Article

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How Do Caregiving Responsibilities Affect Women's Work–Family Spillovers Over the Life Course?

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Abstract

Using three waves of data from the Midlife in the United States Study (MIDUS 1995–2014, *N* = 1,123), this study investigates the linkage between caregiving and women's positive and negative work–family spillovers over the life course. Results show that women's work–family experiences are not only shaped by caregiving itself but also depend on the timing when they take these roles: the effect of raising school-aged children on negative family-to-work spillover (FWS) is the highest in the 40s, and the effect of raising adolescent children on positive work-to-family spillover (WFS) is the lowest in the 50s. Providing financial support to parents increases both negative FWS and negative WFS, and the effects are highest in their 20s and 65+, respectively. Providing emotional care and unpaid assistance to parents can enhance women's positive FWS in their 40s. This study's findings suggest that timing and linked-lives both play strong roles in shaping women's work–family experiences.

Keywords

work–family spillovers, childcare, eldercare, life course perspective

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Introduction

Women's work–family experiences are defined by conflict and enrichment. They have changed drastically as women's labor force participation increased since the 1960s (Cotter, England, Hermsen, 2008), and even more so after many began to return to work after childbirths in the 1970s (Smith, Downs, & O'Connell, 2001). Although men's participation in childcare and housework responsibilities has increased, women are still responsible for a large share of family care (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Sayer & Gornick, 2012). Role theories indicate that women's caregiving roles can provoke both work–family conflict (WFC) and work–family enrichment (WFE) experiences, but studies on the enriching effects of caregiving are relatively sparse and less conclusive (Lin & Burgard, 2018). Therefore, this study aims to fill the research gap by examining how women's caregiving roles affect both their WFC and WFE experiences.

Guided by the life course perspective, a large body of research has investigated the changes in work–family experiences across parental stages: raising young children (0–5) is usually associated with the highest level of conflict experiences among parents, but the level of conflict declines as children grow older. Similarly, women's work–family enrichment experiences also increase as children get older (Erickson, Martinengo, & Hill, 2010). However, given the increasing heterogeneity in the timing of family formation and childbearing (Cherlin, 2010), individuals may bring in different economic resources and personal experiences when engaging in the same caregiving role (Elder, Jr., 1998; Shockley & Allen, 2012). Consequently, the same parental stage does not always indicate a similar life course standing—women's experience of raising young children in their 20s is drastically different than doing so in their 40s. This current study uses age groups rather than parental stages to measure life course standings and examines how each caregiving role affects women's work–family experiences over the life course.

Apart from childcare, adults today are also more likely to provide eldercare due to the increased life expectancy over the past five decades, and around 61% of eldercare is shared by women (AARP, 2020). Nonetheless, very few studies examine how eldercare shapes women's WFC and WFE experiences, and even fewer examine how the effects of eldercare shift over caregivers' life course stages (Freedman, Cornman, Carr, & Lucas, 2019).

To address the research gaps, this study incorporates both the life course perspective and eldercare into the work–family literature. Specifically, this study asks two main questions: (1) How would childcare and eldercare shape women's WFC and WFE experiences? (2) How would the effects of childcare and eldercare on women's WFC and WFE experiences change over their life courses? Methodologically, instead of relying on cross-sectional data, this study applies fixed-effects models to a twenty-year longitudinal data, the

Midlife in the United States Study (MIDUS I, II, and III) and examines within-person changes in women's work–family experiences due to the caregiving roles they took.

Background

Role Theories, Work–Family Conflict, and Work–Family Enrichment

Role theories suggest that engaging in multiple social roles can provoke both positive and negative experiences. From role conflict perspectives, the work domain and the family domain are both very needy institutions that require full loyalty and undivided attention (Coser,1974), therefore taking multiple roles would compete individuals' time and attention, leading to role tensions and conflicts (Goode, 1960). In contrast, role enrichment perspectives assume that taking multiple roles may generate positive energies and enhance the performances of each role (Mirowsky, 1986).

Work–family conflict and work–family enrichment experiences are not zero-sum; they can be bi-directional as well (Grzywacz, Almeida, Mcdonald, 2002). From role conflict perspectives, the stress and exhaustion from work might restrain individuals' energy and attention paid to their children at home, leading to negative work-to-family spillover (WFS). Likewise, caring for sick children during weekdays might cause distractions at work, resulting in negative family-to-work spillover (FWS). From role enrichment perspectives, working while caregiving enhances individuals' multi-tasking skills, resulting in positive WFS. Taking children on vacation helps adults relax and re-energize, and consequently produces positive FWS so that they can be more productive at work. Although role theories indicate four potential dimensions of work–family experiences—negative FWS, negative WFS, positive FWS and positive WFS—only a handful studies to date have examined all four dimensions concurrently (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Lin & Burgard, 2018). Compared to WFC, WFE experiences attract less attention from scholars. Therefore, this current study examines changes in four dimensions of work–family experiences separately and investigates how they are shaped by the caregiving roles.

Conceptual Framework: Bring the Life Course Perspective into the Work–Family Research

As stated earlier, taking on multiple roles can induce both WFC and WFE experiences, but the implications of caregiving roles on work–family experiences may not be uniform across age groups (Erickson, Martinengo, & Hill, 2010; Moen, Kelly, & Huang, 2008).The life course perspective suggests that people of different ages bring different experiences and social resources into

situations; even when faced with the same responsibility, age influences the dynamics as well as perceptions of time and income adequacy (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003; Hu, 2021). Consequently, caregiving's implications on individuals' WFC and WFE experiences might not only depend on the caregiving roles themselves, but also on the life course stages they are enacted in. Previous studies that adopted the life course perspective predominately examined changes of work–family experiences across parental stages (Martinengo, Jacob, & Hill, 2010; Nomaguchi, 2012), and fewer of them examined changes in experience across caregivers' age groups. With the increasing heterogeneity in the timing of childbearing over the past three decades, childcare's implications on work–family experiences can be drastically different by parents' age, even within the same parental stage (Kahn, García-Manglano, & Bianchi, 2014). Therefore, this study uses caregivers' age groups, rather than parental stages, to directly measure caregivers' life course standings, and examines how each of the four dimensions of women's work–family experiences would change across caregivers' life course.

Childcare, Eldercare, and Work–Family Experiences

Most research on work–family experiences is predominately centered on the implications of childcare by children's developmental stage: raising young children (0–5), school-aged children (6–12), and adolescent children (13–18).

Young children (0–5). Research suggests that being a parent to young children is associated with increases in both negative FWS and WFS (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Reynolds & Aletraris, 2007). Young children require time-intensive parental care, which may conflict with parents' demands from work. However, how raising young children would affect women's WFE experiences remain inconclusive (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000).

