

**WORK LIFE IMBALANCE: AN EXAMINATION OF THE DIFFERENTIAL
EFFECTS OF GENDER AND AGE**

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Introduction

De Cieri, Holmes, Abbott and Pettit (2005) argue that in the current highly competitive labour market, where the attraction and retention of valued employees is difficult, greater awareness needs to be given to employee work-life balance concerns. Balancing work and nonwork domains is an important work-related concern which has the potential to affect a broad range of employee work related factors such as employee turnover, stress, job satisfaction, and productivity (Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk, & Beutell, 1996; Rice, Frone, & McFarlin, 1992; Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Veiga, Baldrige, & Eddleston, 2004).

Changes impacting on the work environment over the past ten to twenty years such as globalisation of competition, changes in the patterns and demands of work, and the fast pace of technological innovations have put extra time demands on employees (Coughlan, 2000; DFEE, 2000; Fisher, 2000). Coupled with these organisational and work design changes are demographic changes including the increase in the number of women in the workplace, dual career families, single parent families and an aging population (Brough & Kelling, 2002; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992a; Frone & Yardley, 1996; Hobson, Delunas, & Kesie, 2001; Smith & Gardner, 2007). Together these have combined to generate an increasingly diverse workforce which in turn has created greater demand for organisations to take cognisance of employees needs with regard to their work and nonwork life.

Against this backdrop there is a lack of consensus however about whether the positive effect of work-life benefits is universal (i.e. experienced by all employees, irrespective of their individual characteristics or circumstances) or whether the effect of work-life benefits differs for particular sub-populations of employees (Smith et al., 2007). Some research exists to suggest that demographic differences exist. McKeen and Burke (1994) explored the extent to which managerial women valued different types of work-life benefits and found significant differences according to age and parental status. Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) found that in a homogeneous sample of managers and professionals, the work-life benefits of family-care and flexibility were used by employees possessing different demographic characteristics.

Roehling et al (2001) explored the effect of gender, age and stage of family development upon the extent to which work-life balance benefits contribute to employee loyalty to their organisation. They report flexible time policies are associated with increased loyalty for men and women at all life stages but that the impact of childcare policies on employee's loyalty varied by employees' gender and age of youngest child. Darcy and McCarthy (2007) examined three parenting life stages and found initial support suggesting that the factors influencing work family conflict differed for different age groups. For all parents with dependent children it was found that job involvement, job stress and colleague support all have predictive powers in terms of explaining the antecedents of work family conflict. Despite the potential advantages to be gained from the implementation of work life balance initiatives, some benefits may be costly to implement and it is therefore imperative that organisations firstly consider the likely potential benefits before deciding to provide such initiatives (Darcy et al., 2007).

Our intention is to explore, through empirical based research the antecedents of work life imbalance for men and women as they progress through different life stages. The 'one size fits all' approach to the design and development of work life balance initiatives is not only costly but likely to be ineffective in terms of meeting the real needs of these various categories of employees and so we hope that the research findings will also have practical implications in assisting organisations to come to terms with this complex yet extremely important issue.

The role of gender on work life imbalance

Differences in the way that women and men approach, experience and relate to work and nonwork domains of their lives remains relatively under researched. We know from research that paid employment takes on a different meaning for women than for men (Roehling et al., 2001). In contrast to men, women's work is more strongly influenced by experience in other (nonwork) life domains, such as family/ housework activities (McCarthy, Grady, Darcy, Kirrane, & Cleveland, 2007). For this very reason women workers tend to confront more work-family role juggling than their male counterparts (Cox & Harquail, 1991; Hochschild, 1989). On the other hand, women remain burdened with the responsibility for the majority of child care and household tasks (Greenberger, Goldberg, Hamill, O'Neill, & Payne, 1989; Hochschild, 1989) leading to greater conflict between their work and family responsibility when compared to their male counterparts (Gutek, Searle, & Klepa, 1991).

The culture and organisation of paid work however has remained largely unchanged despite the dramatic changes occurring in the demographic make up of the working population. Despite the increase in females with child caring responsibilities remaining actively engaged in paid employment, the pattern and culture of work remains largely unchanged. It is women who are expected to adapt to the changes taking place with regard to the organisation of their work patterns and in their day to day nonwork activities. Accordingly it is women who have had to accommodate to the structural lag produced by the changing realities of the work family interface (Moen & Yu, 2000).

