work and family (Gordon, Litchfield, & Whelan-Berry, 2003). Specifically, 34% of women between the age of 35 and 50 reported that balancing work and non-work was difficult or very difficult compared to 19% of women older than 50. Gordon et al. (2003) also found that a greater percentage of women between 35 and 50 reported both FIW and WIF than did women older than 50. While WFC appears to decrease at older ages, work–family enhancement does not. Gordon et al. reported that roughly the same percentage of women aged 35 to 50 reported positive spillover from work to home as did women older than 50. Similar to previous research regarding prevalence, Gordon, Whelan-Berry, and Hamilton (2007) reported that WIF is experienced more frequently than is FIW among older working women. FWE was reported more often than was WFE.

Work–Family Challenges for the Older Worker

While WFC may subside, the older years present several unique work–family challenges for workers. The intense caregiving demands associated with young children in the home have typically passed, but older workers are often confronted with new demands. In this section we review research associated with several issues that older workers may face, such as the care of aging parents, the simultaneous care of parents and children, caring for grandchildren, the cumulative career disadvantages that occur as a result of caregiving responsibilities across the life span, and work–family influences on retirement decisions.

Caring for Aging Parents

Although individuals at a young age could be faced with caring for an ill parent or other relative, this type of dependent caregiving is more likely to occur as individuals reach midlife and beyond. Not surprisingly, the percentage of women who provide care to a dependent adult increases as women get older (Gordon et al., 2003). Changes in the healthcare system have also left family members to assume greater responsibility for the care for ill adults (Wagner, 2001). For example, shorter hospital stays often result in family members assuming the management of medical services performed in the past by trained medical providers. The care of elderly parents presents challenges unique from the care of children. Caring for children spans a typically predictable period of time, but caring for elderly parents is less predictable and can vary widely in terms of duration (Moen, Robison, & Fields, 1994). Although both involve similar tasks (meal preparation, feeding, cleaning), aging adults' demands and dependency tend to increase rather than decrease with time and ultimately end in death. Thus, eldercare may be less rewarding and more emotionally taxing than childcare (Buffardi, Smith, O'Brien, & Erdwins, 1999; Dellman-Jenkins et al., 1994; Smith, 2004).

Research shows that eldercare responsibilities relate to employee WFC and to work-related outcomes. Barling, MacEwen, Kelloway, and Higginbottom (1994) found that eldercare-based inter-role conflict predicted partial absenteeism among a sample of university employees. In a follow-up study, Hepburn and Barling (1996) contacted a subgroup of the participants from the Barling et al. (1994) study. These participants completed a daily diary study over a period of 20 workdays.

The within-person results were consistent with those of the prior study in that a positive relationship was reported between providing care for parents and inter-role conflict, which in turn related to partial absenteeism. Parent caregiving hours were also directly related to partial absenteeism. Gignac, Kelloway, and Gottlieb (1996) found that eldercare responsibilities were associated with FIW but not WIF. Moreover, the relationship was significant for women but not for men. Eldercare indirectly related to less job satisfaction and to greater absenteeism through FIW. In a departure from these findings, Barrah, Shultz, Baltes, and Stolz (2004) found no relationship between FIW and time spent providing eldercare. Notably, the prior three studies were ostensibly based on a Canadian sample, while the later was conducted within the United States. In a large sample study of U.S. federal workers, Buffardi et al. (1999) reported that those with eldercare responsibilities were less satisfied with their organizational support, pay, leave, and work–family balance than were those who did not have eldercare responsibilities.

Significant gender differences are associated with elder caregiving. Women are more likely to leave the workforce than are men for eldercare reasons (Pavalko & Henderson, 2006). Men and women may be equally likely to provide eldercare, but women tend to provide more hours of care (Duxbury & Higgins, 2005; Hammer & Neal, 2008).

It is also important to note that paid employment relates to the likelihood that one will be an eldercare provider. A study of women aged 42 to 56 found that paid work reduced the likelihood that women became the caregiver of an elderly parent (Dautzenberg, Diederiks, Philipsen, Stevens, Tan, & Vernooij-Dassen, 2000). However, there were no differences between those who were employed part-time versus full-time. Dautzenberg et al. suggest that a selection process takes place with regard to caring for aging parents in that the daughter who lives nearby and who has the least competing demands (i.e., is not employed) is most likely to assume the caregiving role. However, once women are the caregivers, they provide care based on the needs of the parent rather than the demands of the job.