School-aged children (6–12) and adolescent children (13–18). Studies suggest that school-aged and adolescent children are more independent and demand less around-the-clock parenting, leading to lower levels of negative spillover (Grzywacz et al., 2002). In addition, watching children grow up may provide a sense of fulfillment, which increases positive FWS. Moen and Sweet (2004), however, indicated that raising older children can be as exhaustive and intensive as raising young children: women with school-aged and adolescent children are constantly worried about children's academic performance and opportunities to advance children's academic achievement. Moreover, the recent increase in the practices of intensive mothering also expect mothers to prioritize children's needs over their own employment and leisure, which results in a "child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, and financially expensive" parental practice (Ishizuka, 2019; Lareau, 2011), and it

may contribute to higher levels of negative WFS and negative FWS (Gunderson & Barrett, 2017; Meeussen &Van Laar, 2018).

The implications of raising older children on women's WFE experiences are also inconclusive. On the one hand, some studies on women's WFE experiences argued that the mothering role is essential for many women's identity, and the endeavor in fulfilling the roles' expectations can generate joy and accomplishment (Gunderson & Barrett, 2017; Hays, 1998).On the other hand, other studies found negative effects of raising older children on women's psychological well-being—the stress from fulfilling an intensive mothering role may offset the positive effects, leading to a lower level of WFE experiences (Gimenez-nadal & Sevilla, 2016; Rizzo, Schiffrin, & Liss, 2013).

Providing eldercare to parents/parents-in-law. Given the fast growth of the aging population in the US, the needs of eldercare are soaring as well. One recent study shows that eldercare activities have been increasing across all age groups (AARP, 2020). Further, due to the delay of childbearing in the past three decades, younger adults today are more likely to have parents who are older, frail and need assistance—24% of caregivers are young adults in the 20s and 30s, who mostly provide care to their parents and/or in-laws (AARP, 2020). Another analysis also found that, an average adult provides about 3.2 hours of eldercare on a typical day (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Among middle-aged adults, providing eldercare usually conflicts with the daily demands from work, resulting in WFC experiences (Bittman, Hill, & Thomson, 2007; Niimi, 2017). While there is sizable research centering on the diminished well-being of caregivers (Adelman, Tmanova, Delgado, Dion, & Lachs, 2014; Freedman et al., 2019; Turner & Clegg, 2014), fewer paid attention to the beneficial effects of eldercare on caregivers' WFE experiences. Therefore, it is important to examine both conflict and enrichment experiences as a result of eldercare.

The Present Study

There are three major gaps in the current literature. First, while role theories suggest that taking multiple roles may contribute to both WFC and WFE experiences, most studies focus on WFC experiences with fewer on WFE experiences. Second, studies that adopt the life course perspective primarily examined how mothers' work–family experiences change across parental stages, but with the increasing heterogeneity in the timing of family formation and parenthood, parental stages might not be the best proxy to measure life course standings. Third, life expectancy in the US has increased substantially over the past few decades, and around 80% of older adults today have at least one chronic disease and around 10% of older adults aged 65 have dementia (US Census Bureau, 2013), leading to soaring eldercare needs among older

adults. Additionally, this study argues that eldercare may not be unique to adults in the midlife; instead, it has become prevalent among all age groups: prolonged life expectancy leads to longer years of shared lives. Older adults in their 60s might provide care to their parents in their 80s or 90s; meanwhile, the delay in childbearing also leads to larger age gap between parent-child generations—younger adults today may have parents in their 60s or 70s who need eldercare. Therefore, it is meaningful and urgent to include eldercare into the work–family research, and to examine the differential effects of eldercare by age group.

Method

Data and Sample

This study uses three waves of data from the MIDUS (1995-2014), a nationally representative longitudinal survey that studies the process of aging in the US Wave 1 was collected between 1995–1996 ($N = 7,108$) with follow-ups conducted between 2004–2006 (Wave 2: $N = 4,963$) and 2013–2014 (Wave 3: $N = 3,294$). The response rates of Waves 1, 2, and 3 are 81%, 72%, and 71%, respectively. The attrition rate between Wave 1 and Wave 3 is 29%. Despite the attrition, the MIDUS is the only data source that collects longitudinal information on work–family spillovers over a twenty-year span, providing a unique opportunity to capture the effects of caregiving on work–family spillovers over the life course. I restrict the sample to women who were currently working or had worked in the past 2 years during each survey wave. For the purposes of fixed-effects models, I further restrict the sample to those who have at least two person-wave observations on the work–family spillover questions. This selection yields to 3,266 person-wave observations from 1,123 women.

Measures

Dependent Variables. Work–family spillover measures were compiled from the MIDUS questionnaire that assesses respondents' experiences in the work and family domains.

Negative WFS was assessed by questions asking: "(1) *Your job reduces the effort you engage in activities a home; (2) Stress from jobs makes you irritable at home; (3) Your job makes you feel tired to engage in any activity at home; (4) The problems from your job distract you when you at home"* (Alpha= 0.79). The negative FWS was assessed by: *"(1) Responsibilities at home reduce the efforts you devote to work; (2) Personal or family worries and problems distract you when you at work; (3) Activities and chores at home chores results in a lack of sleep that you need to do your job well; (4) Stress at*

home makes you irritable at work" (Alpha = 0.86). The positive WFS was assessed by *"(1) Things you do at work helps you deal with practical issues at home; (2) Things you do at work make you an interesting person at home; (3) Having a good day on your job makes you a better companion when you get home; (4) The skills you use at work are useful for things you do at home"* (Alpha= 0.78). The positive FWS was assessed by: *"(1) Talking with someone at home helps you deal with problems at work; (2) Providing what you need at home make you work harder at work; (3) The love you get at home makes you feel confident at work; (4) Your home life helps you relax and feel ready for the next day's work"* (Alpha = 0.73).

I reversely coded each item so that higher scores indicate higher level of spillovers. The scores of negative and positive work–family spillovers were calculated by taking the average of responses for the valid items. The average scores were calculated even if the respondents did not answer all the items on work–family spillovers. Overall, only 1.3% of the analytical sample answered less than four items of each spillover questions.

Independent Variables: Caregiving Responsibilities and Age Groups

Childcare Variables. The childcare variables are measured based on whether respondents have any child at certain age in the households. I use caring for young children (0–5), school-aged children (6–12) and adolescent children (13–18), three binary variables to measure adults' childcare responsibilities, and each of these three represent a different child development and rearing stage.

Eldercare Variables. I use providing emotional care, unpaid assistance, and financial support to parents/in-laws, three binary variables to measure adults' eldercare responsibilities. Individuals were defined as providing emotional care and unpaid assistance if they provided at least 1 hour of emotional support and unpaid assistance per month, and they were defined as providing financial support if they gave any money to parents and/or in-laws per month.

