

*'I'm older but I can still do this job': the experiences of mature women in an age-sensitive occupation*

Article

Accepted Version

Rowson, T. S. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1605-2927> and Gonzalez-White, M. D. C. (2019) 'I'm older but I can still do this job': the experiences of mature women in an age-sensitive occupation. *Educational Gerontology*, 45 (4). pp. 248-258. ISSN 1521-0472 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2019.1611223> Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/84110/>

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To link to this article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2019.1611223>

Publisher: Taylor & Francis

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**Title:** ‘I’m older but I can still do this job’: The experiences of mature women in an age-sensitive occupation

This paper explores how mature female flight attendants [FAs] use Selection, Optimization and Compensation [SOC] strategies to cope with age-related diminishing resources at work. FA is an age-sensitive occupation, and in some organisations, women are under constant pressure to look young and attractive. This Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study aims to add depth and nuance to our understanding of SOC strategies qualitatively; most published studies are quantitative. A homogenous sample of 5 mature single Filipina FAs, foreign workers employed by Arabian Gulf-based airlines, were interviewed through a semi-structured protocol. Recruitment was through a snowball process.

The study found that FAs use SOC strategies to compensate for age-related decline. Off-duty, their focus is directed to activities that help them to meet the organisations’ expectations of youthful appearance and productivity. To achieve this, resources from other life domains are diverted, which leads to negative outcomes from focussing SOC strategies on only one aspect of life. Despite negative personal implications and concerns about the future, the participants still felt attached to their work identities. This shows the importance of understanding the use of SOC strategies within and across life domains, as well as its implications for career sustainability and workability. The use of such strategies at work when detrimental to other life roles is unsustainable. The findings highlight the importance of conducting more qualitative studies on SOC behaviours of specific groups, so the experiences of ageing at work can be explored in more depth allowing areas of concern to be identified.

**Keywords:** Selection, Optimization and Compensation; Adjustment to aging; flight attendants; Arabian Gulf states; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

**Funding:** This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

## **Introduction**

The workforce population is getting older (Zacher, Kooji & Beier, 2018) and more age diverse (Truxillo, Cadiz & Hammer, 2015). Debates on the social and economic impacts of ageing and the importance of extending the working life (Zacher et al., 2018) have led to an increased interest in ageing at work and the promotion of successful ageing (Truxillo et al., 2015). The importance of taking a holistic and contextualised perspective to understand individuals' experiences of ageing have been highlighted in the literature (Truxillo et al., 2015; Taylor, Loretto, Marshall, Earl & Phillipson, 2016). The relevance of acknowledging systemic and dynamic aspects influencing individuals' trajectories has been emphasised both in the ageing (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009; Dannefer, 2018) and career literature (De Vos, Van der Heijden & Akkermans, 2018). Although not exclusively referring to age-related adjustments, Career Sustainability's key dimensions, Person, Time and Context (De Vos et al., 2018), are useful to understand the experience of ageing at work and the related career outcomes.

In the work domain, successful ageing can be defined as growth or maintained positive outcomes in the light of increased age (Kooji, 2015; Zacher, 2015). The notion of workability (Ilmarinen, 2009) was linked to the idea that adjusting the demands of work, considering ageing concerns, should help to extend the working life. Life-span developmental psychology offers a useful lens to investigate further successful ageing at work (Rudolph, 2016), and is a favoured framework to study adjustment to age at work (Truxillo et al., 2015) and the idea of career sustainability (De Vos et al., 2018). Within the life-span theories, Selection, Optimization and Compensation [SOC] is often used to understand how individuals manage age-related changes

(Baltes & Baltes, 1990, Freund & Baltes 2000). SOC theory assumes that at any one time, individuals have a limited amount of resources (Hobfoll, 2002) and the use of the three SOC strategies allows them to successfully allocate their resources to maximise desirable outcomes and minimise undesirable ones. SOC behaviours include elective or loss-based selection or the prioritisation of goals, optimization of current resources necessary to achieve the goal and compensation to make up for resource shortages by using external or internal resources. The way SOC is used varies with the situation, the life stage and the personal context. Adaptive behaviours tend to fall into the SOC model (Freund & Baltes, 2000). SOC theory has not received much criticism (Burnett-Wolle & Godbey, 2007) and there is a growing body of evidence supporting the use of SOC strategies as a coping mechanism to adjust to age-related changes at work and beyond (Truxillo et al., 2015; Moghimi, Zacher, Scheibe & Van Yperen, 2017).