Simultaneous Care of Parents and Children
The term the "sandwich generation" was coined to refer to workers, typically in middle adulthood, who are simultaneously caring for older relatives and children in the home (Miller, 1981). Members of this generation face substantial burdens from the competing demands of work and intergenerational caregiving (Ward & Spitze, 1998). Using a person-centered approach, Cullen, Hammer, Neal, and Sinclair (2009) identified three distinct profiles of sandwiched couples based on the relative strength of their various role demands: those with high childcare demands, those with high parent-care demands, and those with high work demands. Differences were found with regard to WIF across groups. Specifically, women with high childcare demands and women with high parent-care demands reported more WIF than did women with high work demands. Different findings emerged for men: men with high work demands reported more WIF than did men with high childcare demands. No differences were detected across groups with regard to FIW.

Research shows that there are negative work-related outcomes for those occupying intergenerational caregiving roles. Comparisons of those with multiple caregiving roles versus those with one or none indicate that those with multiple roles report greater absenteeism (Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton, & Neal, 1994; Fredriksen-Goldsen & Scharlach, 2001) and more work interruptions (Shoptaugh, Phelps, & Visio, 2004). Also, in their study of dual-earner sandwiched couples, Neal and Hammer (2007) reported that greater parent-care role demands was associated with greater absence and poor work performance. In a large sample study of federal employees in dual-earners, Buffardi et al. (1999) reported the effects of caring for both elders and children on job satisfaction were additive rather than multiplicative. Shoptaugh et al. (2004) found no group mean differences in job satisfaction or organizational commitment when comparing individuals with both eldercare and childcare responsibilities to those with either parent or eldercare only and to those with no caregiving responsibilities.

Caring for Grandchildren
As noted in the introduction, the number of individuals with primary caregiving responsibilities for grandchildren is on the rise. The work-related concerns of these individuals have not been a topic of study within the IO/Organizational Behavior literature. Two forms of this family structure are commonly distinguished (Wang & Marcotte, 2007). One form is when both parents and grandchildren live within the same household. This is commonly referred to as a "three-generation family." In the other form, grandchildren live in the home without their parents. This is referred to as a "skipped-generation family." Research tends to suggest that even in

the former circumstance (parents of the children are in the home), the grandparents, especially grandmothers, assume substantial caregiving responsibilities for the children (Pebley & Rudkin, 1999). Care for grandchildren is often prompted by a family crisis (Pebley & Rudkin, 1999). Substance abuse, HIV, welfare reform policies, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, and incarceration have been identified as factors contributing to an increasing number of individuals caring for grandchildren (Copen, 2006; Wang & Marcotte, 2007). The factors that prompt such living arrangements are those that can create additional strain within these households. Research has shown that the physical and psychological demands associated with caring for grandchildren take a toll on health (Grinstead, Leder, Jensen, & Bond, 2003). Being pressed into the service of caring for a grandchild may disrupt an individual's career or cause individuals to leave retirement and return to the workplace due to new financial obligations. Moreover, organizational benefit packages typically do not take into account the unique needs of grandparent caregivers and their grandchildren (Copen, 2006). Although we did not locate any studies that focused on the work-related outcomes of such workers, based on the added demands and strain, we can speculate that these workers may face a number of difficulties within the workplace.

Research does show that caring for grandchildren increases an individual's attachment to the labor market and the number of hours worked, especially for grandfathers, married grandparents, and skipped-generation families (Wang & Marcotte, 2007). Given the current economic climate, this family form may increase.

Cumulative Career Disadvantages for Women

The career paths of women tend to differ markedly from men in that the lives of women "are often a patchwork of self-orchestrated time outs to care for children and aging relatives" (Moen, 2005, p. 200). Mothers tend to shoulder greater caregiving responsibilities for children than do fathers from infancy through older adolescence (Parke, 2000; Phares, Fields, & Kamboukos, 2009). This pattern holds true even in families in which both parents are employed full-time (Jacobs & Kelley, 2006). Men rarely leave or take time out from the workforce for family-related reasons (Judiesch & Lyness, 1999; Moen, 2005).