Many studies on the work-nonwork relationship have focused on employed women however those comparing men and women's experiences where they exist, have proven to be inconsistent (Kirchmeyer, 1992b). The relative dearth of empirical research in terms of the antecedents and consequences of work life imbalance as it affects men and women is somewhat surprising given the increasing pressure in today's business environment to balance effectively work and nonwork elements. Individuals are finding this balancing act increasingly difficult and it is clear that differences exist in terms of job satisfaction and motivation (Sparrow, 1996). Firms that are clued in and actively attempt to meet the individual work preferences of their employees are more likely to retain key individuals and gain their commitment (Finegold, Mohrman, & Spreitzer, 2002).

Life cycle approach – the impact of age on work life imbalance

Researchers have long since recognised that depending on one's life stage, different factors or issues take on differing degrees of importance and that these varying factors

and issues may affect both attitudes and behaviours (Giele & Elder, 1998). Research on adult development has found that as individuals age, they pass through different development stages that affect their employment priorities (Veiga, 1983). In addition to changing personal development needs, as individuals age they may acquire different family responsibilities such as the care of children and aging depends that can affect their work needs and priorities (Finegold et al., 2002).

Research has reported that individuals in mid-life have the most work-balance issues to deal with, as they struggle to balance a strong desire for career advancement with major family responsibilities (Wolfe & Kolb, 1980). This mid career stage in particular is where the demands of balancing work and non-work domains tends to become most apparent for women who are attempting to combine children and career. Older workers are also increasingly looking to scale back their work commitments to focus on nonwork related pursuits or career changes (Hall & Mirvis, 1996). Early career employees, in contrast, generally have the fewest responsibilities outside work and have been found to place the greatest focus on career over non-work issues and yet they appear to place significant importance on obtaining and maintaining a healthy work life balance (Sturges & Guest, 2004).

It is against this backdrop that the majority of research undertaken in relation to work life balance has tended to focus solely on a particular life phase and the associated working time arrangements (Darcy et al., 2007). The research has tended to examine the issues pertaining to individual specific factors at one particular time in an employee's life cycle without reference to what has happened prior, or more importantly, the impact it may subsequently have. In this way the research to date has had a limited focus as it fails to capture differences in terms of the factors influencing work life imbalance as an individual progresses through their working life, particularly comparing directly the experiences of individuals from different age categories, career stages or on the basis of gender. It is our contention that only an explicit life cycle perspective can allow us to better understand the variables which impact upon work life imbalance and recognise the changes that take place in relation to these as one's working circumstances and nonwork responsibilities change.

The model presented in this paper specifically aims to capture and group key work life issues as they relate to an individual employee as they move through their working life. The research hypothesises that as an individual moves through various age categories which reflect distinct career stages, the challenges they face in relation to their work and nonwork domains differs. Four age groupings are presented and examined which we see as representing distinct career stages. These stages would be as follows; age 18-29, initial/ early career stage; age 30-39, developing career stage; age 40-49, consolidating career stage while finally age 50+, pre-retirement career stage.

If it is the case that employees experience work life imbalance in different ways depending on their age and gender then the implications for organisations and government policy are significant. For example to persist in offering 'a one size fits all approach' to work life imbalance amongst employees is certain to result in costly failure

for the organisation and resentment on the part of employees. The findings from this paper will offer us an opportunity to analyse the antecedents of work life imbalance as individuals progress through their working lives while also comparing the experiences of both male and female employees in each category. In doing so we hope to advance the literature on work life imbalance, its causes and consequences, while at the same time provide some insights for practitioners as they try to grapple with the very different needs of an increasingly work life balance conscious workforce. We anticipate that our research will add to the calls for further debate regarding organisation's ability to develop targeted policies to improve the ever increasing demands placed on employees who seek to combine both work and nonwork life domains.

In order to explore the antecedents of work life imbalance a number of independent variables were selected for examination based on a review of the relevant literature. They are job involvement, managerial support and career consequences. A brief discussion of each and the proposed hypotheses derived as a result follows below.