The use of SOC behaviours at work was found to be positively related to competency maintenance and job performance, job satisfaction, work engagement (Moghimi et al., 2017), workability (Riedel, Müller, & Ebener, 2015;) and wellbeing (Wiese, Freund & Baltes, 2002) among others. There is evidence that SOC behaviour can be effectively learned and is therefore trainable as an element of organisational interventions (Müller, Angerer, Becker, Gantner, Gündel et al., 2018). Studies focused on SOC behaviours have given insights into how older teachers (Philipp & Kunter, 2013), factory workers (Ng & Law, 2014) and health care workers (von Bonsdorff, von Bonsdorff, Zhou, Kauppinen, Miettinen, & Rantanen.,, 2014) manage their resources as they age. Despite these previous studies, to the authors' knowledge only one investigated FAs as an example of an age-sensitive occupation (Weigl, Müller, Hornung, Leidenberger, & Heiden, 2014). This study was quantitative and was particularly focused on work engagement rather than on the outcomes for the individuals. Although there has been a growing research interest in SOC, qualitative studies exploring more nuanced aspects of SOC

strategies and ageing at work are scarce (see Ng & Law, 2014; Unson & Richardson, 2013). While quantitative studies are useful to explain the consequences of SOC behaviour on successful workplace ageing, exploring SOC qualitatively enables researchers to expand on quantitative findings to understand ageing from individuals' perspectives and in their contexts (Taylor et al., 2016; De Vos et al., 2018). This allows the impact of ageing at work to be understood more holistically, considering aspects inside and outside the workplace (Truxillo et al., 2015; De Vos et al., 2018), especially for workers in age-sensitive occupations.

In order to illustrate the potential of qualitative research for investigating SOC strategies, and to contribute to filling this gap in the literature, our investigation explores the experience of ageing for mature flight attendants [FAs] working for two major airlines in the Arabian Gulf region. Research on the work of FAs makes sense because of the age-sensitive nature of their job with potential implications for their physical and mental health (Federal Aviation Administration - FAA, 2012; Griffiths & Powell 2012; Grajewski, Nguyen, Whelan, Cole & Hein 2003). Furthermore, FAs working the Gulf region suffer from low job security due to the lack of employment laws to safeguard foreign workers' rights and the temporary nature of employment visas – renewable every 2-3 years, making it unlikely they could secure the rights of residency of permanent citizens (Kemp & Rickett, 2018).

Compared with counterparts working in many other parts of the world (e.g. Europe, North America, Australia), Gulf-based FAs are statistically younger and they are expected to look young and slim to comply with airline branding images (Small & Harris, 2015). Recently the Chief Executive Officer of one of the major Gulf-based airlines has been criticised by referring to North American FAs as 'grandmothers' when making a statement that the average age of their own FAs is 26 years old (Reed, 2017). Despite the criticism of such a statement, it has been pointed out that the noticeable difference in the lack of attractive younger FAs in Western carriers, gives passengers the perception that an airline has declined in quality (Small & Harris,

2015). This perception contributes to pushing older women out of the industry (Whitelegg, 2007). In this occupation, which does not reward longevity of service, it can be assumed that older FAs feel obliged to fit image expectations on top of ensuring that they are fit to perform their duties competently.

In this environment of low job security, FAs who do not meet the airlines' expectations regarding performance or appearance are likely to be let go without much notice or financial settlement. It has been argued that female foreign workers, such as Filipina FAs working in the Arabian Gulf countries, have received very little attention in the literature (Kemp & Rickett, 2018) and the issue of ageing and career sustainability for these workers remains unaddressed.