Within dual-career couples, priority is typically given to the husband's career over that of the wife (Gill & Haurin, 1998; Hardill, Green, Dudleston, & Own, 1997; Zvonkovic, Greaves, Schmiege, & Hall, 1996). For example, research regarding relocation for job-related reasons shows that the trailing spouse is overwhelmingly female (Eby, 2001). Income attainment is related to career-prioritization decisions among couples (Pixley, 2008). Over the life course, decisions made to favor the husband's career result in economic disadvantages for women. Moreover, because of time off for childbearing, women are more likely to have discontinuous career histories than are men. The discontinuous career histories of women can affect retirement planning and timing. The full effect of the cumulative work–family decisions that women make fully manifests itself in the form of reduced pensions (Pavalko & Gong, 2005).

Work–Family Influences on Retirement Decisions

Decisions regarding retirement are made within the context of family life. Given that the majority of contemporary workers are part of a dual-earner couple, retirement decisions involve coordination between both members. A considerable body of research has identified gender and family structure as factors associated with decisions regarding later-life work and the timing of retirement (e.g., Blau, 1998). The differences are attributed to a reflection of gender-asymmetric roles across the life course (Raymo, Liang, Sugisawa, Kobayashi, & Sugihara, 2004).

It is more common for the wife's retirement to be affected and determined by the husband's retirement than the reverse (Moen et al., 2001). For example, women are more likely to retire because their spouse retires than are men (Moen & Altobelli, 2007) and are more likely to retire to take care of an ill spouse than are men (Pavalko & Henderson, 2006). Spousal caregiving also appears to affect men and women differently. Wives caring for their husbands were five times more likely to retire than were wives who were not caregivers (Dentinger & Clarkberg, 2002). Caregiving had little effect on husbands' retirement.

Older women who remain in the workforce after the age of 60 are more likely to be unmarried than are men (Raymo et al., 2004). In addition, the correlates of women's later-life labor force participation are different from those of men. Women who are married and who are co-residing with children are less likely to be employed than are men with the same living conditions.

The experience of WFC has been associated with retirement preferences. Raymo and Sweeney (2006) reported that higher levels of WIF were associated with preferences for both partial and full retirement within 10 years among a sample of 52- to 54-year-old men and women. FIW was associated with preferences for partial retirement. Interestingly, no gender differences were detected in these relationships.

Organizational Interventions

Older employees are not alone in their struggle to balance work and family; several organizational initiatives help in the process. In the following sections, we describe three categories of benefits that some employers provide—flexible work arrangements, dependent-care supports, and retirement planning—and focus on their relevance to older workers. Finally, we discuss how redesigning the sequence of work and the life course may be beneficial for older workers.

Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible work arrangements are any policies that grant workers greater control and flexibility over when and/or where work is conducted. Common examples include flexible schedules (flextime), telecommuting (flexplace, work from home, virtual work), and part-time work (reduced hours). These arrangements facilitate the management of work and family roles by allowing employees to alter work situations to better accommodate family demands (Rau, 2003).

There are several reasons why flexibility may be particularly beneficial and attractive for older workers. Some argue that older workers place a greater premium on work–family balance than younger workers and view flexible work arrangements as a key tool to obtain this balance (Baltes & Young, 2007). Others argue that because older workers often have family responsibilities at both ends of the life spectrum (children, parents, grandchildren), they have a greater likelihood for inter-role conflict and a greater need for flexibility (Rau & Adams, 2005; Scharlach & Boyd, 1989; Yeandle, 2005). Moreover, older workers engaged in eldercare may face more sporadic and uncontrollable demands than younger workers engaged in childcare, making flexibility even more important (Major, Verive, & Joice, 2008; Pavalko & Henderson, 2006). Finally, flexible work arrangements may serve as a transition tool to retirement, allowing older workers to participate in more leisure activities that will eventually become an important part of their post-employment lives (Rau & Adams, 2005).

Flexible scheduling is the most commonly offered work–family benefit: 79% of organizations surveyed by the 2008 National Study of Employers reported offering some sort of time flexibility (Galinsky, Bond, Sakai, Kim, & Giuntoli, 2008). Several researchers have examined flexible schedules specifically in older worker populations. An estimated 37% of the men and 22% of women over age 65 use flexible schedules (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Flexible schedules may be a particularly useful work–family management tool for older workers with eldercare responsibilities (Barrah et al., 2004; Mutschler, 1994).