Job Involvement

Research tends to point to high levels of conflict amongst those individuals who are very involved in their work (Kossek & Ozeki, 1988). Several researchers have found a positive relationship between job involvement and work life imbalance, specifically work life conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Higgins, Duxbury, & Irving, 1992). High work involvement and high family involvement have been shown to be positively related to the number of hours spent in work and family activities respectively (Greenhaus et al., 1985). These hours in turn have been linked to increased work and family conflict (Greenhaus et al., 1985) resulting from role overload (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991).

Secondly, Pleck (1979) suggested that psychological involvement in a role acts primarily as a sensitizer to interference effects, making the individual more aware of problems within that role. This awareness, in turn, increases perceived role conflict (Duxbury et al., 1991). Kossek & Ozeki (1988) concluded from their review of relevant research that workers who have higher job involvement tended to experience somewhat more work family conflict. This finding runs counter to the popular myth that workers who have high involvement in their jobs are likely to have less concern for their family issues (Kossek et al., 1988). Therefore it is hypothesised that high levels of job involvement will increase the likelihood of an individual experiencing work life imbalance. This is likely to especially true of individuals at the early and mid career stage of their careers irrespective of their gender.

H1; Job involvement is likely to be a significant predictor of work life imbalance for workers at early and mid career stage as they seek to advance up the corporate ladder

Managerial Support

While there has been a notable increase in the number of organisations offering formal work life or family friendly policies this has not been met with a reciprocal increase in

the uptake of these policies. The company culture, and more specifically the views of managers and colleagues appear to present a barrier to the utilisation of such policies (Allen, 2001; Lambert, 2000; Lewis & Taylor, 1996; Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Strongly held informal cultural values can have the effect of negating any formal family friendly policies which may be in place within an organisation (Poelmans & Sahibzada, 2004). Indeed, a supportive workplace has been identified as being critical to the successful implementation and uptake of family friendly policies (Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1996; Thomas et al., 1995; Thompson et al., 1999) and the role of direct supervisors or managers has been established as a particularly significant factor in this regard (Galinsky et al., 1996; Thomas et al., 1995). Frankel (1998) argues that an antagonistic workplace culture in terms of family friendly policies can see even the most innovative and sophisticated work family policies falter.

The role of managerial support and attitude is therefore an important variable in determining employee uptake of family friendly policies and hence can be seen to have a direct impact on work family conflict (McCarthy & Cleveland, 2005). It is clear that managers and supervisors have a role to play in terms of translating any family friendly work policy into practice. The level of perceived support an individual employee receives from their direct line manager may vary considerably as a direct result of their managers own personal beliefs and attitude towards such programs. It is highly unlikely for example that a manager who believes that hard work and long hours are a necessary and vital demonstration of an individuals commitment to the organisation is likely to reward someone who decides to avail, however short term, of family friendly work policies. Thompson et al. (1999) found that without a supportive organisational family friendly culture, employees might be reluctant to take advantage of work family benefits. Similarly Brannen and Lewis (2000) reported many employees in their UK study were reluctant to use work family benefits especially when these benefits were dependent on their manager's discretion and might be considered favours rather than entitlements. It is therefore hypothesised that low levels of managerial support will increase the likelihood of an individual experiencing work family conflict, particularly in the early stages of childcare responsibilities. The following hypotheses are therefore proposed;

- H2; Managerial support has a negative impact upon work life imbalance for all employees at early and mid career stages, irrespective of gender*
- H3; Managerial support has a negative impact upon work life imbalance across all career stages for female employees*

Career Consequences

Negative spillover models of the work–family conflict and interface imply that family demands, responsibilities, attitudes and emotions may ‘spill over’ into the workplace causing difficulties on the job (Thompson et al., 1999). When an employee participates in work family programs which have the indirect effect of making the employee less visible within the organisation, for example teleworking, they run a significant risk of suffering career consequences as a result (Bailyn, 1993). Many organisations still labour under a culture of presenteeism, whereby an employee’s commitment and loyalty to the

organisation is measured in terms of the amount of time they literally spend in the office. In this way participating in a work life balance program potentially reduces the time an employee spends in the office and so undermines their ability to show total commitment to the organisation and hence results in jeopardizing, if not diminishing, the employees future career prospects (Glass & Fujimoto, 1995; Perlow, 1995).