### *Age and Ageing*

There is a perception that the work of a FA is glamorous (Baum, 2012). Airlines employ approximately 2.7 million people worldwide (Air Transport Action Group, 2016) and do not seek to hide the fact that youthful physical attractiveness and age limits are essential criteria in hiring FAs (Baum, 2012).

The term 'older workers' is usually used to describe people aged 55 years and over (Organisation Economic Co-operation and Development - OECD, 2017). However, mature FAs aged 40 and over are considered 'old' in the airline industry (Hur, Moon & Han, 2014), largely due to the expectation they should be young and beautiful (Whitelegg, 2004). Mature women are more likely to experience work-related age discrimination (Saucier, 2004) due to their appearance, and will tend to attempt to meet stereotypes by trying to look as young as possible (Clarke & Griffin, 2008). Women's fear of wrinkles, which is connected to the fear of ageing and workplace discrimination and the abandonment of a partner, is a common concern among ageing FAs (Clarke & Griffin, 2008). According to Fineman (2014), the employment of airline workers with physical attributes that appeal to customers is considered 'aesthetic

labour'. The attractive youthful image of a FA is an inadvertent obstacle preventing older FAs from engaging in frontline services in the airline (Whitelegg, 2007).

Age stereotyping of FAs is not uncommon (Whitelegg, 2007) and it links back to the 'golden age of flying' - the early days in the airline industry. Traditionally, older FAs were discouraged to stay in their roles for long (Boris, 2006; Whitelegg, 2003), at times being targeted for redundancies (Bajawa & Woodall, 2004). Occupational continuity was generally weak, as it was perceived to be easier and cheaper to train new FAs (Whitelegg, 2007), whose skills are relatively similar to mature ones (Weller, 2007). Older FAs also suffer from a pressure to comply with grooming and appearance expectations and this extends to being monitored by their own work colleagues (Tsaur & Tang, 2013).

In addition to the pressure to keep up a desirable youthful appearance, FAs work in age-sensitive conditions with significant implications for their health. Travelling through time zones disrupts their circadian rhythms and menstrual cycles (Grajewski et al., 2003). Insufficient sleep due to irregular work schedules and extreme flying hours may lead to chronic fatigue and related health issues (Grajewski et al. 2003; Federal Aviation Administration - FAA, 2012; Griffiths & Powell, 2012). Age increases their need for a longer recovery time (Blok & de Looze, 2011). Many FAs suffer memory loss related to constantly performing in hypoxic physical work environments (FAA, 2012) and musculoskeletal injury (Griffiths & Powell, 2012).

On a psychological level, customer-related stress and high information load can contribute further to mental ill-health and fatigue, which has implications for their health and general job safety (Griffiths & Powell, 2012). In these challenging work conditions, we propose to investigate the experience of ageing, using the SOC model to explore how older individuals manage their resources.



## **This study**

This investigation is an initial study on the experience of ageing at work of FAs. In order to meaningfully understand how mature FAs manage their resources it is important to consider personal and contextual factor dimensions holistically (Truxillo et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2016; De Vos et al., 2018), especially considering how these factors influence the diversity of ageing experiences (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009; Dannefer, 2018). As work and employment policies and practices tend to vary according to the airlines' countries, this preliminary study will focus on foreign workers (Kemp & Rickett, 2018) employed by Arabian Gulf-based airlines. Like other foreign workers in the region, these FAs experience low job security. They are also expected to comply with appearance standards of airlines. Both of these two factors combined would already enhance the sense of risk and contribute to the accumulation of disadvantages as one ages (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009; Dannefer, 2018).