Beyond actual use, research suggests that older workers are attracted to flexible schedules. The AARP (2003) notes that 86% of retirement-age workers surveyed reported that being able to set their own hours was a somewhat or very important factor. This idea was supported in experimental research: Rau and Adams (2005) manipulated job advertisements and found that older workers were more attracted to jobs with flexible hours than those without. Also, schedule flexibility contributes to older workers' ability and intentions to remain in the workforce past normal retirement age (Pavalko & Henderson, 2006; Shacklock, Brunetto, & Nelson, 2009). Pitts-Catsouphes and Matz-Costa (2008) argue that fit between flexibility preferences and supplies is more important to older workers than the raw amount of flexibility provided. The authors found that flexibility fit related positively to work engagement, which has been linked to other positive outcomes such as well-being and productivity (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003).

Another common flexible work arrangement is telecommuting (flexplace, work from home). Telecommuting refers to an arrangement where some or all of the time that would traditionally be spent working onsite is spent working from a remote location using telecommunications technology (Rau, 2003). In addition to flexibility in location, telecommuting arrangements may also permit flexibility in timing of work.

With regard to older workers, telecommuting has not received as much empirical attention as flexible hours. However, because many telecommuting arrangements also grant time flexibility, much of the research on flexible scheduling may be transferable. A study of telecommuting employees with eldercare responsibilities (the sample included both older and middle-age employees) found that the majority (91%) reported that telecommuting helped them manage their eldercare responsibilities. Qualitative

results indicated that telecommuting allowed some participants to give home care to elderly parents rather than placing them in an assisted care facility. The flexibility also allowed them to stay in the workforce while caring for dependent parents, which would have been impossible with traditional work arrangements (Major et al., 2008). Older workers do seem to be attracted to telecommuting, with 58% indicating that being able to work from home is very or somewhat important (AARP, 2003). Furthermore, telecommuting may be particularly desirable to older workers with illnesses or disabilities who have limited ability to travel to work each day, and "snowbirds" who change locations during different seasons (Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, 2008).

One important consideration of telecommuting is the older worker's ability to effectively use the technology that is often required for such arrangements. There is some evidence that older workers are less skilled at using computer-based technology (Czaja & Sharit, 1993) and have more anxiety and negative attitudes towards it (Elder, Gardner, & Ruth, 1987). However, an experimental study comparing older and younger workers on a telecommuting task (e-mail–based customer service) found very few differences in performance. These few differences were present only early in the experiment and disappeared as the participants gained more experience with the task (Sharit et al, 2004). Overall, it appears that older adults are capable of using telecommuting technology, but organizations need to be mindful that they generally require more training and thrive when training is specifically adapted to their needs (Kubeck, Delp, Haslett, & McDaniele, 1996; Morris & Vankatesh, 2000).

The third category of flexible work arrangements is part-time or reduced work hours. Such arrangements may have great variability in terms of flexibility, as some part-time schedules are fixed and others grant the worker greater autonomy in choosing hours (Rau, 2003). There is inconsistency in the academic literature on the definition of part-time work, but the U.S. Department of Labor refers to it as working less than 35 hours per week (Barnett, 1998). Part-time work is quite popular among older workers. In fact, 28% of employed men and 45% of employed women between ages 65 and 69 work part-time. These numbers increase to 45% of men and 59% of women for employees aged 70 and above (Purcell, 2008).

Many older workers use part-time work as a form of bridge employment, allowing them to move more easily into retirement (Canaff, 1997; Henretta, 1994). Some workers stay employed in the same industry or field, whereas others obtain jobs in different fields (Feldman, 1994; Schultz, 2003). Part-time work has several benefits in terms of work–life balance, as it allows older workers to continue to earn some income while granting more time for health, leisure, and family events (Hutchens & Dentinger, 2003). Despite the positive aspects of part-time work, it may also have a downside, including loss of healthcare benefits and full retirement pensions (Cooke, 2006). Moreover, despite the aging workforce's interest in part-time work, organizations are not always willing to offer such benefits (Hutchens & Dentinger, 2003).

In summary, flexible work arrangements are highly valued by older workers and seem efficacious in regards to work–life balance, particularly in managing eldercare responsibilities. Many cite flexibility as a key human resource management tool, one that is essential for attracting and retaining the aging workforce (Patrickson & Ranzkin, 2004; Rau & Adams, 2005; Schoeff, 2005).