There has been considerable empirical research to support the idea that there may be negative career consequences for individual who opt to utilise work family initiatives or programs (Finkel, Olswang, & She, 1994; Perlow, 1995). Although work-life balance programmes create new ways working, organisational cultures still reward old ways of working with the result that employees who use work life programmes are negatively affected (Thompson et al., 1999; Wayne & Cordeiro, 2003). The following hypotheses are therefore proposed;

H4: Availing of work life balance initiatives at early and mid career stage is perceived to have negative career consequences by both male and female employees

Methodology

The research was carried out among a sample of 729 employees in 15 organisations; 10 private sector and 5 public sector organisations, in the Republic of Ireland. In all 343 males and 378 females participated in the research with the average age of participants being 37.4 (8 respondents failed to indicate their gender). 46% of participants reported having at least one child with 14% assuming some form of eldercare. Participants were re-categorised into four distinct age groupings namely 18-29 years of age (initial career stage), 30-39 years of age (developing career stage), 40-49 (consolidating career stage) and finally 50+ years of age (pre-retirement career stage). Table 1 below details a breakdown of each age grouping by gender.

Table 1; Age categories by gender

	Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
18-29 Years	89	25.9	85	22.5
30-39 Years	122	35.6	136	36.0
40-49 Years	78	22.7	99	26.2
50+ Years	53	15.5	58	15.3
Total	342	99.7*	378	100.0

*One male respondent failed to indicate his age

Measures

Scales were either adapted from previous research or developed specifically for the study.

Job Involvement; We used a 6 item scale to measure job involvement adapted from Frone & Rice (1987). Ratings were completed on a 1-6 scale (1=strongly disagree and 6=strongly agree with 0=undecided). Sample item; ‘*Most of my personal life goals are*

job-centred'. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the scale was $\alpha = .74$ with a mean of 3.28 and a variance of 1.19.

Managerial Support; We used a 5 item scale to measure managerial support adapted from Thompson et al. (1999). Ratings were completed on a 1-6 scale (1=strongly disagree and 6=strongly agree with 0=undecided). Sample item; *'In general, managers in this organisation are quite accommodating of personal needs'*. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the scale was $\alpha = .78$ with a mean of 4.97 and a variance of 0.05.

Career Consequences; We used a 3 item scale to measure managerial support adapted from Thompson et al. (1999). Ratings were completed on a 1-6 scale (1=strongly disagree and 6=strongly agree with 0=undecided). Sample item; *'To turn down a promotion or transfer for family related reasons will seriously hurt one's career progress in this organisation'*. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the scale was $\alpha = .70$ with a mean of 4.22 and a variance of 0.07.

Work Life Imbalance; The dependent variable of work life imbalance was adapted from Clarke (2001). Ratings were completed on a 1-6 scale (1=strongly disagree and 6=strongly agree with 0=undecided). Sample item; *'My job keeps me away from the people and activities that are important to me too much'*. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the scale was $\alpha = .80$ with a mean of 4.55 and a variance of 0.42.

Analysis

A number of statistical tests, including correlations and regression analysis, were undertaken to uncover the nature of relationships which exist among the dependent and independent variables. Correlation analysis was used to discover and describe the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables.

Table 2; Interrelationships of variables for each age category under examination and by gender

		Work Life Imbalance		Job Involvement		Managerial Support		Career Consequences	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Work Life Imbalance	18-29	-	-						
	30-39	-	-						
	40-49	-	-						
	50+	-	-						
Job Involvement	18-29	.255*	.088	-	-				
	30-39	.218*	.212*	-	-				
	40-49	.316**	.246*	-	-				
	50+	.234	.038	-	-				
Managerial Support	18-29	-.329**	-.329**	-.068	.193	-	-		
	30-39	-.366**	-.425**	-.017	.046	-	-		
	40-49	-.216	-.189	-.072	.250*	-	-		

	50+	-.357**	-.306*	.408**	.036	-	-		
Career Consequences	18-29	.314**	.399**	.070	-.004	-.399**	-.374**	-	-
	30-39	.481**	.482**	.196*	.031	-.422**	-.570**	-	-
	40-49	.130	.238*	.135	-.052	-.316**	-.339**	-	-
	50+	.188	.161	.116	-.270*	-.155	.054	-	-