The set of circumstances of foreign workers will also vary depending on their country of origin, gender and marital status. Therefore, this study focuses on a particular group of Filipina FAs. Filipinos working abroad form a very particular kind of international worker. Originally encouraged as a temporary solution to unemployment, Filipino foreign workers are considerably important for the country's economy (Tyner, 2009), as their remittances of money into the country are essential to the economy of the Philippines (Ofreneo & Samonte, 2004; Rodriguez, 2010). When returning to their country, Filipinos from abroad face many challenges, such as a lack of job opportunities, low savings and broken family ties. Women in particular find it difficult to reintegrate into society (Ofreneo & Samonte, 2004). These challenges mean that the research participants are exposed to a great level of uncertainty if they lose their job due to age-related reasons, particularly as these women are single and without a partner to support them. Therefore, as a sub-set of mature FAs generally, these single Filipinas

working for Arabian Gulf airlines form an especially vulnerable group – which this paper aims to investigate.

The research questions this study aims to explore are: How do mature, single, Filipina FAs working in the Arabian Gulf region, make sense of their experience of ageing at work? How do they manage their resources to meet their work-related goals and what are the implications for other life domains?

## **Methodology**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was used in this study to explore how the participants make sense of their own ageing process in this age-sensitive occupation. IPA captures the participants' lived experiences and attempts to explain the connections between the meanings constructed by them about their social, personal and professional worlds (Smith, Flower & Larkin, 2009).

### *Participants*

In IPA, it is useful for researchers to find a reasonably homogenous sample for which the research question will be meaningful (Smith et al., 2009). There is no right sample size but IPA studies benefit from a concentrated focus on a smaller number of participants (Smith et al., 2009). As a preliminary study on the experience of ageing in the airline industry, this IPA study focuses on mature, single, Filipina FAs, foreign workers employed by Arabian Gulf airlines.

The selection criteria for participants were: Filipina, currently working as a FA, with a minimum of 20 years' experience and over the age of 40. In addition to this, the study focused on women who are single or have been long divorced, based on the assumption that work would be a central aspect of their lives. No specific airline was targeted, but for the homogenous purposes necessary for the IPA study, only FAs working for airlines in the Arabian Gulf region were interviewed. Snowballing strategy was used to identify research participants through key

contacts in the Filipino community working for Arabian Gulf airlines. In total, eight potential participants were identified, these were based in Saudi Arabia and in the United Arab Emirates. Two did not respond to the researchers' invitation. One expressed a concern of being identified by the airline. Finally, five women were interviewed. Preserving anonymity and keeping up with the Filipino context, FAs are referred to as: Bituin (B) (age 54), Luningning (L) (age 53), Mayumi (M) (age 44), Kalayaan (K) (age 42) and Tala (T) (age 47).

### *Data collection*

Ethical approval was given by the Ethics Committee of the School of Life Sciences at Heriot-Watt University, United Kingdom (REF 2015-13) before participants were contacted. In line with the ethical approval received, written consent was obtained from the participants before recording the interviews. These lasted between 45 minutes and two hours. The interview schedule consisted of ten semi-structured, open-ended and non-directive questions encouraging free-narrative and detailed responses as required by IPA (Smith et al., 2009). These questions were tested in advance and refined to help the participants to tell their stories and express their views.

These interview questions included: (1) Tell me your story, from when you became a flight assistant until now (2) How do you think things have changed in the industry since you joined? (3) Today, what are the biggest stereotypes/misconceptions surrounding the FAs' role? (4) In this stage of your career, how do you feel about these stereotypes? (5) How do you think 'age' is viewed in the airline industry? (6) How do you feel about growing old in this industry? (7) Tell me about the value of your experience in your job. (8) Can you describe your day-to-day, routine? (9) How is your life outside work? (10) How do you feel about staying in this career long term?

### *Analysis*

IPA was employed to analyse the data (Smith et al., 2009). Each transcript was read at least three times by the authors to ensure familiarity and to bring the experience of participants' accounts to light (Eatough, Smith & Shaw, 2008). Patterns were identified and referenced in each interview. Each transcription analysis was summarised into themes and data were cross-referenced into main themes and sub-themes. A collective summary was created defining the final themes and correlating sub-themes for study.

