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# Perceived Organisational Support, Work-Life Balance, and Employee Engagement and Job Satisfaction: A Moderated Mediation Study of Grandparent Status

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## ABSTRACT

While older workers have received considerable attention from researchers, far less is known about the work experiences of grandparents. This study examines how perceived organisational support (POS) influences work-life balance (WLB) and work outcomes (employee engagement and job satisfaction) with grandparent status as a moderator. Using a moderated mediation model tested on 783 New Zealand employees (including 155 grandparents) with the PROCESS macro, we find support for all direct effects. Importantly, when POS is high, grandparents report significantly higher WLB than non-grandparents. Moderated mediation analyses further show that the indirect effect of POS on engagement and job satisfaction, via WLB, is strongest for grandparents. These findings position grandparents as a distinct and often under-recognised segment of the workforce, suggesting they may engage with social exchange relationships in unique ways. For HR practice, this recognition goes beyond demographic categorisation—it calls for a critical evaluation of policies related to flexibility, leave, and wellbeing through the lens of later-life caregiving responsibilities. By doing so, HR practitioners can better support the engagement and retention of this group, while researchers are encouraged to consider grandparent status as a meaningful variable in future HRM scholarship.

## 1 | Introduction

An article published in the Financial Review titled ‘The grandparents who help keep mothers at work, but at a cost’ argued that grandparents are often the glue that holds the social fabric of working families together (Hare 2022). Yet, despite many grandparents being in paid work, their workplace experiences remain underexplored. This is an important gap to address because the OECD projected that the old-age dependency ratio, a demographic indicator that measures the size of the population aged 65 and over relative to that of people at classic working ages 20–64, will increase by two-thirds in OECD economies, from 30% in 2020 to 50% in 2050 (OECD 2020). Long-range projections suggest the New Zealand workforce aged 65–79 years is expected to make up 10% of the total workforce (Statistics New Zealand 2025a). Thus, HR has a key role to play in ensuring

grandparent workers are at their best for the needs of a successful employer and societal benefit. This study will demonstrate that organisational support has amplified benefits for working grandparents.

New Zealand offers an interesting country to study older workers. Like most OECD countries, it has an aging population. New Zealand census data reports that almost one in four people aged 65+ are in paid work (Statistics New Zealand 2025a), noting a steady increase in paid work for this cohort over time. Further, New Zealand has high immigration trends (André et al. 2024) and fertility rates, alongside Australia, that are relatively high in comparison to other OECD countries (Milovanović 2023). However, given one could be a grandparent from a young age (e.g., early 30s), grandparents should not simply and exclusively be viewed as a subset of older workers. Indeed, the HRM

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## Summary

- Grandparents experience higher WLB than non-grandparents when perceived organisational support (POS) is high.
- POS indirectly enhances engagement and job satisfaction via WLB, strongest for grandparents.
- Grandparent status should be recognised as a key factor in WLB research.
- Working grandparents are a diverse group in terms of demographics, unique family configurations, proximity and locations.

literature has acknowledged the role that grandparents might play in aiding careers (Fischlmayr and Puchmüller 2016) or simply providing additional support (e.g., Zhang et al. 2020).

Hamilton and Suthersan (2021) sought to address the lack of attention given to grandparents' labour market participation by examining the impact of regular intergenerational childcare on employment and retirement decisions. They found that grandparents' choices about paid work are deeply embedded in idealised forms of parenting and are also highly gendered. Building on this perspective, Buchanan and Rotkirch (2018) highlighted how grandparenting is shaped not only by individual traits but also by cultural variation. Extending these insights cross-nationally, Floridi (2022) reported that the negative association between daily grandchild care and employment is most pronounced in countries with familistic approaches to childcare. Similarly, Bertogg (2023) showed that both the practical need for childcare and the obligations embedded in prevailing social support norms influence how grandparents balance care and employment.

While not an expansive literature, studies of grandparents in paid work have been primarily directed at grandmothers in paid employment (Harrington-Meyer 2014; Frimmel et al. 2022). This is not surprising given the accommodating care lexicons that have been central to studies on grandparents and work (Day 2021). Consistent with this focus, Backhaus and Barslund (2021) found a large negative impact of grandparenthood on the employment rate of women aged 55–64 in European countries with limited formal childcare, whereas men's labour supply was largely unaffected. Further, Arpino and Bellani (2022), using longitudinal data from Europe, found the provision of grandchild care tends to be beneficial for grandmothers' wellbeing only if they do not combine this activity with paid work. They caution, however, that 'juggling paid work and childcare to grandchildren may result in an excessive burden which eliminates the potential benefits of grandchild care on older women's wellbeing' (p. 6).