It is clear from Table 2 that differences do exist among male and female employees with regard to the factors which impact upon work life imbalance within this sample. Further we can see evidence of differences not just between male and female employees but also differences between male and female employees in the different age categories. Job involvement was found to be positively correlated to work life imbalance for male employees in the 18-29 age grouping ($r=.255$, $p<0.05$) but had demonstrated no relationship to work life imbalance for the female employees in the same age category. Interestingly job involvement was found to be positively correlated to work life imbalance for both male and female employees in both the 30-39 age category (male $r=.218$, $p<0.05$; females $r=.212$, $p<0.05$) and the 40-49 age category albeit a stronger relationship was demonstrated among male employees in the 40-49 age category (males $r=.316$, $p<0.01$; females $r=.246$, $p<0.05$). Both male and female employees in the age category of 50+ failed to demonstrate any significant relationship between job involvement and work life imbalance.

The findings from the correlation analysis in relation to managerial support are very interesting. The results are similar for both male and female employees suggesting that the support of one's direct boss in terms of accessing and assisting employees who avail of work life balance initiatives is extremely important. For both male and female employees in the 18-29 age category managerial support was found to be highly negatively related to work life imbalance (males $r=-.329$, $p<0.01$; females $r=-.329<0.01$). Similarly for both male and females in the 30-39 age category managerial support was found to be highly positively related to work life imbalance (males $r=-.366$, $p<0.01$, females $r=-.425$, $p<0.01$). However it was interesting to note that for the male and female employees in the age category of 40-49 managerial support did not display a significant relationship with work life imbalance. Finally managerial support was found to be significantly correlated to work life imbalance for both male and female employees in the 50+ age category which is interesting considering the absence of evidence of a relationship in the preceding age category (males $r=-.357$, $p<0.01$; females $r=-.306$, $p<0.05$).

As was expected the analysis reveals that employees, both male and female at the early and developing stages of their careers are acutely aware of the potential career consequences of availing of work life balance initiatives. We see from Table 2 that both career consequences was highly positively correlated to work life imbalance for both male and female employees in the age category 18-29 years of age (males $r=.314$, $p<0.01$; females $r=.399$, $p<0.01$). Similarly for both male and female employees in the age category 30-39 years of age career consequences was highly positively correlated to work life imbalance (males $r=.481$, $p<0.01$; $r=.482$, $p<0.01$). Interestingly it continues to

be an issue for female employees in the age category 40-49 years of age but not their male counterparts ($r=.238$, $p<0.05$).

It is advised to apply caution when interpreting the significance of these findings as the casual nature of the relationships has yet to be explored fully.

Further analysis

A series of standard multiple regression analyses were performed on the data to further explore the hypotheses. In doing so it is hoped to produce a number of models which will allow us to better predict the factors which impact upon work life imbalance for male and female employees at various career stages related to their age. The dependent variable, as with the correlation analysis above, was work life imbalance and all the independent variables namely job involvement, managerial support and career consequences were entered simultaneously as suggested by Studenmund & Cassidy (1987) as the only appropriate method for theory testing.

Employees aged 18-29

Firstly we looked at those individuals, who are the early or initial career stage, so those employees in the age category of 18-29 years of age. As can be seen from Table 3 below a number of factors were found to have significant predictive powers in relation to work life imbalance among male and female employees aged 18-29 years of age. Firstly, job involvement was found to significantly predict work life imbalance for male employees aged 18-29 ($p<0.05$) however it was found to have no predictive qualities for female employees within this age category. The positive sign of the regression coefficient reveals that the greater the degree to which male employees aged 18-29 feel that they are highly involved in their working roles, the more likely they are to experience high levels of work life imbalance.

Managerial support was found to have predictive powers in relation to work life imbalance for both male and female employees in aged 18-29 (male employees $p<0.05$, female employees $p<0.05$). The negative sign of the regression coefficient reveals that the greater the degree to which male and female employees aged 18-29 feel that they are supported by their managers in accessing and availing of work life balance initiatives, the less likely they are to experience high levels of work life imbalance.

Career consequence was found to have predictive powers in relation to work life imbalance for both male and female employees aged 18-29 however it appears that careers consequence plays a relatively stronger role in predicting work life imbalance for females than their male colleagues (male employees $p<0.05$, female employees $p<0.01$). The positive sign of the regression coefficient reveals that the greater the degree to which male and female employees aged 18-29 feel that there are likely to be career consequences to availing of work life balance initiatives or programmes, the more likely they are to experience high levels of work life imbalance.