Dependent-Care Supports

The second category of work–family benefits, dependent care supports, include any services (onsite daycare), resources (employee assistance programs), leave policies, or subsidies (dependent-care accounts) that consider the needs of employees' current or future dependents (Grandey & Cordeiro, 2002; Parker & Allen, 2001). Older workers are less likely than younger workers to need dependent-care supports geared at childcare; rather, support programs aimed at eldercare are more relevant (Baltes & Young, 2007; Dellman-Jenkins, Bennett, & Brahce, 1994).

Dependent-care supports aimed primarily at eldercare are relatively rare (Lockwood, 2003), although the number of organizations offering them is increasing (Families and Work Institute, 2002; Meurs, Breaux, & Perrewe, 2008). The most commonly offered support policy is some form of an employee assistance programs with a focus on elder caregiving (SHRM, 2003). Employee assistance programs are a systematic set of procedures, often including counseling, advice, and assistance, designed to help employees with problems arising from work and external sources (Berridge, Cooper, & Highley, 1997). Employee assistance programs geared at eldercare may include resource referrals, counseling, support groups, and educational presentations and literature (Dellman-Jenkins, et al., 1994;

Hoffman, 2000). There is little empirical research on the effectiveness of these services. One study suggests promising results, as eldercare program participants reported less stress, better job performance, and more confidence in their ability to balance work and family demands (Sizemore & Jones, 1990). However, another cross-sectional study found that those who used eldercare information services reported greater eldercare interference with work than those who did not use the services (Wagner & Hunt, 1994). These results should be interpreted with caution, given that individuals with more caregiving responsibilities were more likely to use the information services.

Subsidies, specifically dependent-care flexible spending accounts, are the second most common form of eldercare support (Kossek, DeMarr, Backman, & Kollar, 1993; SHRM, 2003). Dependent-care flexible spending accounts allow employees to deduct up to $5,000 spent on dependent care from their annual pre-tax incomes (U.S. Office of Personnel Management). Given that the average caregiver spends $200 a month on eldercare (National Alliance for Caregiving, 2004), we would expect this subsidy to be an attractive option. Yet research suggests that the spending accounts are underused, due in part to their complexity, tendency to have a substantial impact only on those with high incomes, and lack of program communication to employees (Galinsky, 1989; Kossek et al., 1993).

Under the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993, all public sector agencies and private agencies with.50 or more employees are required to grant workers at last 12 weeks of unpaid family leave. This act covers the birth or adoption of a child as well as care for ill or disabled immediate family members. Despite the widespread offering of family leave, only 11% of individuals with eldercare responsibilities use the policy (National Alliance for Caregiving/AARP, 1997). Research suggests that leave policies are underused for several reasons. First, many workers cannot afford to take unpaid time off work (Gerstel & McGonagle, 1999; Lockwood, 2003). Second, even within organizations that offer leave policies, supervisors may not be supportive of policy use, undermining their effectiveness (Kossek et al., 1993, Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Third, employees may fear negative career consequences as a result of leave use. Although focusing not exclusively on eldercare leave but on leave in general, several studies support the idea that leave use was related to negative career repercussions, especially for men (Allen & Russell, 1999; Judiesch & Lyness, 1999; Wayne & Cordeiro, 2003).

There is limited research on the efficacy of eldercare leave in alleviating WFC, eldercare-related stress, or quality of care (Rudd, 2004). One study examined family leave (not restricted to eldercare) and found that use of leave was related to less WFC (Breaugh & Frye, 2008). Pavalko and Henderson (2006) found that female elder caregivers using unpaid leave were more likely to stay employed than those who did not use leave, and Yanadori and Kato (2009) cite a significant relationship between eldercare leave and subsequent absenteeism for Japanese women but not for men. Thus, it seems that leave policies allow workers to minimize the family-related interruptions of work that result in turnover or absenteeism.