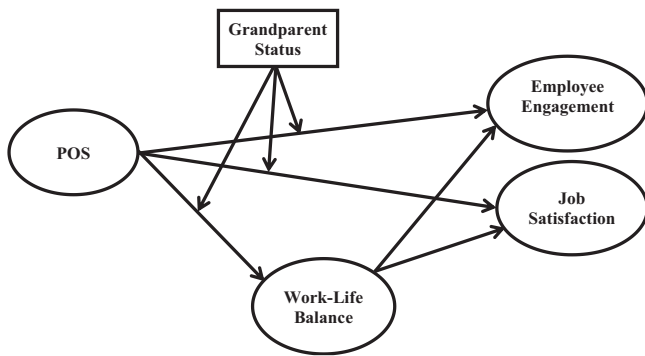
Grandparents, both male and female, can be very good supporters for their own children, especially children who are working mothers. For example, grandparents' involvement has been shown to positively influence mothers' labour market participation (Kanji 2018), while grandchild care is associated with lower levels of family-to-work conflict for parents (Robertson and Eby 2021). In contrast, Kulik et al. (2017) found that although grandparents may still experience some family-to-work conflict,

its contribution to both positive and negative affect is less pronounced than in earlier life stages. Taken together, these studies suggest that grandparents' involvement offers important benefits for families, but that the intensity and consequences of this involvement differ across roles, genders and life stages.

Cantillon et al. (2021) call for greater recognition of the vital role grandparents play in sustaining economic life, noting that stigma around older people as burdens and the undervaluing of unpaid care work creates a 'double invisibility.' Paid employment can help contest assumptions that grandparents—especially grandmothers—should always be available 'on demand' (Day 2021), instead providing a legitimate reason to limit childcare responsibilities (Harrington-Meyer 2014). At the same time, grandparent involvement clearly benefits families. During Covid-19 lockdowns, for example, grandparents isolated from grandchildren reported heightened nervousness, depression and loneliness (Yordanova and Markova 2023). Proximity also matters: while multigenerational households are common, studies rarely consider how grandparents influence work–family dynamics within parent–child dyads (Mustillo et al. 2021).

This study draws on meta-analytic evidence that perceived organisational support (POS, Eisenberger et al. 1986) is fundamentally a key workplace perception that is vital for employee achievement. We build off meta-analysis and reviews showing POS influences key work outcomes including job satisfaction and employee engagement (Kurtessis et al. 2017; Eisenberger et al. 2020; Mazzetti et al. 2023). However, what remains unknown is whether this functions similarly for grandparents. This becomes our core study focus. Next, we then extend the influence of POS on employee engagement and job satisfaction and include WLB, because this similarly has meta-analytic support with POS (Kurtessis et al. 2017; Vaziri et al. 2022), although links to engagement are limited, as are mediation effects to these outcomes. Thus, there are conceptual overlaps in our model; although currently, there are limited grandparent worker insights. Indeed, WLB studies have shown it to be valuable for parents and non-parents (see Haar 2013), but there has been no extension of the research to consider grandparents alone. We use organisational support theory (Eisenberger et al. 1986) to ground our research, suggesting greater support enhances WLB, which in turn bolsters job satisfaction and employee engagement.

While a rich body of knowledge about work-life balance (WLB) exists (e.g., Haar et al. 2014; Haar and Harris 2023), there are still many groups of under-explored workers who need further research exposure, with older workers only recently gaining attention (e.g., Haar et al. 2024). Ultimately, this study makes three contributions. First, we explore if POS is positively related to employee engagement and job satisfaction, and whether WLB acts as a mediator using a broadly supportive sample of the New Zealand workforce who are grandparents. While these relationships are established in the literature individually (Kurtessis et al. 2017; Vaziri et al. 2022; Haar et al. 2014), we don't know if they hold together. Second, we examine how grandparent status might moderate the effects of POS, and whether grandparents enjoy enhanced beneficial effects from POS. Given they are a growing section of the New Zealand workforce (New Zealand Statistics, 2025), understanding potential benefits or harmful



**FIGURE 1** | Study model.

effects is critical for HR. Finally, we test grandparent status as a boundary condition such that the indirect effect of POS on (a) employee engagement and (b) job satisfaction, with WLB as the mediator, will be more beneficial for grandparents (moderated mediation). Our study model is shown in Figure 1.

## 2 | Theoretical Underpinnings and Hypotheses

A clear orientation in the study of the work-home interface for working parents has been present since the initial stages of parenthood. This is also a time that organisations often provide support to working parents, such as through parental leave. Receiving support from others is fundamental for reducing work–family conflict (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985) and for achieving higher WLB (e.g., Haar et al. 2024). Work–family conflict captures the tension between work and family roles, such as childcare, while WLB represents achieving harmony between work and all other roles (Haar 2013). Studies have shown WLB to influence work and well-being outcomes over and above the effects of work–family conflict (see Haar 2013; Haar et al. 2014), suggesting it is more important than focusing on conflict alone. Meta-analytic evidence shows POS can aid in reducing conflict and enhancing balance, although studies (Haar 2013; Haar et al. 2014) show that WLB influences outcomes beyond the effects of work–family conflict, making this a key workplace factor to test.

However, within work-life studies, scant attention has been given to care for children by other individuals, for example, siblings, grandparents, other relatives, or family friends (Kelliher et al. 2019). Little is known about the impacts of caregiving on labour market participation of grandparents themselves, and even less is known about the effects of POS and WLB on work outcomes of grandparents in paid work.

POS typically uses organisational support theory, built on social exchange theory, to understand why high levels of POS benefit employees (see Eisenberger et al. 1986; Kurtessis et al. 2017). Haar and Spell (2004) state ‘social exchange theory recognizes conditions under which individuals feel obligated to reciprocate when they personally benefit from another’s actions’ (p. 1041). Applied to POS, when an employee perceives they can rely on their organisation to be interested in their wellbeing and come to their aid in a time of crisis, then employees become psychologically obliged to reciprocate (Haar and Spell 2004). Cropanzano et al. (2017) extended SET by suggesting the consideration of

(1) hedonic value and (2) activity. Cropanzano et al. (2017) note the hedonic value axis refers to desirable value at one end and undesirable at the other. Further, the activity axis refers to ‘the extent to which an entity actively exhibits the behavior in question’ (p. 497), ranging from one pole where activity is exhibited and the other end where such activities are withheld.

