

## ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on interpersonal contributions to the pursuit of work and family goals in employed parents with preschool children. The combination of work and family is a central task in middle adulthood with a potential for stress and enhancement. Based on the assumption that this task is realized within the context of social networks such as families, the present study aimed at integrating individual and social aspects into the study of successful management of work and family goals in middle adulthood. Informed by the collective extension of the model of selective optimization with compensation (M. M. Baltes & P. B. Baltes, 1990; M. M. Baltes & Carstensen, 1998) it was examined to which extent time-related characteristics of both partners' work and family goals affect the organization of goals between the partners, how conflict and convergence in interpersonal goal relations influence the developmental success of employed parents, and whether grandparental childcare buffers the negative effects of interpersonal goal conflict in the present sample.

The sample is composed of 42 dual-earner couples with preschool children (M age = 37 years, M paid work = 41 h/week; M number of children = 2). A short-term longitudinal design was chosen to examine processes at different levels of abstraction. Predictors and global outcomes were assessed 6 weeks apart via internet, with a one week time-sampling phase in between.

Results indicate that the time-intensity of personal goals was positively related to reports of interpersonal goal conflict and that the quality of interpersonal goal relations influences pursuit and progress on work and family goals in the present sample. Interpersonal goal convergence was positively related to daily goal pursuits and overall goal progress. Results on interpersonal goal conflict reveal a complex pattern. Within individuals, interpersonal goal conflict seemed to enhance daily goal pursuit but also was related to high goal pursuit variability, whereas between partners, a negative relation to goal pursuit was found which was buffered by grandparental childcare. These opposing forces might explain why interpersonal goal conflict was independent of overall goal progress. Successful goal pursuit and goal progress were reflected by high subjective well-being and low physiological arousal as indicated by free cortisol in saliva. The findings of the present study are in line with propositions by life-span scholars that successful development requires both individual agency and interpersonal cooperation. The results show that coordination of personal goals at the level of the couple fosters the management of work and family goals in the present sample and that grandparents contribute to the developmental success of employed parents by providing childcare to small grandchildren.