Table 3; Standard Regression Analysis for Work Life Imbalance as Predicted by Job Involvement, Managerial Support and Career Consequences for Male and Females Employees Aged 18-29 years of age

	Predictor Variable	beta	SE	B	t	Sig.	R ²	Adjusted R ²
Male	Job Involvement	.217	.094	.225	2.30	.024	.198	.170
	Managerial Support	-.272	.125	-.232	-2.18	.032		
	Career Consequence	.197	.102	.205	1.94	.050		
Female	Job Involvement	.166	.124	.135	1.34	.183	.214	.185
	Managerial Support	-.284	.129	-.239	-2.20	.030		
	Career Consequence	.299	.103	.310	2.91	.005		

Employees aged 30-39

We then looked at those individuals who are at the developing career stage, so those employees in the age category of 30-39 years of age. As can be seen from Table 4 below a number of factors were found to have significant predictive powers in relation to work life imbalance among male and female employees aged 30-39 years of age. Firstly, job involvement was found to be a significant predictor of work life imbalance for female employees aged 30-39 (female employees $p < .01$) however it was found to have no predictive qualities for their male employee counterparts within this age category. The positive sign of the regression coefficient reveals that the greater the degree to which female employees aged 30-39 feel that they are highly involved in their working roles, the more likely they are to experience high levels of work life imbalance.

Managerial support was found to have significant predictive powers in relation to work life imbalance for both male and female employees in aged 30-39 (male employees $p < 0.05$, female employees $p < 0.01$). The negative sign of the regression coefficient reveals that the greater the degree to which male and female employees aged 30-39 feel that they are supported by their managers in accessing and availing of work life balance initiatives, the less likely they are to experience high levels of work life imbalance.

Career consequence was found to have significant predictive powers in relation to work life imbalance for both male and female employees aged 30-39 (male employees $p < 0.01$, female employees $p < 0.01$). The positive sign of the regression coefficient reveals that the greater the degree to which male and female employees aged 30-39 feel that there are likely to be career consequences to availing of work life balance initiatives or programmes, the more likely they are to experience high levels of work life imbalance. This is a significant findings for this particular cohort of employees and is likely to reflect the fact that individuals in the 30's are more likely to be actively attempting to advance their careers and so are acutely aware of the potential consequences of being perceived as not fully committed to their work or organisation.

Table 4; Standard Regression Analysis for Work Life Imbalance as Predicted by Job Involvement, Managerial Support and Career Consequences for Male and Females Employees Aged 30-39 years of age

	Predictor Variable	beta	SE	B	t	Sig.	R ²	Adjusted R ²
Male	Job Involvement	.152	.085	.143	1.79	.076	.283	.265
	Managerial Support	-.245	.100	-.210	-2.44	.016		
	Career Consequence	.360	.087	.364	4.14	.000		
Female	Job Involvement	.246	.084	.212	2.93	.004	.310	.295
	Managerial Support	-.252	.091	-.243	-2.76	.007		
	Career Consequence	.283	.074	.336	3.82	.000		

Employees aged 40–49

We then turned our attention to those individuals who are at the consolidating stage of their career, so those employees in the age category of 40-49 years of age. As can be seen from Table 5 below a number of factors were found to have significant predictive powers in relation to work life imbalance among male and female employees aged 40-49 years of age. Firstly, job involvement was found to be a significant predictor of work life imbalance for both male and female employees aged 40-49 (male employees $p < 0.01$; female employees $p < .01$). The positive sign of the regression coefficient reveals that the greater the degree to which male and female employees aged 40-49 feel that they are highly involved in their working roles, the more likely they are to experience high levels of work life imbalance.

Managerial support was found to have some predictive powers in relation to work life imbalance for female employees only aged 40-49 ($p < 0.05$). The negative sign of the regression coefficient reveals that the greater the degree to which female employees aged 40-49 feel that they are supported by their managers in accessing and availing of work life balance initiatives, the less likely they are to experience high levels of work life imbalance. It is interesting to note that managerial support was not found to have any predictive powers in relation to work life imbalance for male employees aged 40-49.