Finally, organizations are increasingly offering direct services such as employer-sponsored or on-site daycare services. Most organizations providing these services only offer childcare and do not accommodate dependent adults (Barr, Johnson, & Warshaw, 1992). Elder caregivers do value on-site adult-care facilities; in fact, a sample of utility workers rated these services as more preferable than more commonly offered benefits (e.g., flexibility, leave of absence) (Kossek et al., 1993). Because of the low prevalence of adult-care facilities, research on the topic is limited, but several studies have examined on-site childcare. Consequences of on-site childcare are generally positive, as those who use the services report fewer problems with childcare, less WFC, better attitudes about managing work and childcare, and greater satisfaction with organizational support for dependent care than non-users (Goff, Mount, & Jamison, 1990; Kossek & Nichol, 1992; Rothausen, Gonzalez, Clarke, & O'Dell, 1998). However, application of these results to adult care must be done cautiously, given the differences between caring for children and caring for adults.

In summary, older workers with eldercare responsibilities seem to value dependent-care supports, and research in the area generally suggests that such supports are a promising avenue for work–family management. As the workforce continues to age and the demand for these policies increases, research in the area should proliferate and it is hoped will provide additional insight into policy effectiveness.

Retirement Planning
As individuals move from full-time employment to retirement, their work and non-work roles will

inevitably change. As previously mentioned, some employees work reduced hours or engage in bridge employment to ease this transition, whereas others simply stop working abruptly (Hutchens & Dentinger, 2003). Either way, older workers are likely to experience retirement-related stress (Bosse, Spiro, Kressin, 1996). For example, they may worry about social interactions, financial stability, and finding a sense of purpose and identity outside of work (Lim, 2003). Retirement planning is one way to assuage these concerns and to make the retirement process easier (Feldman, 1994; Moen, 1996).

Organizations may help with retirement planning by offering employer-sponsored programs. There are many types of retirement-planning programs, including peer support groups, financial information sessions, counseling programs that give employees a realistic sense of post-employment life, and goal-setting sessions where individuals clarify their retirement goals and trajectory (Hershey, Mowens, & Jacob-Lawsen, 2003; Perkins, 2000). Different types of programs are more or less effective depending on older workers' needs, but there is evidence that information-oriented seminars combined with goal-setting sessions are particularly helpful (Hershey et al., 2003).

It is important to note that while offering work–family benefits is an important step, the mere availability of benefits is not enough—that is, it is essential for employees to perceive that their supervisors and overall organization are supportive of benefit use (Allen, 2001; Thompson et al, 1999). Also, for work–family benefits to be most effective, organizations must put effort into communicating the existence of programs, for employees will not use benefits they are unaware of (Kossek et al., 1993; Prottas, Thompson, & Kopelman, 2007). This point may be of particular relevance to older employees, as work–family initiatives are a relatively new type of benefit and were likely unavailable for a good part of older employees' careers. As such, they may be less likely to inquire about available policies. Organizations are encouraged to use a variety of media that appeal to workers of all ages, including websites, newsletters, and management speeches, to communicate available benefits (Prottas et al., 2007).

Life Course Perspective

Despite the advantages of policy approaches to helping older workers with work–family issues, they are deficient in that they do not consider the life course in its entirety (Cooke, 2006). Life course perspectives focus on the interdependence of work

and family roles as well as the relationships among early and later life events (Elder, 1995). At present there is still a "structural lag" in most workplaces, as formal and informal workplace policies are failing to keep up with the contemporary realities of dual-earner couples (Riley & Riley, 1994). In other words, most organizations expect employees to follow career paths that are structured in the "male as sole bread-winner" fashion, beginning with education, then full-time work, and ending in full-time retirement (Moen, Kelly, & Huang, 2008). Employees who deviate from this plan (usually women) suffer in terms of salary, occupational attainment, and benefits accrued (Moen & Sweet, 2004).

For workplace and career structures to match the current workforce realities, new institutional arrangements that allow diverse and flexible career trajectories are necessary (Han & Moen, 1999). Life course theorists argue that there is no need for employees to engage in uninterrupted work, nor is there a need for abrupt retirement (Moen & Sweet, 2004). Allowing workers to truly mold their careers to their own needs would likely have a positive cumulative effect on workers at the end of their careers. For instance, if as new parents workers are able to easily balance work and family, perhaps through exiting the workforce or working reduced hours, this may affect their later life choices—that is, with less stress and burnout from WFC, employees may be more apt to put off retirement and work happily into their elder years (Cooke, 2006; Moen & Sweet, 2004). The current age- and gender-driven career templates are socially constructed and socially sustained, meaning change is likely a slow process. The current availability of some work–family policies is evidence that the change is beginning to occur, but there is clearly even more potential for work–family synergy.