Within this conceptualisation, high POS represents the quadrant whereby employees perceive their organisation—which is our focus here—as administering desirable behaviour (desirable hedonic value and active exhibit). Low POS may signal different organisational responses, including: (1) choosing not to engage in undesirable behaviour, (2) actively engaging in undesirable behaviour or (3) failing to provide desirable behaviour. Organisational support is helpful for shaping employee WLB (see Kurtessis et al. 2017), and POS refers to employee perceptions regarding the extent to which their employer ‘values their contributions and cares about their well-being’ (Eisenberger et al. 1986, 501). In effect, POS leads to felt obligations and enhanced work outcomes—specifically higher job satisfaction and employee engagement, because such support perceptions are desirable and actively exhibited by the organisation (Cropanzano et al. 2017).

In their meta-analysis of 154 samples and over 64 thousand employees, Kurtessis et al. (2017) reported a corrected mean correlation of 0.65, indicating a large effect size. While the empirical evidence for POS influencing engagement is limited, the review by Eisenberger et al. (2020) stated ‘POS communicates the organisation’s valuation of employees’ efforts and meets their needs for esteem and approval, which could also promote employees’ intrinsic interest and thus their work engagement’ (p. 112). This argument is supported by empirical studies, with Tan et al. (2020) finding POS positively related to engagement.

While there is meta-analysis supporting POS and work-family balance (Kurtessis et al. 2017), this is distinct from WLB (see Haar 2013). A more specific WLB meta-analysis (Vaziri et al. 2022) found organisational support was positively related to a large effect size (true population correlation estimate of 0.51). High POS can aid WLB, which reflects the extent to which an individual can manage the multiple roles in their life, including work, family, and other major responsibilities (Haar 2013). WLB studies share a commonality around employers having ‘an underlying commitment to help employees obtain a balance between work and family obligations’ (Wood et al. 2003, 221); under social exchange theory, high POS means employees know their employer will aid them in challenging times, leading to better WLB. We posit the following.

**Hypothesis 1.** *POS will positively influence (a) WLB, (b) employee engagement and (c) job satisfaction.*

Research also shows that employees with higher WLB report enhanced wellbeing and work outcomes (Haar and Brougham 2022), including job satisfaction (Haar et al. 2018)—including across cultures (Haar et al. 2014), as well as engagement (Wood et al. 2020). Further, the literature often examines WLB as a mediator of work factors including conflict (Haar et al. 2014), leadership style (Ugwoke et al. 2023), or pay fairness (Haar et al. 2018). Ultimately, WLB is expected to be a

positive influence on employee engagement and job satisfaction, as the felt obligation from high WLB creates felt obligations on employees to apply themselves more to their work, enhancing engagement and satisfaction. Thus, WLB will influence engagement and job satisfaction, and reduce (mediate) the direct effect or influence of POS on these outcomes. We posit the following.

**Hypothesis 2.** *WLB will positively influence (a) employee engagement and (b) job satisfaction.*

**Hypothesis 3.** *WLB will mediate the influence of POS on (a) employee engagement and (b) job satisfaction.*

We now apply grandparent status to organisational support theory and hypothesise distinct effects. To date, the current relationships remain untested in the literature, and thus an exploratory approach is undertaken, whereby we suggest grandparent status might shape social exchanges and enhance the influence of POS on outcomes. We argue that grandparents will respond more favourably to POS than other employees with dependents because they potentially have the additional responsibility, and enjoyment, of grandchildren. Having an employer who caters for worker wellbeing and who can be relied on for support, such as quickly needing to work remotely while caring for grandchildren or finishing work early to pick grandchildren up or attending school events, are likely to lead to enhanced reciprocation benefits under social exchange theory (Haar and Spell 2004). Thus, grandparents compared to other parents are likely to be especially psychologically grateful for high POS and respond appropriately with enhanced work outcomes. We suggest this will lead to them having greater felt obligations (Haar and Spell 2004) and thus reciprocating with stronger WLB, employee engagement and job satisfaction when POS is high, compared to non-grandparents.

A Swedish study of grandparents found ‘most individuals live within daily reach of their kin’ (Lundholm and Malmberg 2009, 121), although this is not always the case (see Kalmijn 2021). However, on average, given most grandparents are located close to grandchildren, including in New Zealand (see Keeling et al. 2008). Indeed, we suggest that grandparents might view the opportunity of engaging more with their grandchildren as being highly beneficial, including in New Zealand (Breheny et al. 2013). Given the evidence that POS can facilitate WLB (Kurtessis et al. 2017), it stands that high POS might facilitate greater opportunities for engagement with grandchildren for grandparents, casting an especially positive perception around organisational support. Overall, we suggest the greatest benefits from POS will be for grandparents with closer proximity. Kurtessis et al. (2017) remind us that high POS reflects the perception that help is available if needed—and thus these benefits could enhance the felt obligations of social exchange even if grandparents aren’t using them at present. We hypothesise the following moderation effect.