Age Groups. According to the life course perspective, age is considered as a sequence of life course stages that mirrors individual's changes in life experiences. Therefore, women of different ages would have distinctive perceptions on work–family compatibility and thus have distinctive WFC and WFE experiences. I categorized age into five groups: 20–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–65, and 65+, and each of them indicates a unique life course standing.

Control Variables. Other covariates include educational attainment (less than high school, high school or some college, college and above college), marital status (married, separated or divorced, widowed or never married), total

weekly work hours, and annual logged-income. In addition, since individuals' work–family experiences are also found to be strongly affected by their job characteristics (Grzywacz & Butler, 2005; Yu & Kuo, 2017), I added the level of demand, authority, and discretion of their current or most recent job as control for job characteristics.[1]

Analytic Strategy

I use fixed-effects models to estimate the impact of caregiving responsibilities on women's work–family spillovers at different stages of life. The fixed-effects methods allow me to account for unobserved time-invariant confounders (such as personal job history and personality dispositions) that might bias the estimates (Allison, 2009; Wayne, Musisca, & Fleeson, 2004).

The analytical strategy is illustrated by the equations below

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Spillover}_{it} = {} & \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Age Group}_{it} + \beta_2 * \text{Caregiving}_{it} \\ & + \beta_3 * \text{Age Group}_{it} \times \text{Caregiving}_{it} + \beta_j * X_{it} + u_i + \varepsilon_{it} \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

$$\begin{aligned}\overline{\text{Spillover}_{it}} = {} & \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \overline{\text{Age Group}_{it}} + \beta_2 * \overline{\text{Caregiving}_{it}} \\ & + \beta_3 * \overline{\text{Age Group}_{it} \times \text{Caregiving}_{it}} + \beta_j * \overline{X_{it}} + u_i + \overline{\varepsilon_{it}} \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Spillover}_{it} - \overline{\text{Spillover}_{it}} = {} & \beta_1 * \left(\text{Age Group}_{it} - \overline{\text{Age Group}_{it}}\right) \\ & + \beta_2 * \left(\text{Caregiving}_{it} - \overline{\text{Caregiving}_{it}}\right) \\ & + \beta_3 * \left(\text{Age Group}_{it} \times \text{Caregiving}_{it} \right. \\ & \left. - \overline{\text{Age Group}_{it} \times \text{Caregiving}_{it}}\right) \\ & + \beta_j * \left(X_{it} - \overline{X_{it}}\right) + \left(\varepsilon_{it} - \overline{\varepsilon_{it}}\right) \end{aligned}$$

The time-varying dependent variables are represented by Spillover_{it} in the equations, where *i* stands for respondent *i,* and *t* stands for wave *t*. Age Group_{it} stands for the age group that respondent *i* belongs at wave *t*. Caregiving_{it} stands for the type of care that respondent *i* was providing at wave *t*. X_{it} stands for the vector of other covariates (total weekly work hours, annual logged-income, educational attainment, marital status, and job characteristics); u_i represents the time-invariant unobservable individual characteristic (e.g., personal work history); and ε_{it} represents the error term.

Equation (1) represents the statistical association at wave *t* for respondent *i,* while equation (2) represents the mean of the statistical association for respondent *i* across 3 waves. The fixed-effects model (shown as equation (3)) is obtained from a subtraction of equation (2) from equation (1).

As equation (3) suggests, only time-variant variables are in the fixed-effects model, and the time-invariant unobserved characteristics, u_i , were canceled out after the subtraction: β_1 is the coefficient for the variable of age group (20–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–65, and 65+), measuring the main effects of life course stages on women's work–family experiences; β_2 is the coefficient measuring the main effects of each caregiving role (caring young, school-aged, and adolescent children; providing emotional, unpaid, and monetary assistance to older parents); β_3 is the coefficient of the interaction between age groups and caregiving roles, capturing differential effects of caregiving roles by life course stages. All predicting variables in the fixed-effect model are time-variant, and all coefficients denote the within-individual effects (Gould & Paserman, 2003).

I conducted the analysis in three steps: (a) unadjusted estimates in the model that only include age group intervals, care responsibilities, and other demographic characteristics; (b) adjusted estimates of work–family spillovers with additional job characteristics as control; (c) adjusted estimates of work–family spillovers which added significant interaction terms between age group variables and care responsibilities. Lastly, I use the "*margins*" and the "*marginsplot*" commands from the Stata 16 to plot the predicted values of work–family spillovers by age group and caregiving responsibilities, but only for significant interactions (shown in the Figures 1-6)[2].

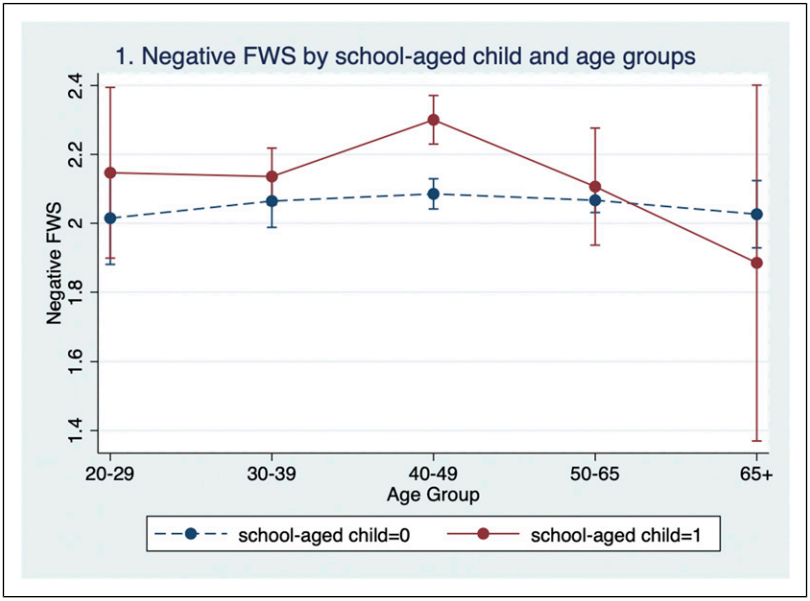

Figure 1. Negative family-to-work spillover by school-aged child and age groups.