An Agenda for Future Research

In general, there is a need for more focused attention on the work–family issues of older workers. Much of the discussion regarding work–family issues has focused on families with young children. Whereas WFC may decrease as children grow older, concerns do not disappear after children become teenagers or have left the home, as new challenges may appear. Below we highlight several areas we believe are ripe for additional research.

Family Context

By and large the study of work–family issues has focused on individual reports and experiences,

typically isolated from context (Allen, in press). It seems important to more closely examine the experience of older workers living in different familial situations. Investigations into family structure are typically limited to marital and parental status. There are several potential avenues of research that can be taken in this area.

As noted in our review, multigenerational family structures are increasing. Multigenerational households have rarely been a topic of study within the work–family IO/OB literature. Perhaps because such family living arrangements are not normative within the United States, work–family research has rarely examined this form of family structure. Different focal perspectives are needed, such as the elderly person living with an adult child and grandchildren, or individuals living with parent(s) and children. WFC may be amplified in either context because of the increased salience of multiple roles—that is, the individual roles of worker, parent, and daughter/son or the individual roles of worker, parent, and grandparent are simultaneously enacted on a daily basis. Although there is some research that examines work outcomes associated with multiple roles, we know little regarding how multigenerational living arrangements relate to work-related outcomes.

The impact of adult children returning to the home on the working lives of parents is another timely topic for investigation. Estimates suggest that between 40% and 50% of young adults in the United States move out of their parents' home, return, and then move out again at least once during their late teens and twenties (Seiffge-Krenke, 2006). Socioeconomic conditions, which can increase unemployment, are associated with adult children returning home or delayed leaving (Mitchell, 2006). Women who have put renewed energy into their careers as a result of reduced family responsibilities may be especially affected by a child returning home.

Research Focused on Dual-Career Couples

The great number of changes that have occurred with regard to the status of working men and women in the past several decades should produce older couples unlike those of the past (Galinksy, Aumann, & Bond, 2009). Previous research findings regarding couples and career prioritization decisions across the life span may no longer apply, and new studies are needed that reflect these changes. Since the 1950s the participation by women in the labor force has increased while that of

men has decreased. In addition, women's level of education relative to men has increased, the gender gap in earnings is diminishing, and women in dual-career couples are contributing more to family income. Galinsky et al. (2009) report that while mature individuals (those 63 and over) still adhere to more traditional gender roles than do younger generations, there has been a general shift among this age group toward more egalitarian roles. The role of men has also been changing such that fathers are spending more time with their children and are engaged in more family work than they were in the past (Bianchi & Raley, 2005). The implications for these changes are that older women are more likely to have an equal say in work–family decisions. This may include the timing of retirement, reduced workloads, relocation, and the allocation of dependent-care responsibilities. While in the past decisions made by couples with regard to strategies used to balance work and family were more likely to reflect the preferences of the husband more than the preferences of the wife, this may no longer be the case.

Investigation of crossover effects among dual-career couples using multigenerational cohorts would be of interest. Crossover refers to a process whereby stressors and strains experienced by one individual affect the stressors and strains experienced by a partner in that individual's social system (Westman & Etzion, 1995; Westman & Vinokur, 1998). Crossover research helps demonstrate how employee work–family experiences influence the work–family experience of the spouse. While crossover studies have begun to proliferate in recent years, none has taken a developmental approach to examine how within-couple crossover effects may change over the course of the life span.

Age Stereotypes and Work–Family

A substantial body of research has examined stereotypes associated with older workers (Posthuma & Campion, 2009), but little of this work has been crossed with work–family concerns. As noted by Shore and Goldberg (2005), age stereotyping may interact with other forms of stereotypes. One potential issue for consideration in future research is the views held of older workers with young children. Lawrence's age norm theory suggests that when people are older than what they are "supposed to be" for a particular role (such as parenthood), they may be judged harshly because they have violated societal expectations (Lawrence, 1988).

As noted previously, the average age of first birth (and subsequently last birth) has increased. Adoption

also increases the age limit at which families may begin or expand. Advances in reproductive technology are also pushing the upper age limits at which women may bear children. Lawrence's age norm theory suggests that workers who have children at an advanced age may be subject to negative coworker reactions. Because older workers are also subject to stereotypes regarding declining performance, coworkers may hold critical views regarding how these workers can manage family responsibilities and maintain job performance. Women in particular may be expected to adhere to socially prescribed standards regarding age and motherhood.