Career consequence was found to have no predictive powers in relation to work life imbalance for either male or female employees aged 40-49. This is an interesting finding and would appear to suggest that as employees age and reach a consolidating stage of their career development they are less concerned with possible or potential career consequences or perhaps have already been a victim to them. Further research is required to ascertain the likely cause of this effect.

Table 5; Standard Regression Analysis for Work Life Imbalance as Predicted by Job Involvement, Managerial Support and Career Consequences for Male and Females Employees Aged 40-49 years of age

	Predictor Variable	beta	SE	β	t	Sig.	R ²	Adjusted R ²
Male	Job Involvement	.252	.092	.299	2.74	.008	.138	.103
	Managerial Support	-.157	.097	-.185	-1.62	.109		
	Career Consequence	.029	.107	.031	.270	.788		
Female	Job Involvement	.392	.125	.307	3.15	.002	.158	.131

	Managerial Support	-.230	.117	-.203	-1.96	.053		
	Career Consequence	.168	.091	.186	1.85	.067		

Employees aged 50 and over

The final cohort whom we examined was those individuals who at final or pre-retirement stage of their careers, so those employees in the age category of 50+ years of age. As can be seen from Table 6 below a number of factors were found to have significant predictive powers in relation to work life imbalance among male and female employees aged 50+ years of age. Job involvement was found to be a significant predictor of work life imbalance for male only employees aged 50+ (male employees $p < .01$) however it was found to have no predictive qualities for their female employee counterparts within this age category. The positive sign of the regression coefficient reveals that the greater the degree to which male employees aged 50+ feel that they are highly involved in their working roles, the more likely they are to experience high levels of work life imbalance.

Managerial support was again found to have significant predictive powers in relation to work life imbalance for both male and female employees in this age category (male employees $p < 0.01$, female employees $p < 0.01$). The negative sign of the regression coefficient reveals that the greater the degree to which male and female employees aged 50+ feel that they are supported by their managers in accessing and availing of work life balance initiatives, the less likely they are to experience high levels of work life imbalance.

Career consequence was found to have no significant predictive powers in relation to work life imbalance for either male and female employees aged 50+ years. This finding is not surprising given the absence of any predictive powers of the variable among the 40-49 years age grouping and for the reasons we have outlined above as potential explanatory factors.

Table 6; Standard Regression Analysis for Work Life Imbalance as Predicted by Job Involvement, Managerial Support and Career Consequences for Male and Females Employees Aged 50+ years of age

	Predictor Variable	beta	SE	β	t	Sig.	R ²	Adjusted R ²
Male	Job Involvement	.545	.160	.446	3.406	.001	.309	.267
	Managerial Support	-.602	.152	-.525	-3.969	.000		
	Career Consequence	.085	.114	.090	.747	.459		
Female	Job Involvement	.165	.162	.135	1.020	.312	.142	.094
	Managerial Support	-.380	.145	-.333	-2.617	.011		
	Career Consequence	.185	.113	.216	1.641	.107		

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings shed new light on our understanding of the antecedents of work life imbalance. The research not only advances our understanding of the factors which

impact upon work life imbalance but they offer us a unique insight into the differences in how work life balance is experienced by male and female employees but also crucially how it is experienced by male and female employees as they progress through the various career stages typified by our four distinct age categorisations.

In total four hypotheses were proposed and found to be true. Support was found for hypothesis 1 which proposed that job involvement was likely to be a significant predictor of work life imbalance for workers at early and mid career stage as they seek to advance up the corporate ladder. The research has found this to be true of both male and female employees. This finding suggests that employees are prepared, or forced, to invest heavily in their careers during the earlier career stages however this has a dramatic impact on the quality of their lives and in particular the high levels of work life imbalance they experience. The more heavily invested an individual is in their working life the more likely they are to experience high levels of work life imbalance.

It is interesting to see from the findings that only females in the 50+ age category were immune from this phenomenon. We could speculate as to the reasons for this – it may be that this grouping is dominated by women returning to work after a career break and hence are content to work reduced or flexible hours in lower level jobs however it is unclear from the data and further research would be required.