### *Trustworthiness*

IPA does not aim to establish the truth but to capture and legitimise participants' experiences (Smith et al., 2009). IPA recognises the process of 'double hermeneutics' that happens during the analysis. The researchers play an active role in trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their experiences during the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). However, to ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis (Morrow, 2005), the first author audited the first level of coding conducted by the second author, discussing the assumptions and potential biases (Rodham, Fox & Doran, 2013). Emerging and superordinate themes were generated by both authors collaboratively. Once the analysis was completed the research participants were invited to provide feedback on the aggregated interpretation and analysis results.

### **Findings**

All airlines have image and behavioural expectations when it comes to their flight attendants. These include grooming standards and ethics codes and can be summarised by the term 'The 3As' – Appearance, Attendance and Attitude. When making sense of their experience of ageing in the Arabian Gulf airline industry, all interviewees often referred to these 3A standards. They all believe that provided they meet these expectations their jobs are safe. Luningning explains:

*'I asked my manager, "What is the retiring age for crew?" She said: "We did not set a retiring age for crew, as long as you still have the 3As" (...). So if you're making trouble, you're not going, you're absent, you have so many sick days. Your appearance, sorry to say, you've become fat and into weight management (...), you don't have the positive or right attitude for the job. Then, I think, it's time to go.'*

The FAs interviewed have a positive self-image. They believe their experience makes them more prepared to deal with stressful situations during flights than their younger colleagues.

*'Who apologises to the passenger? Who do these passengers look for when they have a problem? They don't look for the most junior flight attendant. They look for the most senior or whoever is in charge and whoever is in charge is expected to be a senior.'*  
(Kalayaan)

[Management expect] *maturity, responsibility that you can cope up. No matter what kind of flight they give you, even if it's one after another, they're still there. Even if they're tired, they're still there. Even if they don't feel well, they're still there (...)*Crew?  
*They're happy when they're with a senior. They're calm because of your experience (...)* (Bituin)

However, for them to continue to meet the expectations of the industry regarding appearance, attendance and attitude, they focus their efforts on their work domain. Whether it is because they love the job, still need the money or do not have any other major life goals, all of the participants had, over the years, let go of other aspects of life so they were fit for the job. Thus, they use SOC strategies (Baltes & Baltes, 1990) to maintain the resources (Freund & Riediger, 2001) necessary to keep going in the same way as when they first joined the airline.

*'When you're older, when you don't rest well, when you don't put a lot of effort on putting on good make up and all - you look tired, you look more haggard. You're less*

*energetic probably because you're older. You look fresher when you're young.'*

(Luningning)

Conscious of how age affects their appearance (Clarke & Griffin, 2008) and recovery time (Bok & de Looze, 2011), whenever they are off-duty they prioritise rest and sleep to fight the fatigue associated with frequent flying (FAA, 2012) or beauty rituals to meet the standards associated to aesthetic labour (Tsaur & Tang, 2013). Consequently, their social and personal lives are sacrificed, giving them a sense of isolation, which could have an adverse effect on their mental and physical health (Cornwell & Waite, 2009).

*'I go to the gym, go to the derma, shopping. I mean, like I really never engaged into other activities because of course my rest days I prioritise to, like, recover sleep (...) the job is kinda taxing.'* (Kalayaan)

Age does not necessarily diminish the ability of FAs to perform at work (Barry, 2007). However, it does make it harder for FAs to continue working on the same conditions as when they were younger. The women interviewed find it difficult to cope with their demanding work schedule, as between flying, beauty routines and rest and recovery there is no time left.

*'Now, our off days are spent on recovery. Lack of sleep. Your housekeeping duties, you have to take care of that area you know. The next thing you know is that your day off is finished and you're having another flight. It's demanding.'* (Luningning).

Although SOC strategies are argued to be particularly useful in complex jobs where individual and contextual resources are scarce, it has been suggested that enhanced job resources can lead to a greater use of SOC strategies (Müller et al., 2018). Other qualitative studies exploring SOC (Ng & Law, 2014) emphasised the role of the organisation and co-workers in supporting older employees to use SOC strategies to manage their diminishing resources.