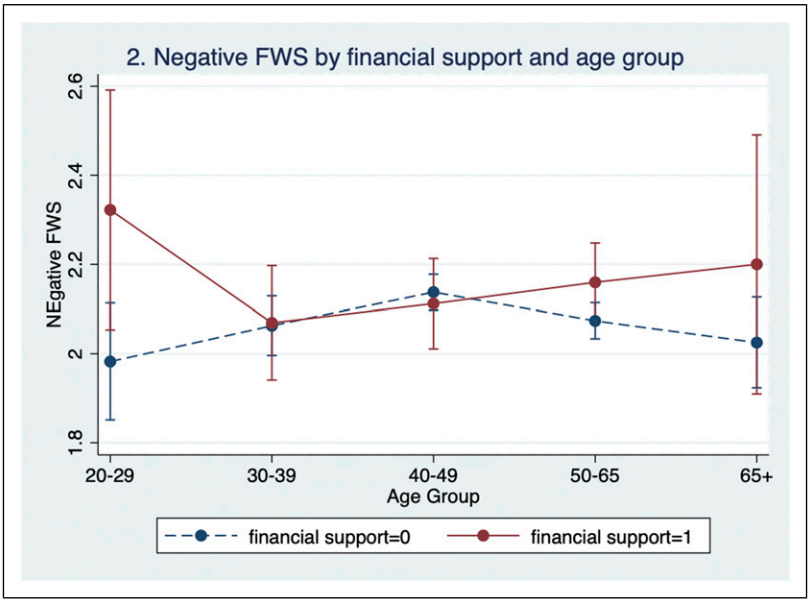

Figure 2. Negative family-to-work spillover by financial support and age group.

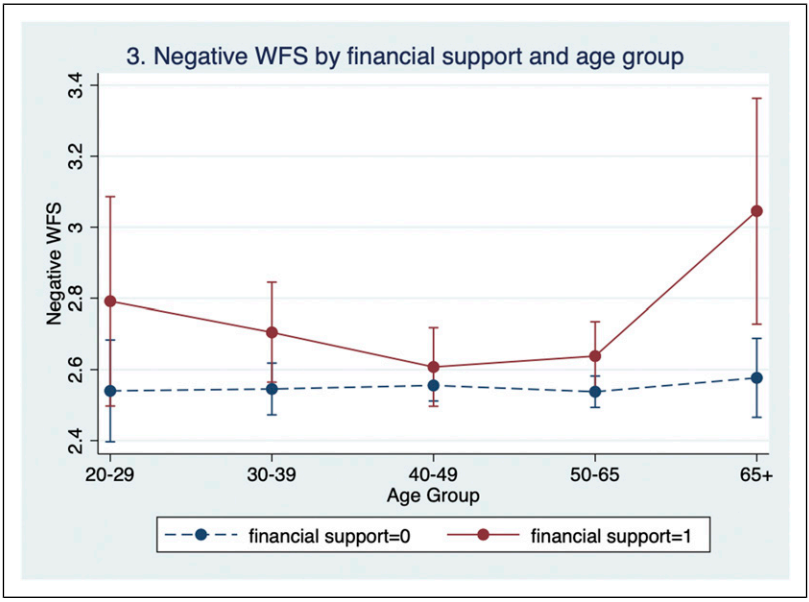

Figure 3. Negative work-to-family spillover by financial support and age group.

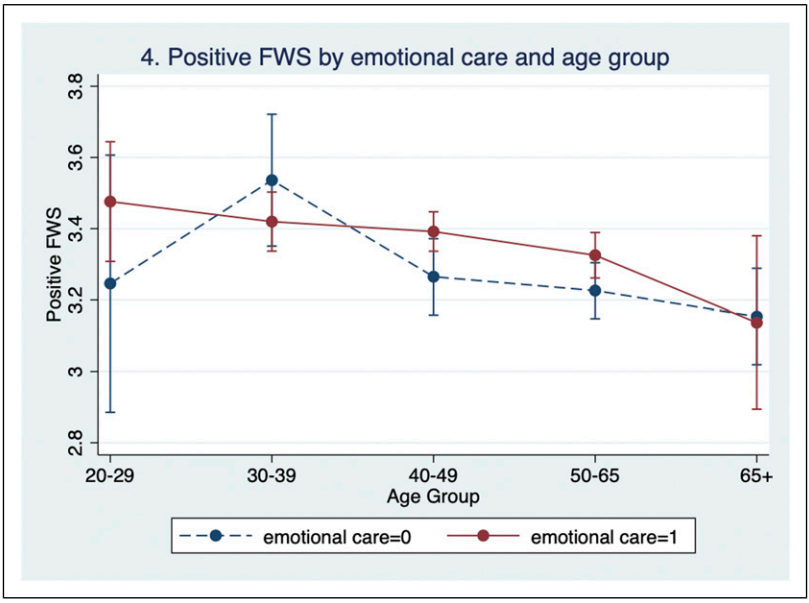

Figure 4. Positive family-to-work spillover by emotional care and age group.

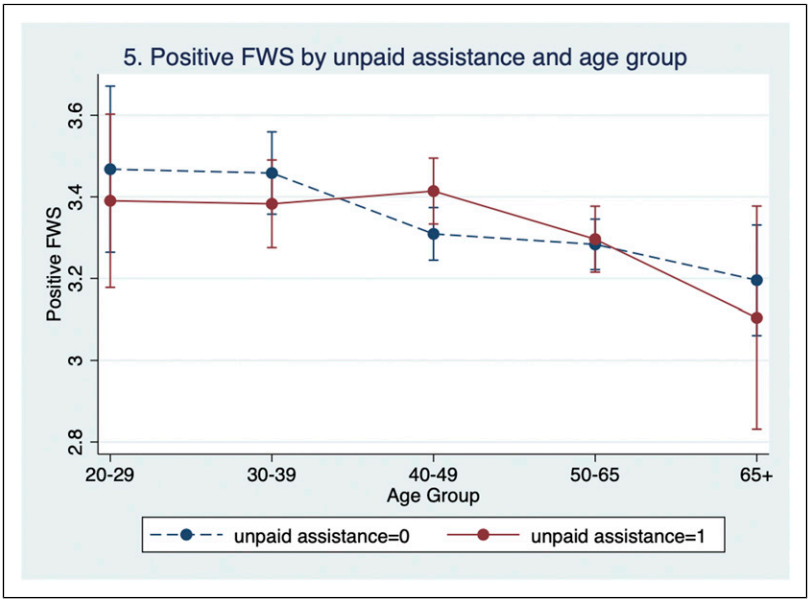

Figure 5. Positive family-to-work spillover by unpaid assistance and age group.