Support was also found for hypothesis 2 which proposed that managerial support has a negative impact upon work life imbalance for all employees at early and mid career stages, irrespective of gender. Again this hypothesis was found to be true of both male and female employees across three of the four age categories notably the 18-29 age group, the 30-39 age group and the 50+ age grouping. Within the 40-49 age group this hypothesis was only relevant to the female workers. Clearly we can see from these findings that managerial support is an extremely important factor when it comes to improving individual employees work life imbalance. The formal and most importantly, the informal messages a manager sends with regard to accessing and availing of work life balance initiatives cannot be underestimated in terms of the effect it potentially has on subordinate employees behaviour. It is vital therefore that organisations seek to foster a culture of acceptance and embrace new ways of working which reward outputs rather than presentism. All too often organisations pay lip service to the idea of obtaining and maintaining a healthy work life balance when the reality is that the expectations of managers remain unchanged as to need for employees to commit 100% to their work. An excellent example of this is a manager holding out of hours meetings either before work in the morning or late in the evening. Those employees with childcare responsibilities or nonwork domain activities are automatically disadvantaged and have to make often difficult choices.

Managerial support and career consequences appear to be significant factors impacting on younger respondents work life imbalance suggesting that those at the earlier stage in their careers are more aware of the negative consequences of availing of work life balance initiatives and look to their managers to provide signals of support or approval that availing of such initiatives will not harm their career prospects. The findings further

suggest that female respondents consistently identify managerial support as a factor impacting upon their work life imbalance irrespective of their age. For their male counterparts the findings suggest that job involvement is key however interestingly not for those males in the 30-39 age grouping where again it appears that managerial support and career consequences are the significant factors.

These findings shed new light on our understanding of the antecedents of work life imbalance and have particular implications for organizations who wish to foster a culture which values work life balance. In particular organizations may need to re-think their policy in relation to work life balance and more specifically target different groups, depending upon age and possibly gender, in order to maximise the positive impact of different policies. It is likely, from our initial analysis, that organizations wishing to minimize work life imbalance among younger staff members would be wise to examine the attitudes and work styles of direct supervisors to ensure that key organizational values in relation to work life balance are being embraced and are visible to staff. Often the most visible indication of work life imbalance can be found in excessive working hours which are very often the result of employees feeling unable to leave on time for fear of being seen as not committed to the job by their manager.

While this research is seen as a foundation block it is clear that examining work life imbalance from a life cycle perspective across gender and age groupings can produce valuable insights from both a theoretical and practitioner perspective. It is clear that organisations need to adopt a more tailored approach to work life balance programmes and initiatives and have the courage to move away from a 'one size fits all' approach. It is clear that persisting to do so not only will result in organisations failing to directly meet the needs of their employees but is also likely to be a considerable waste of valuable resources. Organisations need to get smarter in terms of how they approach the issues and complexities of modern day living for their employees and begin to target specific groups, by age and/or gender, with tailor made work life balance initiatives.

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Appendix

Table 1 – Items and Scales

Scale Item	Reliability Coefficient Cronbach's Alpha α	Mean	Variance
Job Involvement Scale – Frone & Rice (1987)			
Most of my personal life goals are job-centred	.74	3.28	1.19
To me, my job is only a small part of who I am			
I am very much involved personally in my job			
I live, eat and breathe my job			
Most of my interests are centred around my job			
I have strong ties with my present job which would be very difficult to break			
Managerial Support - Adapted from Thompson et al. (1999)			
In general, managers in this organisation are quite accommodating of personal needs	.78	4.97	.05
Senior management in this organisation encourage supervisors/line managers to be sensitive to employees' personal/non-work concerns.			
Middle managers and executives in this organization are sympathetic toward employees' responsibilities/commitments outside work.			
In the event of conflict, managers are understanding when employees have to put their personal lives first			
In this organization, employees are encouraged to strike a balance between their work and non-work lives.			
Career Consequences (R) - Adapted from Thompson et al. (1999)			
In this organisation employees who participate in available work family programs (e.g. job sharing, part-time work) are viewed as less serious about their careers than those who do not participate in these programs	.70	4.22	.07
To turn down a promotion or transfer for family related reasons will seriously hurt one's career progress in this organisation			
In this organisation employees who use flexi-options are less likely to advance their careers than those who do not use flexi-options			
Work-Life Imbalance			
My job keeps me away from the people and activities that are important to me too much	.80	4.55	.42
I feel I have more to do than I can handle comfortably			
I wish I had more time to do things for myself			
I feel physically drained when I get home from work			
I feel I have to rush to get everything done each day			
I feel emotionally drained when I get home from work			