*'The older you get the more expensive you become because the more [medical] tests you need to do. You're becoming a liability; I don't think productivity is a problem. I still consider myself very active. I don't sit in work; I'm much better than the young ones...'* (Tala)

Differently from what was expected, these women do not manage ageing at work by managing exclusively their occupational-related resources (Müller et al., 2018). Instead, to meet the expectation of Arabian Gulf airlines and to cope with the demands of their job, they need to reallocate resources from other life domains using a combination of optimization and compensation strategies. Thus, the self-regulation process of SOC needed to meet occupational goals are carried over to personal domain (Unger, Sonnentag, Niessen & Kuoath, 2015) despite the implications for their quality of life.

*'Especially with age, like it's only work, work (...) It seems like all my energy, is being taken over by work.'* (Mayumi)

Mature FAs resent the fact that Arabian Gulf airlines do not value their experience and commitment to the job. This makes it difficult for them to use the advantages of being experience as a resource to balance an ageing appearance and a greater need for recovery time.

*'European [airlines] they value experience, that's a different beauty as well because people are matured enough to know what they're doing. From our company's point of view they rather have the young because I believe they don't really value the experience. They don't. If they do they would have kept the old people, as much as they can to keep the older people. You can't buy experience.'* (Tala)

It can be suggested that in an industry that typically favours youth and, in a context, where workers can be dismissed without significant legal protection such as in the Arabian Gulf, airlines have no motivation to create an environment which promotes occupational continuity

through flexible work arrangements. Likewise, there would be no interest in compromising the brand image by allowing FAs to age, which in turn enhances older FAs' feelings of job insecurity.

*'Seniors have loyalty. They gave their lives to the company (...), if they [company] don't like you anymore, they can just let you go. They wouldn't even consider you, how many years you've been with the company or anything like that.'* (Mayumi)

Critics of SOC theory indicate that the model assumes that individuals' actions are rational (Burnett-Wolle & Godbey, 2007) and that the process of selection can mirror an objective goal setting processes such SMART (Müller et al., 2018). The experience of mature FAs indicates that the use of SOC as adaptive strategy to ageing is more complicated than this. The process of goal selection and resources allocation is influenced by individuals' context (e.g. Arabian Gulf airlines), set of circumstances (e.g. single, female Filipina foreign workers) and personal preferences and perceptions derived from these aspects such as are suggested in the conceptualisation of sustainable careers (De Vos et al., 2018).

*I'm thinking of resigning, I want to get away from everyone, I want to hibernate. I don't know where to go (...) my only fear is where to get the money to give to my mother (...)  
We have a travel agency (...) I'm just waiting for it to prosper that, yeah, because I have to give up the job because I have the age.'* (Bituin)

Furthermore, our participants spent their adult lives working for airlines. After over 20 years of service, their identities are linked to their occupation (Elliot, 1972), making it difficult for them to see how they can move on. The literature on age-related transitions emphasises the importance of developing non-work-related interests and identities to help relinquish an identity-defining career (Silver & Williams, 2016). Therefore, by being immersed in the daily



demands of the job, without being able to build a life outside, it is not surprising that they find it hard to make any plans for the future.

*'I don't know what I would do after this job, you know. Because doing the same thing for 23 years of course, I mean like it becomes a part of you, it's like the air that you breathe it comes next to water, to air! You know you're gonna fly, you know you're gonna do this. It becomes routine but you know it becomes a great part of you.'*

(Kalayaan)

These women's employment situations are likely to become increasingly precarious as age discrimination still affects job prospects for older people (International Labour Office [ILO], 2011). Over time, they are likely to feel even more vulnerable to being dismissed as their ageing appearance deviates from the FA ideal (Whitelegg, 2004; Tsaur & Tang, 2013), while their chances of a career change or even re-employment decline progressively (Wang, Zhan, Liu & Shultz, 2008; Zhan, Wang, Liu, & Shultz, 2009). These implications for their career sustainability or occupational continuity are especially true for them as Filipina foreign workers working for Arabian Gulf airlines.