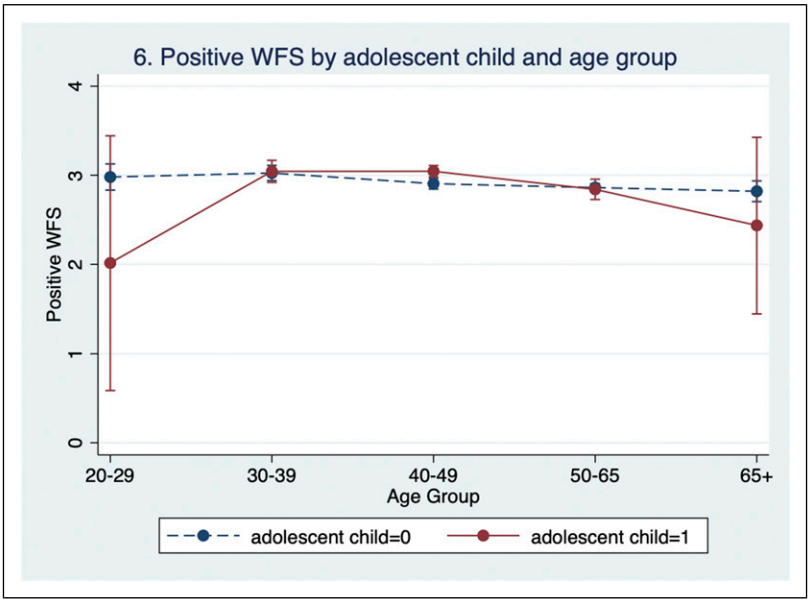

Figure 6. Positive work-to-family spillover by adolescent child and age group.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive information for the analytical sample. The analytical sample includes 3,266 person-wave observations from 1,123 women, and most of them were between 40 and 65 (69.3%).

Table 2 displays the distribution of care responsibilities by each age group. As for childcare, raising young children was more prevalent in women's 20s and 30s, and raising school-aged children and adolescent children was more prevalent in women's 30s and 40s. Around 5% of the observations in the 40s were raising young children, and 12.5% of the observations in the 50–65 age group were raising adolescent children, mirroring the trend of delayed childbearing recently in the US(Matthews & Hamilton, 2009). As for eldercare, the proportion of emotional care, unpaid assistance, and financial support to older adults in the sample were around 64%, 36%, and 16%, respectively. Particularly, the proportions of emotional care and unpaid assistance in women's 20s were 86.5% and 46.5%, respectively, indicating the emerging trend in an earlier onset of eldercare among younger age groups (AARP, 2020).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Pooled Three Waves Analytical Sample (N = 3,266 Person-Wave Observations).

	Range	Mean (SD)
Negative FWS	1–5	2.1 (0.6)
Negative WFS	1–5	2.6 (0.7)
Positive FWS	1–5	3.3 (0.7)
Positive WFS	1–5	2.9 (0.7)
Age group		Percentage
20–29		4.7
30–39		17.5
40–49		29.6
50–65		39.7
65+		8.5
Childcare		
Young child (0–5)		9.9
School-aged child (6–12)		18.8
Teen-aged child (13–18)		23.8
Eldercare		
Emotional care		64.7
Unpaid assistance		36.9
Financial support		16.0
Educational attainment		
Less than HS		3.3
HS		25.5
Some college		32.6
College		20.6
College+		18.0
Marital status		
Married		64.8
Separated/divorced		18.4
Never married /widowed		13.7
Job characteristic		Mean (SD)
Logged annual income		10.1 (1.0)
Weekly work hours		37.4 (14.6)
Demanding level		15.3 (3.0)
Authority level		21.9 (4.6)
Discretion level		10.5 (2.2)
Total number of observations		3,266
Total number of respondents		1,123

Table 2. Distribution of Childcare and Eldercare by Age Groups (Pooled Three Waves, N=3,266 Person-Wave Observations).

	Childcare (%)			Eldercare to parent/parent-in-law (%)			
Age group	Young children	School-aged children	Adolescent children	Emotional support	Unpaid assistance	Giving money	Total N
20–29	29.7	19.4	1.3	86.5	46.5	19.4	155
30–39	34.7	44.9	28.6	83.9	43.5	17.1	570
40–49	5.8	27.9	46.3	78.5	42.5	16.1	967
50–65	1.7	4.2	12.5	53.5	33.9	16.9	1296
65+	0.7	1.8	0.7	17.4	12.0	6.5	276
Total N							3,266

Effects of Caregiving on Negative Work–Family Spillovers by Age Group

Table 3 displays the results of fixed-effects models on women's negative FWS and WFS. Models 1, 2, 3, and 4 present the fixed-effects estimates of negative FWS, whereas Models 5, 6, and 7 present the estimates of negative WFS. Models 1 and 5 present the coefficients for each age group, caregiving responsibility, and other demographic characteristics; Models 2 and 6 present estimates adjusted by job characteristics, and lastly Models 3, 4, and 7 present the estimates after adding the interactions between age groups and caregiving variables.[3] The R-squared of the full models for negative FWS is 0.11, and for negative WFS is 0.28. For negative WFS, the R-squared increased from 0.27 to 0.28 after adding interactions (Model 7), suggesting that the interaction explained away some of the variations (around 4%) in negative WFS. The reference group across all the models are women in their 40s and had no caregiving responsibility.

Negative FWS. Models 1 and 2 suggest that raising young children (0–5), school-aged children (6–12), and adolescent children (13–18) are all associated with significantly higher negative FWS, and the coefficients of three childcare variables remain mostly unchanged after controlling for job characteristics (Model 2). Moreover, in models with interactions of age group and care responsibilities (Models 3 and 4), the interaction is negative and significant for women in their 30s with school-aged children ($\beta_3 = -0.23$, $p = 0.05$); and for eldercare, the interaction is positive and significant for women in their 20s who provide financial support to older ($\beta_3 = 0.59$, $p = 0.05$). These significant interactions suggest that the effect of raising school-aged children on negative FWS is lower in the 30s than doing so in the 40s, whereas the effect of providing financial support on negative FWS is higher in the 20s than doing so in the 40s. This pattern is evident as shown in Figures 1 and 2: the effect of caring for school-aged children is the highest among women in their 40s, and the effect of providing financial support to parents is the highest for women in their 20s. While caring for young children, adolescent children both provoke higher negative FWS; the effects do not vary significantly by age group.

Negative WFS. Based on Models 5 and 6, the significance level of age group variables vanishes after adding job characteristics as controls in the model; raising adolescent children and providing financial support to older parents are both associated with higher negative WFS. After adding the Age group × Financial Support interaction in Model 7, the main effect of financial support attenuates and loses significance, suggesting that providing financial support in the 40s has minimal effect on women's negative WFS. The positive and

Table 3. Fixed-Effects Estimates on Negative FWS and Negative WFS with Standardized Coefficients.