**Hypothesis 4.** *Grandparent status will moderate the effects on POS leading to more beneficial effects on (a) WLB, (b) employee engagement and (c) job satisfaction.*

Finally, we include grandparent status as a moderator of the mediated relationships between POS, WLB, and engagement and

satisfaction. Such studies have grown because they provide new insights and directions (e.g., Haar et al. 2024). For example, testing grandparent status as a boundary condition might provide greater insight and understanding in how grandparents respond to POS. We suggest that the indirect effect of POS on employee engagement and job satisfaction through WLB will be stronger for grandparents, compared to non-grandparents. This leads to our final hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 5.** *Grandparent status will act as a boundary condition such that the indirect effect of POS on (a) employee engagement and (b) job satisfaction, with WLB as the mediator, will be more beneficial for grandparents (moderated mediation).*

## 3 | Method

### 3.1 | Sample and Participants

Data were collected in New Zealand using a Qualtrics survey panel. The survey methodology was approved by the university ethics committee (Approval no: 21/426). Qualtrics provides researchers a service of accessing a large database of employees who are paid to complete surveys. They send out invitations, and if potential respondents meet qualifiers, they can participate. This study had three qualifiers: (1) being in paid employment; (2) working 20 h/week minimum; and (3) having dependents. Because we focus on grandparents, we capture all respondents with dependents (e.g., children) to ensure comparisons between respondents are as similar (i.e., excluding respondents with no dependents). Bernerth et al. (2021) recommend a few tests for online survey collection, which we follow. This includes a focus on time and removing respondents completing the survey too fast or too slow (typically 30% above and below the median time). Next, an instructed response item was included, which is a test for attention, specifically ‘For this question, answer disagree only’. Those that fail the test are automatically removed from the survey.

In total, 783 respondents with dependents fully completed the survey. Overall, a sufficiently sized group ( $n=155$ ) identified as grandparent employees (19.8%). Overall, respondents were slightly more likely to be male (57.3%), which aligns well with the New Zealand average (Statistics New Zealand 2025b), with an average age of 44.60 years ( $SD=8.35$ ), also close to the average New Zealand workforce age of 44.98 years (Statistics New Zealand 2024). Comparing grandparents and non-grandparents, grandparents are on average 12 years older ( $M=54.41$  years,  $SD=9.82$  versus  $M=42.17$  years,  $SD=5.80$ ). By ethnicity, respondents are mainly New Zealand Europeans (61.3%), Māori (25.8%) or Asian (8.6%). Respondents had an average tenure of 5.35 years ( $SD=3.61$ ). By sector, the majority came from the private sector (70.6%), followed by the public/government sector (24.6%) and the not-for-profit sector (4.7%).

### 3.2 | Measures

POS was measured using the 4-item short construct by Eisenberger et al. (1986), coded 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree. This short scale has been validated (e.g., J. Haar 2023).

Questions followed the stem ‘My organisation...’, with a sample item being ‘My organisation takes pride in my accomplishments at work’ ( $\alpha=0.85$ ).

WLB was measured using the three-item scale by Haar (2013), coded 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree. A sample item is ‘Nowadays, I seem to enjoy every part of my life equally well’ ( $\alpha=0.79$ ). This measure has strong psychometric support across multiple cultural groups and settings (e.g., Haar and Brougham 2022; Haar and Harris 2023).

*Employee engagement* was measured using nine items by Shuck et al. (2017), coded 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree. Sample items are ‘I concentrate on my job when I am at work’ (cognitive engagement), ‘I believe in the mission and purpose of my organisation’ (emotional engagement) and ‘I really push myself to work beyond what is expected of me’ (behavioural engagement). As per the literature (e.g., Ghosh et al. 2019), these items were summed for a single employee engagement score ( $\alpha=0.85$ ). We conducted a test of a higher-order construct to confirm the three-dimensional engagement measure:  $\chi^2$  (df) = 82.1 (26), CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.06, and SRMR = 0.03. An alternative CFA was tested, with all nine items reflecting a single engagement factor, and this was significantly ( $p < 0.0001$ ) a poorer fit to the data.

*Job satisfaction* was measured using three items by Judge et al. (2005), coded 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree. A sample item is ‘Most days I am enthusiastic about my work’ ( $\alpha=0.83$ ).

*Grandparent status* was assessed by the question ‘Are you a grandparent?’ with responses coded 0=non-grandparent, 1=Grandparent.

**Control Variables:** We controlled for *Age* (in years), *Tenure* (in years), and *Hours Worked* (per week) due to meta-analytical support for these demographics on outcomes (Ng and Feldman 2008, 2010). We also controlled for *Ethnicity* (1=New Zealand Europeans, 0=others) due to childcaring differences (Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (SUPERU) 2015) and *Gender* (1=females, 0=males) (Hamilton and Suthersan 2021), which also account for childcare differences (Horsfall and Dempsey 2015).

### 3.3 | Measurement Models

We conducted a global CFA with all measures using AMOS (version 28). The overall CFA was a good fit to the data:  $\chi^2$  (df) = 396.1 (163), CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.05, and SRMR = 0.04. Further, alternative CFAs were tested to confirm the hypothesised measures were the best fit, and this was confirmed, with all alternatives significantly poorer fit (all  $p < 0.001$ ). We also conducted a metric invariance test to confirm that grandparents and non-grandparents answered items in similar patterns. Multi-group CFA was conducted, and the resulting analysis (Vandenberg and Lance 2000) using the RMSEA (Cheung and Rensvold 2000) showed no difference (0.00) in the RMSEA score, which is below the established critical value

(Cheung and Rensvold 2000). This supports measurement invariance, meaning comparative analysis is possible.