### *Research Limitations*

There are a few limitations to this study that are important to discuss to put the findings into perspective. As a small-scale IPA study, the aim was to capture the experiences of a particular group of mature, single, Filipina FAs working for Arabian Gulf-based airlines, so a small and homogeneous sample was used (Smith et al., 2009). It is important to note that even though the population for older FAs in the Arabian Gulf is small, the experiences explored do not represent all mature Arabian Gulf-based FAs. Other cultural and ethnic group FAs exist, as well as mature FAs who have other well-established social roles and identities.

### **Conclusion**

This initial study focused on a particularly vulnerable group of mature FAs, single Filipina foreign workers, employed by Arabian Gulf airlines. The aim of this study was to explore how these women make sense of their experience of ageing at work, how they manage their resources to meet their work-related goals and what the implications are for their wider lives. The purpose of taking an IPA approach to investigate such a narrow group in the first instance avoids other factors such as cultural background, country of origin or marital status influencing the key findings .

The experience of mature Filipina FAs employed by Arabian Gulf airlines is consistent with the literature in demonstrating the successful use of SOC strategies to mitigate the effects of ageing and achieving work-related goals and occupational continuity (Truxillo et al., 2015; Moghimi et al., 2017). However, this research also shows that when these ageing workers engage in such strategies without the support of the organisation, they run the risk of depleting resources from other life domains to meet the expectations of their jobs, especially in age-sensitive occupations. For the women in this study, disadvantages derived from their country of origin, gender, marital status and lack of job security make them more vulnerable (Ferraro & Shippee, 2009; Dannefer, 2018). They become more inclined to deplete their available resources from other domains to minimise the risk of not meeting the '3As' – Appearance, Attendance and Attitude.

This study also indicates that the intense use of SOC strategies for immediate work needs, without a long-term perspective on career sustainability (De Vos et al., 2018) and on future workability (Ilmarinen, 2009) can lead to negative outcomes regarding the quality of life and future possibilities. Individuals in this study still felt attached to their work-identity as FAs, despite the demanding nature of the job. As time progresses, the fact that they have few resources available, e.g. time or energy to explore their next career moves, means that their situation tends to become increasingly precarious (ILO, 2011). Therefore, the findings of this

study highlight the significance of understanding how individuals use SOC strategies in different life domains and their impact across domains. Also, they suggest that it is important to consider individuals' context, circumstances and the personal factors which may influence their perceptions of present and future possibilities as they age.

Finally, this paper shows the importance of conducting more qualitative studies exploring SOC strategies for successful ageing at work. It demonstrates the value of investigating successful ageing at work holistically (Taylor et al., 2016; Truxillo et al., 2015), considering how work and other life domains interact. It also highlights that the importance of understanding how individuals' perceptions and experiences of ageing at work can be influenced by their context, time and self (De Vos et al., 2018). Hence, it allows researchers to identify areas that need further investigation so the implications of the use of SOC strategies are not oversimplified (Taylor et al., 2016).

The findings in this paper reflect an initial study with a particular group of FAs, whose set of circumstances explain why they use SOC strategies at work to the detriment of other life aspects. The next steps are to extend this study to include other groups of older FAs working in the Arabian Gulf region - male and female, with different marital statuses and cultural backgrounds, to explore how different sets of circumstances impact how they manage their resources to meet occupational goals as they age. Further to this, studies comparing the experiences of ageing at work in airlines based in different countries would allow greater understanding of organisational policies and practices on individuals' experiences. This would highlight universal and specific patterns in the use of SOC strategies in the light of ageing for FAs.

Other occupational groups that have been receiving attention, such as teachers (Philipp & Kunter, 2013) and health care workers (von Bonsdorff, von Bonsdorff, Zhou, Kauppinen,

Miettinen, & Rantanen, (2014) could also benefit from more qualitative research so the nuances and complexities of SOC use and their experience of ageing can also be better understood.

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