Outcomes Associated with Dependent-Care Initiatives within Organizations

There is a surprising lack of research regarding individual and organizational outcomes associated with the availability and use of dependent-care initiatives within organizations. This is true for both childcare and eldercare (Allen, in press). The limited research that does exist tends to focus on childcare or mixes child and eldercare together (e.g., Goff, Mount, & Jamison, 1990; Hammer, Neal, Newsome, Brockwood, & Colton, 2005). Few studies have isolated the effects of eldercare supports, and those that have show inconsistent results (e.g., Sizemore & Jones, 1990; Wagner & Hunt, 1994). Research that identifies what types of support are most effective is especially needed.

Examination of the career outcomes associated with the use of organizational policies is also an important focal topic. There is a body of research that indicates that the use of family-supportive policies can have negative career repercussions (Allen, 2008). However, these studies have not specifically examined eldercare responsibilities or the use of eldercare supports. For example, it would be interesting to compare the accessibility of and the support of supervisors for time off to care for sick children with that of time off to care for sick parents.

Cross-national studies of eldercare policies and arrangements would also be of value. It is interesting to note that the lack of social policies regarding elder caregiving responsibilities is not unique to the United States (Neal & Hammer, 2007). This is in contrast to other forms of dependent-care support, such as paid time off for childbirth and adoption, that are common in industrialized nations other than the United States (Heyman, Earle, & Hayes, 2007). Cross-national studies that can guide multinational company policies are important in that eldercare arrangements differ across countries. For example, in the United States it is common for families to live great distances apart, complicating the provision of care. Thus, organizations with employees in the United States need to provide informational services that are national in scope. In other cultures, kinship ties tend to be stronger and eldercare responsibilities are shared by extended family members at a more local level (Nijkamp, Pacolet, Spinnewyn, Vollering, Wilderom, & Winters, 1991). These sorts of differences need to be taken into account when developing policy and generalizing theories concerning older worker work–family balance needs.

Positive Spillover across the Life Span

The majority of this chapter has focused on the work–family challenges associated with the mature worker. Research is needed that examines positive spillover/work–family enhancement among older workers. As reviewed previously, while WFC tends to decrease with age, the positive aspects of multiple role engagement appear to remain steady. However, only a few studies have directly examined positive spillover among older workers (e.g., Gordon et al., 2007).

Positive outcomes associated with multiple social attachments among older workers have been identified. For example, in a study of middle-aged women, Perrig-Chiello, Hutchinson, and Hoepflinger (2008) reported that those with three social roles (parent, partner, worker) scored more favorably in terms of health and well-being compared to those with fewer social roles. Several studies suggest that elders who receive care also provide help to their adult children who provide the care (Ingersoll-Dayton, Neal, & Hammer, 2001; Starrels, Ingersoll-Dayton, Dowler, & Neal, 1997). A better understanding is needed of the factors that contribute to beneficial outcomes relative to negative consequences associated with work–family roles in later years. For example, multiple roles can provide the opportunity to experience mastery, which in turn is related to positive psychological health (Christensen, Stephens, & Townsend, 1998). Role centrality may also play a part. Research has shown that holding the mother role as central to the self-concept is associated with greater well-being among employed married women simultaneously caring for elders and for children (Martire, Stephens, & Townsend, 2000).

Conclusions

Work and family concerns change across the life span. As the population continues to age, addressing

the work–family needs of older workers will become an increasingly salient and pressing issue. Research is needed that includes both individual and organizational perspectives and recognizes the unique work–family challenges of mature workers.

Related Chapters

Chapter 8. Aging and Participation in Career Development Activities

Chapter 19. Workforce Planning with an Aging Workforce

Chapter 25. Multiple Generations in the Workplace

Chapter 26. Career Planning for Mid- and Late-Career Workers

Chapter 28. Retirement Planning

Chapter 29. Retirement Dilemmas and Decisions

Chapter 30. Health, Fiscal, and Psychological Well-Being in Retirement

Chapter 31. Aging Workers, Demographic Subgroups, and Differential Work and Retirement Opportunities

Chapter 35. The Pros and Cons of Pro-Work Policies and Programs for Older Workers

Further Readings

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