### 3.4 | Analysis

Hypotheses were tested in SPSS (version 28) using the PROCESS 4.0 program. To test mediation effects, Model 4 of PROCESS was used, while Model 8 was used for moderation and moderated mediation effects. Analysis included bootstrapping (5000 times), confidence intervals across the 95% intervals, lower limits (LL), and upper limits (UL), and confirming mediation effects by examining indirect effects (in Model 4).

Consequently, Podsakoff et al. (2003) suggestion of conducting Harman’s One-Factor test as a rudimentary test was followed. An unrotated factor analysis found that the dominant factor accounted for only 29.7% variance, which is well under the 50% threshold (Podsakoff et al. 2003).

### 3.5 | Common Method Bias

Podsakoff et al. (2003) recommended conducting the Harman’s One-Factor test as a rudimentary test of common method bias (CMB). An unrotated factor analysis found that the dominant factor accounted for only 29.7% of the variance, which is well under the 50% threshold (Podsakoff et al. 2003).

## 4 | Results

Descriptive statistics for the study variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that POS is significantly correlated with WLB ( $r=0.53$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and employee engagement ( $r=0.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and job satisfaction ( $r=0.58$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). WLB is significantly correlated with employee engagement ( $r=0.37$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and job satisfaction ( $r=0.57$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). While employee engagement and job satisfaction are significantly correlated ( $r=0.53$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), grandparent status is not significantly correlated with any key variable (all  $p > 0.05$ ). Looking at the breakdown for grandparent status, we find that 19.8% ( $n=155$ ) are grandparents and 80.2% are parents but not grandparents.

Results of the direct, moderation and moderated mediation analyses are shown in Tables 2–4.

The results show that POS is significantly related to WLB ( $\beta=0.55$  (0.03),  $p < 0.0001$ , [LL=0.49, UL=0.61]), employee engagement ( $\beta=0.30$  (0.02),  $p < 0.0001$ , [LL=0.26, UL=0.35]) and job satisfaction ( $\beta=0.60$  (0.03),  $p < 0.0001$ , [LL=0.54, UL=0.66]). This supports Hypothesis 1a,c. WLB is significantly related to both employee engagement ( $\beta=0.22$  (0.03),  $p < 0.0001$ , [LL=0.16, UL=0.27]) and job satisfaction ( $\beta=0.39$  (0.03),  $p < 0.0001$ , [LL=0.33, UL=0.46]), and we further hypothesised that WLB would mediate the influence of POS and was partially supported. The addition of WLB leads to the reduction in the direct effect of POS on

**TABLE 1** | Correlations and descriptive statistics of study variables.

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	44.60	8.35	—							
2. Tenure	5.35	3.61	0.21**	—						
3. Hours worked	38.31	8.15	-0.06	0.06	—					
4. POS	3.70	0.81	-0.15**	-0.04	0.02	—				
5. WLB	3.65	0.83	-0.02	0.04	-0.04	0.53**	—			
6. Grandparent status	0.33	0.69	0.53**	0.15**	-0.08*	-0.01	0.05	—		
7. Employee engagement	3.88	0.58	0.04	-0.04	0.04	0.41**	0.37**	0.07	—	
8. Job satisfaction	3.76	0.84	-0.07	0.00	0.01	0.58**	0.57**	0.02	0.53**	—

Note: *N* = 783.

\**p* < 0.05.

\*\**p* < 0.01.

**TABLE 2** | Moderation results towards WLB.

	Variables	WLB		
		$\beta$ (SE)	Confidence intervals	<i>p</i>
Controls	Age	0.00 (0.00)	LL = -0.01, UL = 0.01	0.5819
	Tenure	0.01 (0.01)	LL = -0.00, UL = 0.03	0.0594
	Hours Worked	-0.01 (0.00)	LL = -0.01, UL = -0.00	0.0401
	Ethnicity	-0.01 (0.05)	LL = -0.11, UL = 0.09	0.8467
	Gender	-0.14 (0.05)	LL = -0.24, UL = -0.04	0.0079
Predictor	POS	0.55 (0.03)	LL = 0.49, UL = 0.61	< 0.0001
Moderator	Grandparent	0.08 (0.08)	LL = -0.07, UL = 0.23	0.2947
Interaction	POS × Grandparent	0.23 (0.07)	LL = 0.09, UL = 0.37	0.0011
	Total <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.30 ( <i>F</i> = 41.9303, <i>p</i> < 0.0001)		

employee engagement (reduced to  $\beta = 0.22$  (0.03), *p* < 0.0001, [LL = 0.16, UL = 0.27]) and job satisfaction (reduced to  $\beta = 0.39$  (0.03), *p* < 0.0001, [LL = 0.33, UL = 0.46]). Furthermore, POS retains a significant indirect effect on both outcomes (both *p* < 0.0001), including indirect effects (both *p* < 0.0001). This supports Hypotheses 2a,b and 3a,b.