	Negative FWS				Negative WFS		
Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Age group (ref = 40–49)							
20–29	−0.10 (0.11)	−0.16 (0.10)	−0.11 (0.12)	−0.25** (0.11)	0.19+ (0.10)	0.02 (0.10)	−0.02 (0.11)
30–39	−0.10+ (0.05)	−0.12** (0.05)	−0.03 (0.07)	−0.12** (0.06)	0.09+ (0.05)	0.01(0.05)	−0.01 (0.06)
50–65	−0.11** (0.05)	−0.07 (0.05)	−0.03 (0.05)	−0.10** (0.05)	−0.10** (0.05)	−0.01 (0.04)	−0.02 (0.05)
65+	−0.27*** (0.09)	−0.14 (0.09)	−0.09 (0.10)	−0.18+ (0.10)	−0.17+ (0.09)	0.09 (0.09)	0.03(0.09)
Childcare							
Young children	0.23*** (0.07)	0.21*** (0.07)	0.23*** (0.07)	0.21*** (0.07)	0.11+ (0.07)	0.10+ (0.06)	0.11+ (0.06)
School-aged children	0.22*** (0.05)	0.22*** (0.05)	0.35*** (0.07)	0.22*** (0.05)	0.07 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)	0.06 (0.05)
20–29#school-aged children			−0.13 (0.23)				
30–39#school-aged children			−0.23** (0.11)				
50–65#school-aged children			−0.28+ (0.16)				
65+#school-aged children			−0.57 (0.43)				
Adolescent children	0.11** (0.04)	0.11** (0.04)	0.11*** (0.04)	0.12*** (0.04)	0.09** (0.04)	0.09** (0.04)	0.09** (0.04)
Eldercare							
Emotional care	−0.03 (0.05)	−0.04 (0.05)	−0.04 (0.05)	−0.04 (0.05)	0.08 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)
Unpaid assistance	0.00 (0.05)	−0.01 (0.05)	−0.01 (0.05)	−0.01 (0.05)	−0.01 (0.05)	−0.02 (0.05)	−0.02 (0.05)
Financial support	0.09 (0.06)	0.08 (0.06)	0.08 (0.06)	−0.04 (0.06)	0.18*** (0.09)	0.17*** (0.05)	0.07 (0.09)

(continued)

Table 3. (continued)

Variables	Negative FWS				Negative WFS		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
20–29#financial support				0.59**(0.25)			0.28 (0.23)
30–39#financial support				0.05 (0.13)			0.15 (0.12)
50–65#financial support				0.18 (0.11)			0.07 (0.11)
65+#financial support				0.32 (0.26)			0.57** (0.25)
Educational attainment (ref = <HS)							
HS	−0.33+ (0.18)	−0.29+ (0.18)	−0.31+ (0.18)	−0.28 (0.18)	−0.05 (0.18)	0.08 (0.17)	0.08 (0.17)
Some college	−0.16 (0.19)	−0.10 (0.19)	−0.12 (0.19)	−0.09 (0.19)	−0.07 (0.19)	0.08 (0.17)	0.09 (0.17)
College	−0.10 (0.20)	−0.03 (0.20)	−0.05 (0.20)	−0.02 (0.20)	−0.01 (0.20)	0.16 (0.19)	0.17 (0.19)
College+	−0.21 (0.21)	−0.18 (0.21)	−0.21 (0.21)	−0.16 (0.21)	−0.02 (0.21)	0.07 (0.20)	0.08 (0.20)
Logged annual income	0.02 (0.03)	−0.00 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	−0.00 (0.03)	0.13** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.03)	0.10*** (0.03)
Total work weekly hours	0.15*** (0.03)	0.11*** (0.03)	0.11*** (0.03)	0.11*** (0.03)	0.32*** (0.03)	0.22*** (0.03)	0.22*** (0.03)
Marital status (ref = married)							
Separated/divorced	0.01 (0.07)	0.02 (0.07)	0.03 (0.07)	0.01 (0.07)	−0.09 (0.07)	−0.08 (0.07)	−0.09 (0.07)
Widowed/never married	−0.18+ (0.09)	−0.17+ (0.09)	−0.17+ (0.09)	−0.17+ (0.09)	−0.23** (0.09)	−0.18** (0.09)	−0.18** (0.09)

(continued)

Table 3. (continued)

	Negative FWS				Negative WFS		
Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Job characteristics							
Demanding level		0.12*** (0.02)	0.11*** (0.02)	0.11*** (0.02)		0.30*** (0.02)	0.30*** (0.02)
Authority level		0.07*** (0.03)	0.07*** (0.03)	0.07*** (0.03)		−0.09*** (0.02)	−0.09*** (0.02)
Discretion level		−0.03 (0.03)	−0.03 (0.03)	−0.03 (0.03)		0.04 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)
Constant	0.15 (0.33)	0.26 (0.33)	0.21 (0.33)	0.26 (0.33)	−1.20*** (0.33)	−1.03*** (0.31)	−1.05*** (0.31)
Observations	3,266	3,266	3,266	3,266	3,266	3,266	3,266
R-squared	0.08	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.16	0.27	0.28
N (respondents)	1,123	1,123	1,123	1,123	1,123	1,123	1,123

Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, + p<0.1.

significant interaction for women who are over 65 with financial support responsibilities indicates that providing financial support to parents for women over 65 leads to higher negative WFS than for similar women in their 40s ($\beta_3 = 0.57$, $p = 0.05$). This pattern is evident as shown in Figure 3, where I plotted the predicted values of negative WFS based on the estimates of Model 7: The effect of providing financial support on negative WFS is lower in the 40s and highest over 65.

Effects of Caregiving on Positive Work–Family Spillovers by Age Group

Table 4 displays the fixed-effects estimates for positive FWS and positive WFS. Models 1, 2, 3, and 4 show the fixed-effects estimates on positive FWS, whereas Models 5, 6, and 7 show the estimates on positive WFS. Models 1 and 5 present the coefficients for age group intervals, care responsibilities, and other demographic factors; Models 2 and 6 present coefficients after adding job characteristics as controls, and Models 3, 4, and 7 include the significant interactions between age groups and caregiving. The R-squared of full models for positive FWS (Models 3 and 4) and positive WFS (Model 7) are 0.06 and 0.13, respectively. For positive FWS, after adding interactions, the R-squared increases from 0.05 to 0.06, suggesting that the interaction explained away some variation (about 17%) in positive FWS. The reference group across all the models in Table 4 are women in their 40s with no caregiving responsibility.