Results of the moderation and moderated mediated regression analyses show grandparent status interacts significantly with POS towards WLB ( $\beta = 0.23$  (0.07), *p* = 0.0011, [LL = 0.09, UL = 0.37]), accounting for 1% extra variance. There were no significant two-way interactions with either grandparent status towards employee engagement or job satisfaction (both *p* > 0.05). This supports Hypothesis 4a only. There was support for Hypothesis 5a,b, with significant moderated mediation effects found for grandparents towards both employee engagement ( $\beta = 0.04$  (0.02), *p* = 0.0146, [LL = 0.01, UL = 0.07]) and job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.09$  (0.03), *p* = 0.0042, [LL = 0.02, UL = 0.15]). All models were significant (*p* < 0.0001) and accounted for robust amounts of variance towards WLB (30%), employee engagement (22%) and job satisfaction (43%). The significant interaction effects are graphed in Figure 2.

The interaction effects towards WLB (Figure 2) show that at low levels of POS, there is little significant difference in levels of WLB, with those respondents with or without grandchildren reporting similar levels of WLB. When we compare this with respondents in the high POS groups, significant differences are indicated. Respondents who are grandparents report significantly higher WLB than those who are not grandparents. This supports our hypothesised effect.

The significant moderated mediation effects towards employee engagement and job satisfaction are shown in Table 4, where the indirect effect of POS is probed on employee engagement and job satisfaction with WLB as the mediator, conditional on grandparent status (moderator). For non-grandparents, the indirect effect of WLB on employee engagement through WLB is significant ( $\beta = 0.07$  (0.02), *p* < 0.0001, [LLCI = 0.04; ULCI = 0.11]) and similarly so towards job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.18$  (0.03), *p* < 0.0001, [LLCI = 0.13; ULCI = 0.24]). Further, conditional on grandparent status, the indirect effect of POS is significant and larger towards both employee engagement ( $\beta = 0.11$  (0.03), *p* < 0.0001, [LLCI = 0.06; ULCI = 0.17]) and job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.27$  (0.04), *p* < 0.0001, [LLCI = 0.19; ULCI = 0.35]). Overall, the indirect

**TABLE 3** | Moderated mediation results towards work outcomes.

		Employee engagement		
	Variables	$\beta$ (SE)	Confidence intervals	<i>p</i>
Controls	Age	0.01 (0.00)	LL = 0.00, UL = 0.01	0.0085
	Tenure	-0.01 (0.01)	LL = -0.02, UL = 0.00	0.0752
	Hours worked	0.00 (0.00)	LL = -0.00, UL = 0.01	0.1384
	Ethnicity	-0.09 (0.04)	LL = -0.16, UL = -0.01	0.0248
	Gender	0.00 (0.04)	LL = -0.07, UL = 0.08	0.9590
Predictor	POS	0.30 (0.02)	LL = 0.26, UL = 0.35	< 0.0001
	POS (with mediator)	0.22 (0.03)	LL = 0.16, UL = 0.27	< 0.0001
	POS (indirect effect)	0.08 (0.02)	LL = 0.05, UL = 0.12	< 0.0001
Mediator	WLB	0.22 (0.03)	LL = 0.16, UL = 0.27	< 0.0001
Moderator	Grandparent	0.15 (0.20)	LL = -0.24, UL = 0.53	0.4542
Interaction	POS $\times$ Grandparent	-0.21 (0.08)	LL = -0.14, UL = 0.07	0.5148
IMM	POS $\rightarrow$ WLB $\rightarrow$ Engagement	0.04 (0.02)	LL = 0.01, UL = 0.07	0.0146
	Total $R^2$	0.22 ( $F = 24.2530, p < 0.0001$ )		
		Job satisfaction		
	Variables	$\beta$ (SE)	Confidence intervals	<i>p</i>
Controls	Age	0.00 (0.00)	LL = -0.01, UL = 0.01	0.8371
	Tenure	-0.00 (0.01)	LL = -0.01, UL = 0.01	0.9832
	Hours worked	0.00 (0.00)	LL = -0.00, UL = 0.01	0.6960
	Ethnicity	0.01 (0.05)	LL = -0.08, UL = 0.10	0.8222
	Gender	-0.03 (0.05)	LL = -0.12, UL = 0.06	0.4903
Predictor	POS	0.60 (0.03)	LL = 0.54, UL = 0.66	< 0.0001
	POS (with mediator)	0.39 (0.03)	LL = 0.33, UL = 0.46	< 0.0001
	POS (indirect effect)	0.20 (0.03)	LL = 0.15, UL = 0.26	< 0.0001
Mediator	WLB	0.39 (0.03)	LL = 0.33, UL = 0.46	< 0.0001
Moderator	Grandparent	0.02 (0.07)	LL = -0.12, UL = 0.16	0.7471
Interaction	POS $\times$ Grandparent	-0.02 (0.06)	LL = -0.14, UL = 0.11	0.8033
IMM	POS $\rightarrow$ WLB $\rightarrow$ Job Sat	0.09 (0.03)	LL = 0.02, UL = 0.15	0.0042
	Total $R^2$	0.43 ( $F = 65.0501, p < 0.0001$ )		

Abbreviations:  $\beta$ , unstandardised regression coefficients; IMM, index of moderated mediation; SE, standard error.

effect of POS is significant across the full 95% confidence intervals for both employee engagement and job satisfaction, showing its beneficial indirect effect through WLB, with an indirect effect that is stronger for grandparents than non-grandparents, supporting the hypothesised effect.