Positive FWS. Models 1 and 2 reveal the main effects of age groups and caregiving roles on positive FWS: Women over 65 have significantly lower positive FWS than those in their 40s, and the coefficient remains robust after adding job characteristics as controls. Caring for school-aged children is associated with lower positive FWS, and the coefficient also remains unchanged after controlling for job characteristics (Model 2). Model 3 presents the results after adding interaction for age group and emotional caregiving to parents: the negative and significant interaction for women in their 30s with emotional care responsibilities indicates that providing emotional care for women in their 30s leads to significantly lower positive FWS than similar women in their 40s ($\beta_3 = -0.32$, $p = 0.05$). The pattern is evident as shown in Figure 4. Model 4 presents the results with the interactions of age group and unpaid assistance to parents. Providing unpaid assistance in a woman's 30s is associated with significantly lower positive FWS than doing so in their 40s, as shown in Figure 5.

Positive WFS. Models 5 and 6 present the main effects of age group and caregiving responsibilities on positive WFS: women between 50 and 65 have

Table 4. Fixed-Effects Estimates on Positive FWS and Positive WFS with Standardized Coefficients.

	Positive FWS				Positive WFS		
Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Age group (ref = 40–49)							
20–29	0.08 (0.11)	0.09 (0.11)	−0.02 (0.25)	0.21 (0.14)	0.00 (0.11)	0.04 (0.11)	0.10 (0.11)
30–39	0.08 (0.06)	0.09 (0.06)	0.35*** (0.13)	0.19*** (0.07)	0.10+ (0.06)	0.10+ (0.06)	0.16** (0.07)
50–65	−0.08+ (0.05)	−0.08+ (0.05)	−0.05 (0.08)	−0.03 (0.06)	−0.11** (0.05)	−0.13*** (0.05)	−0.05 (0.06)
65+	−0.20** (0.09)	−0.21** (0.10)	−0.14 (0.12)	−0.15 (0.11)	−0.12 (0.10)	−0.17+ (0.10)	−0.11 (0.10)
Childcare							
Young children	0.04 (0.07)	0.04 (0.07)	0.04 (0.07)	0.04 (0.07)	−0.03 (0.07)	−0.03 (0.07)	−0.02 (0.07)
School-aged children	−0.19*** (0.05)	−0.17*** (0.05)	−0.17***(0.05)	−0.18*** (0.05)	−0.10+ (0.05)	−0.06 (0.05)	−0.06 (0.05)
Adolescent children	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.08	0.09+	0.19***
20–29#adolescent children							−1.48 (0.98)
30–39#adolescent children							−0.16 (0.12)
50–65#adolescent children							−0.22** (0.11)
65+#adolescent children							−0.71 (0.68)
Eldercare							
Emotional care	0.11+ (0.06)	0.10+ (0.06)	0.16** (0.08)	0.09 (0.06)	0.01 (0.06)	0.02 (0.06)	0.01 (0.06)
20–29#emotional care			0.13 (0.27)				
30–39#emotional care			−0.32** (0.14)				
50–65#emotional care			−0.04 (0.10)				
65+#emotional care			−0.19 (0.19)				
Unpaid assistance	0.02 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	0.14+ (0.07)	0.02 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)
20–29#unpaid assistance				−0.24 (0.20)			
30–39#unpaid assistance				−0.23** (0.11)			

(continued)

Table 4. (continued)

Variables	Positive FWS				Positive WFS		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
50–65#unpaid assistance				−0.12 (0.09)			
65+#unpaid assistance				−0.25 (0.20)			
Financial support	0.03 (0.06)	0.03 (0.06)	0.0 (0.06)	0.03 (0.06)	−0.04 (0.06)	−0.04 (0.06)	−0.04 (0.06)
Educational attainment (ref = less than HS)							
HS	0.16 (0.18)	0.20 (0.18)	0.20 (0.18)	0.19 (0.18)	0.29 (0.19)	0.42** (0.18)	0.38** (0.18)
Some college	0.09 (0.19)	0.14 (0.19)	0.14 (0.19)	0.13 (0.19)	0.14 (0.20)	0.25 (0.19)	0.21 (0.19)
College	0.01 (0.21)	0.05 (0.21)	0.05 (0.21)	0.05 (0.21)	0.00 (0.21)	0.11 (0.21)	0.08 (0.21)
College+	0.08 (0.22)	0.11 (0.21)	0.11 (0.21)	0.11 (0.21)	0.21 (0.22)	0.29 (0.21)	0.24 (0.21)
Logged annual income	0.09*** (0.03)	0.08*** (0.03)	0.08*** (0.03)	0.08*** (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	−0.01 (0.03)	−0.01 (0.03)
Total weekly work hours	0.06** (0.03)	0.06** (0.03)	0.06** (0.03)	0.06 + (0.03)	0.09*** (0.03)	0.08*** (0.03)	0.09*** (0.03)
Marital status (ref = married)							
Separated/divorced	−0.06 (0.07)	−0.06 (0.07)	−0.06 (0.07)	−0.06 (0.07)	−0.09 (0.08)	−0.10 (0.07)	−0.09 (0.07)
Widowed/never married	−0.28*** (0.09)	−0.30*** (0.09)	−0.31*** (0.09)	−0.29*** (0.09)	0.04 (0.10)	0.00 (0.09)	−0.00 (0.09)
Job characteristics							
Demanding level		−0.03 (0.02)	−0.02 (0.02)	−0.02 (0.02)		−0.10*** (0.02)	−0.10*** (0.02)
Authority level		0.06** (0.03)	0.06** (0.03)	0.06** (0.03)		0.13*** (0.03)	0.13*** (0.03)
Discretion level		0.08*** (0.03)	0.08*** (0.03)	0.08*** (0.03)		0.25*** (0.03)	0.26*** (0.03)
Constant	−0.92*** (0.34)	−0.86** (0.34)	−0.92*** (0.34)	−0.91*** (0.34)	−0.17 (0.35)	−0.04 (0.33)	−0.05 (0.33)
Observations	3,266	3,266	3,266	3,266	3,266	3,266	3,266
R-squared	0.04	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.03	0.13	0.13
N (respondents)	1,123	1,123	1,123	1,123	1,123	1,123	1,123

Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, + p<0.1.

lower positive WFS than those in their 40s, and none of the caregiving variables are associated with any change in positive WFS. However, in Model 7, where the interaction of age group and adolescent children is added, the coefficient of caring for adolescent children becomes positive and significant ($\beta_2 = 0.19$, $p = 0.01$), and interaction is negative and significant for women with adolescent children between 50 and 65 ($\beta_3 = -0.22$, $p = 0.05$), suggesting that raising adolescent children between 50 and 65 is associated with significantly lower positive WFS than doing so in their 40s. As shown in Figure 6, the effect of raising adolescent children is lowest in the 20s, then gradually increases in the 30s and 40s, and finally declines again after the 50s.