## 5 | Discussion

While the HR literature understands the value of POS and WLB on key employee outcomes, whether these effects hold for grandparents remains largely unexplored. Grandparents likely constitute a proportion of many employee samples

(e.g., Wilkinson and Haar 2023). While research has often compared parents and non-parents (e.g., Haar 2013), studies examining POS and WLB with a specific focus on grandparents remain scarce. Further, understanding whether grandparents respond differently to support and whether these effects are greater (or not) for grandparents compared to non-grandparents aids our theoretical understanding of organisational support theory (Eisenberger et al. 1986). It may be that felt obligation has differences across age cohorts or parental cohorts (including grandparents), which previously we have been unaware of. Importantly, this study shines a light on the specifics of support relationships and how these shape WLB and ultimately key work outcomes. The findings

provide much-needed insight into a grouping segment of the workforce, and while set in New Zealand, this growth in an aging workforce resonates in Australia and throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

This study explored POS for WLB for those with dependents and to determine how grandparent status might play a role in influencing the effects of POS and WLB on key work outcomes. Our study found that the direct effects of POS on WLB do differ by grandparent status, whereby respondents who are non-grandparents report lower levels of WLB than respondents who are grandparents when POS is high. For grandparents, the influence of POS appears to generate additional felt obligations under SET, leading to stronger WLB. However, while POS was significant toward both employee engagement and job satisfaction, this was not different by grandparent status, indicating some specific effects for enhanced WLB for grandparents. This suggests the greater reciprocation for grandparents manifests best through WLB (only) and not sufficiently toward the work outcomes. This might reflect that POS provides greater WLB for all employees, but grandparents feel better able to leverage the higher support for benefits specifically to role management and harmony between work and non-work. We suggest that this likely creates greater benefits around helping their children and grandchildren, making it easier to be a working grandparent and thus enhancing their WLB.

**TABLE 4** | Indirect effects of POS on work outcomes via WLB attenuated by grandparent status.

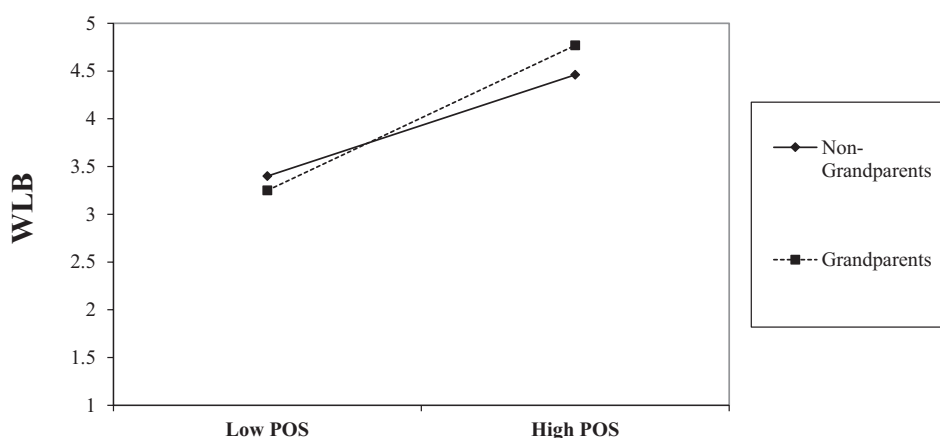
Indirect effect of POS	Employee engagement
Non-grandparents	0.07 (0.02), LL=0.04, UL=0.11, $p < 0.0001$
Grandparents	0.11 (0.03), LL=0.06, UL=0.17, $p < 0.0001$
Indirect effect of POS	Job satisfaction
Non-grandparents	0.18 (0.03), LL=0.13, UL=0.24, $p < 0.0001$
Grandparents	0.27 (0.04), LL=0.19, UL=0.35, $p < 0.0001$

This is the first time in the literature that we find such effects for POS for grandparents, and this should encourage firms to re-evaluate the support they offer to employees with dependents, especially those with grandparents. Our findings have useful implications for government policy as well. Findings from the European SHARE survey (Bertogg 2023) conducted across 18 countries found that regular provision of grandchild care increases the risk of exiting the labour market for both men and women. Importantly, the linkage is stronger in contexts with stronger support norms but also depends on the childcare infrastructure in contexts where norms are weaker (Bertogg 2023). This study suggests that societies seeking to enhance the longevity of the workforce, specifically grandparents, might do so by providing stronger support for employee wellbeing (POS). This study suggests this can enhance the WLB of employees, and this is important given the many work and wellbeing outcomes associated with WLB (e.g., Haar and Brougham 2022; Haar et al. 2018; Wood et al. 2020).

### 5.1 | Practical Implications

Human resource managers should recognise grandparents as a heterogeneous segment of the workforce, differing by age, family configuration, caregiving intensity, and proximity to dependents. Grandparent status also intersects with ethnicity, where familistic and cultural norms shape expectations around care provision (e.g., Zhao et al. 2019; Zhang et al. 2020). From a workforce planning perspective, this recognition is increasingly important: New Zealand census data show that nearly one in four people aged 65+ remain in paid work (Statistics New Zealand 2025a), with participation rates for this cohort continuing to rise.