Discussion and Conclusion

Guided by the life course perspective, this study examines how women's work–family conflict and work–family enrichment experiences are shaped by childcare and eldercare responsibilities over the life course. This study uses fixed-effects methods with longitudinal data from the MIDUS (1995–2014) to examine the within-person changes in women's negative and positive work–family spillovers as a result of childcare and eldercare responsibilities from their 20s to 65 and up.

This study makes contributions to the current body of the work–family literature in three major ways. First, building on previous studies that center on WFC experiences, this study investigates how WFE experiences change over the life course. Second, this study incorporates eldercare the into work–family studies, since eldercare has become more prevalent among all age groups. The findings from this study provide empirical evidence on how eldercare shapes women's work–family conflict and enrichment experiences. Third, previous studies used parental stage as a measure for life course stage; however, this study argues that due to the increasing heterogeneity in the timing of childcare and eldercare, age group is a better measure for life course standing than parental stage because it shapes people's perceptions and dynamics of social interactions (Hu, 2021). I find that even the same caregiving role has significantly different effects on work–family experiences across age groups.

Childcare

The results of negative spillovers from fixed-effects models suggest that raising young children, school-aged children and adolescent children *per se* all significantly increase women's negative FWS, indicating that providing childcare is consistently associated with increased negative FWS, regardless of children's age. As for negative WFS, only raising adolescent children significantly increases women's negative WFS. This is possibly because women tend to worry about looming college expenses as their children

approach high school graduation, and thus the pressure of meeting financial needs increases women's negative WFS. For positive spillovers, as main effect, only raising school-aged children is significantly associated with lower positive FWS. This agrees with what Moen & Roehling (2005) found about how women with older children have "*a real juggling act,"* and are associated with fewer enrichment experiences. The results of the main effects of childcare are consistent across negative and positive spillover: childcare as the main effect largely increases work–family conflicts and decreases enrichment experiences.

As for differential effects of childcare on negative and positive spillovers by age groups, the impacts of raising school-aged children on negative WFS peak around their 40s, and the effect of raising adolescent children on positive WFS is also the lowest among older age groups (50+). This might be because of the financial needs of raising older children—women in later age groups are usually at the onset of transitioning into retirement, therefore the pressure of meeting potential financial needs of older children's expenses of school might alter retirement plans (Handwerker, 2011), leading to higher conflict experiences and lower enrichment experiences.

Eldercare

As main effects, providing emotional care and unpaid assistance do not have significant impacts on women's negative FWS or negative WFS. However, providing financial support to parents significantly increases women's negative WFS, and the effect also exhibits a "U-shape" pattern—it is lowest in the 40s and highest in the 20s and 65+ range. A similar pattern is observed for negative FWS as well: the effect of providing financial support is higher for women in their 20s than those in their 40s. This is probably because younger women, who just start working, and older women, who are saving money for upcoming retirement, both have less extra money to spare; therefore, providing financial support to older parents in younger and older age groups would take a toll on their financial well-being, leading to higher negative spillover experiences. For positive spillovers, I found that providing emotional care and unpaid assistance to parents can enhance women's work–family enrichment experiences, but the effect depends on the age group: both providing emotional care and unpaid assistance to older adults leads to significantly higher positive FWS for women in their 40s than those in their 30s. This is possibly because women in their 40s tend to be more emotionally mature and established, therefore providing eldercare, such as emotional care and unpaid assistance, can instill confidence in caregivers and also increase the emotional bonding with older adults (Roth, Fredman, & Haley, 2015), leading to higher enrichment experiences. In contrast, women in their 30s are usually at the career building stage and face increaseing responsibilities and

expectations from work and motherhood (Moen & Roehling, 2005). As a result, providing eldercare at this stage can be overwhelming, adding extra stressors and eventually leading to lower enrichment experiences. Aside from the effects of eldercare on positive FWS, this study did not find any eldercare responsibilities having a significant impact on positive WFS, nor does the effect vary by age groups.

As with any other study, this one has several limitations. First, a long lapse between survey waves leads to high attrition, which may limit the generalizability of this study's findings. Radler and Ryff (2010) found that respondents who returned to the follow-up surveys tend to be white, female, married, and college educated. In addition, the fixed-effects models omitted some important covariates, like race, which are shown to be strong predictors for work–family experiences (Ammons, Dahlin, Edgell, & Santo, 2017). Future studies should investigate the racial patterns of work–family experiences over the life course. Second, while fixed-effects models account for unobserved time-invariant characteristics that may bias the estimates, the models are not immune to biases resulting from unobserved time-varying characteristics. Third, the long lapse between survey waves might fail to capture important life transitions, such as job switching and leaving and entering the labor force, which all affect perceptions of work–family experience. A person might choose to leave the labor force entirely because of a heavy caregiving load, high work–family conflict, and low enrichment (Xue, Fleischmann, Head, McMunn, & Stafford, 2020). If this is the case, the effects of caregiving on work–family conflicts might be underestimated, and the effects on enrichment might be overestimated. This study manages to reduce the bias by including women who were currently working or have worked the past 2 years; however, employment transitions outside the 2-year window are unobservable. Fourth, this study uses three binary variables to measure eldercare responsibilities; however, the difficulty and intensity of the care are not available in the data, which are found to be strongly related to caregivers' well-being (Liu, Fang, Chan, & Lou, 2019). Lastly, the growth of the "sandwiched generation," who are caught between childcare and eldercare, is notable in the past decade (Parker & Patten, 2013). Thus, it is meaningful to understand the work–family experiences of the "sandwiched generation" in future studies as well.

Worth noting is that the R-squared is higher for negative spillovers than positive spillovers, suggesting that family caregiving explained away more variations of conflict experiences than enrichment experiences. Future studies should explore on the other factors, such as institutional support, family leave policies, that can promote the work–family enrichment experiences among caregivers.

Despite the limitations listed above, this study is among the first to examine within-person changes of work–family conflict and enrichment experiences

due to childcare and eldercare over a twenty-year life span. The findings from this study highlight that women's work–family experiences are not only shaped by caregiving responsibilities, but depend on the life course stage they are at as well. Lastly, caregiving is a life-long experience, and policies on promoting work–family balance should provide support for both childcare and eldercare providers.

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Notes

1. The levels of demanding, authority, and discretion of current or most recent job are all measured by discrete scales. The detailed summary statistics are shown in Table 2. Since all three scales have different ranges, I standardized these scales so that they all have a mean of "0" and a standard deviation of "1" in the fixed-effects models.
2. I used "margins" and "marginsplot" commands from the Stata 16 to calculate the predict work–family spillovers with unstandardized coefficient estimates from fixed-effects models—it would be more intuitive for readers to understand the magnitude of the effects from the figures when using the unstandardized scales.
3. I only present the interaction terms that are statistically significant, aiming to avoid multicollinearity and distortion of the coefficient estimates and their significance level.

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