For HR practice, this trend highlights the need to review whether existing work-life balance (WLB) policies explicitly include grandparents—both those providing daily care and those supporting family from a distance—and whether HR practitioners, including younger cohorts, are equipped to understand the unique pressures faced by older employees in caregiving roles. To strengthen perceived organisational support, organisations should move beyond parent-centric policies to formally include and value grandparents as integral



**FIGURE 2** | 2-way interaction between POS and grandparent status towards WLB.

members of the workforce (Cantillon et al. 2021). Practical initiatives include flexible scheduling to accommodate caregiving, explicit inclusion of grandparents in family-related leave provisions and workforce planning strategies that anticipate and integrate the contributions of older employees. Consultation with grandparent employees can further inform inclusive HR policy design, while intergenerational training and awareness programs can bridge understanding across age cohorts. Together, these measures embed grandparents more visibly into organisational culture and position HRM as proactive in supporting an expanding and often-overlooked workforce group.

Grandparents should continue to reflect on what builds or reduces WLB for them personally, given its importance for wellbeing (Haar et al. 2014). Those in paid work should be encouraged to actively pursue balance across roles, examining the potential for both conflict and enrichment across life stages. Paid work may be a source of stress and/or a welcome relief from familial demands, which can intensify when children and grandchildren live nearby. Work is valuable not only for financial independence but also for maintaining visibility in organisations and society (Day 2021). Rising labour market participation among grandparents must be understood in the context of WLB needs, including how care is shared across genders and generations (Bertogg 2023). WLB is not only an individual concern; effective HR practices are central to shaping and supporting it within organisations.

## 5.2 | Future Research and Limitations

This paper has implications for future research. Internationally, there has been increasing policy emphasis on boosting mature-age labour market participation in the context of an ageing population and concerns about the decline in the proportion of the working relative to the non-working population (OECD 2020). A multigenerational workforce can yield a stronger pipeline of talent, higher productivity, more resilience, as well as improving workforce continuity, stability and retention of intellectual capital (OECD 2020). As the rate of both maternal and mature-age participation in the paid labour market continues to rise, further attention needs to be given to how time spent undertaking unpaid care is compressed, reorganised and redistributed across genders and generations as a result (Hamilton and Suthersan 2021).

Grandparents are not simply just a subset of older workers. Indeed, in some cultures—like Māori in New Zealand—grandparents might be at a significantly younger age cohort compared to white ethnicities. Extending future studies to include a wide age net of grandparent workers would be advantageous, as one could find oneself a grandparent at a fairly young age. Defining the age at which one becomes an older worker is problematic given that age is not just biological but can also be socially and contextually determined by the perceptions of the individual, the organisation and society (Myers and Douglas 2017). Similarly, defining the age at which one becomes a grandparent can be even more problematic. Future research might examine whether POS is particularly consequential in cultural contexts where familistic norms are

strong and formal childcare is weak, making grandparents' WLB even more precarious. So, we encourage researchers to examine the interplay of dependent care for parents, children and grandchildren that a grandparent may juggle. We also encourage replication and further exploration of grandparents in the wider HR context, including in high-performance work systems (Haar and Harris 2023).

While we conducted analysis showing CMB is unlikely, we also note that analysis by Evans (1985) showed that CMB is unlikely when significant moderation effects are found, and here, one two-way and both moderated mediation effects were significant. We also acknowledge that the study design means causality cannot be determined. While both POS and WLB are subjective evaluations, this does align with the approach used in the literature (e.g., Eisenberger et al. 1986; Haar 2013). However, future research might focus on other-sourced data for work outcomes such as supervisor-rated performance or use time-lagged data to boost confidence in relationships tested.

We acknowledge that grandparent status was measured with a single dichotomous approach, and thus future research might seek to explore more specifically the dynamics of grandparents and especially their caregiving roles to their family, including grandchildren. This might include the number of grandchildren, the intensity of relationships, geographical locations, etc. We also did not capture other potential challenges grandparents might face, including their own eldercare issues, although these might naturally be captured within the WLB measure. Future research might also seek to capture these dynamics specifically. Finally, we note that we did capture a large group of working grandparents, although this can be a challenging cohort to capture, representing under 20% of the overall sample. However, our sample of workers with dependents is large and makes this study generalisable.

## 6 | Conclusion

Theoretically, this study makes three contributions. First, it extends Organisational Support Theory by identifying grandparents as a boundary condition shaping the POS–WLB relationship. Second, it demonstrates that POS has stronger indirect effects via WLB for grandparents, highlighting a distinctive form of reciprocity under social exchange theory. Third, it advances work-life literature by positioning grandparents—not only parents or older workers—as a critical yet overlooked group in HRM research. Our findings show that when POS is high, grandparents report significantly greater WLB than non-grandparents, underscoring the importance of organisational support for this segment of the workforce. We contribute to debates on ageing workforces by showing that support for grandparents sustains not only their employment but also the broader care infrastructure of working families. This highlights grandparents as a visible and important focus for HRM practice, rather than a marginal subgroup. As ageing populations expand, recognising grandparents as visible and valued employees highlights the promise of a multigenerational workforce and the need for organisations to provide targeted support that sustains their wellbeing and contribution.

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## Ethics Statement

The survey methodology was approved by the Auckland University of Technology ethics committee (Approval no: 21/426).

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author (CH) upon reasonable request.

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