

Managing the aging workforce: health and wellbeing in service organisations

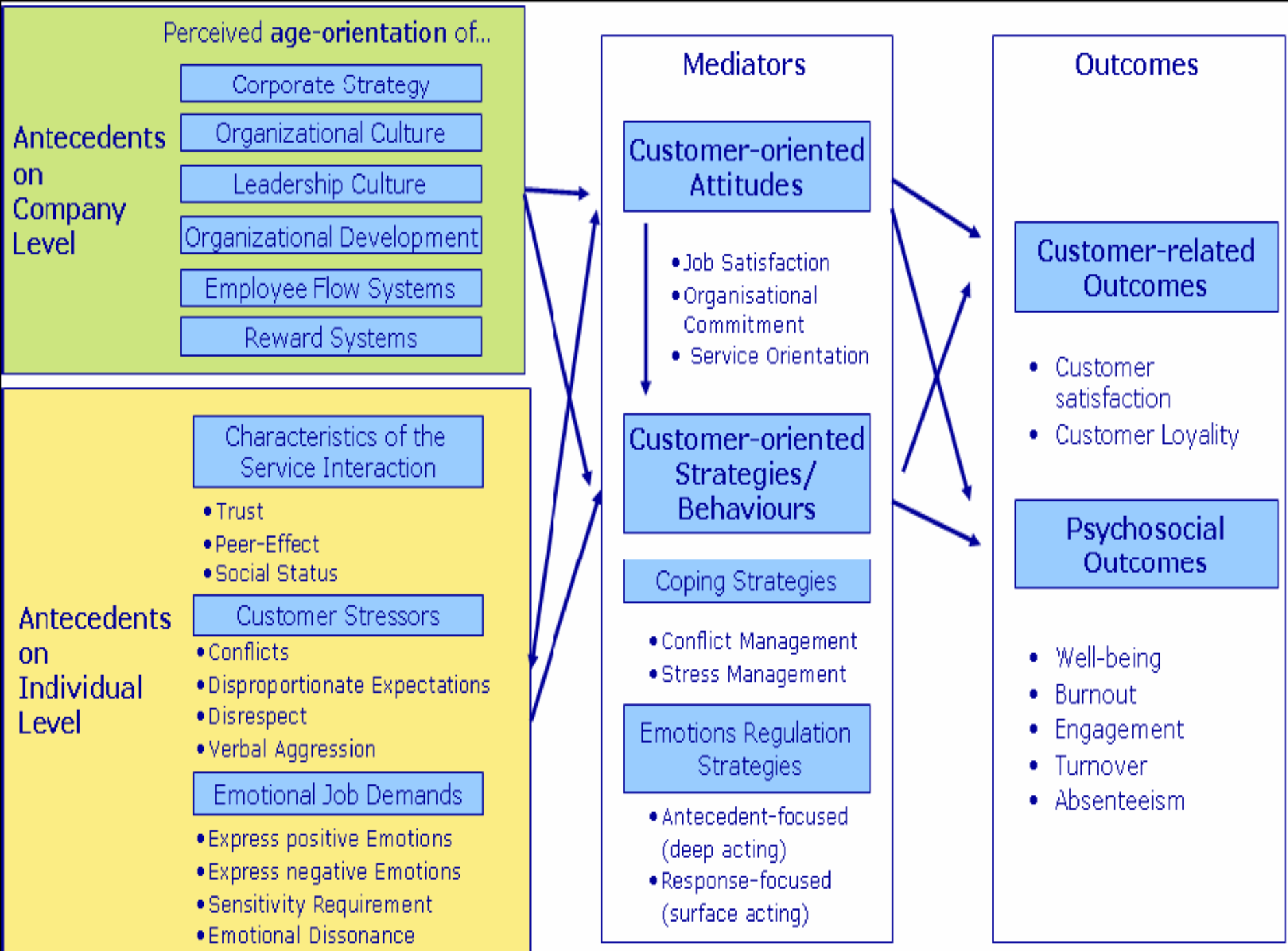
S. Johnson, L. Holdsworth,
H. Hoel, S. Guediri

Overview

- Background to age and emotion research project
- Focus on customer stressors, stress management, age and burnout
- Findings and implications for service organisations

Background to Research

- European VW funded
 - “Investigating the key potentials of older employees in the service sector”
- Collaboration between:
 - Manchester Business School (Dr Johnson, Dr Holdsworth & Dr Helge Hoel)
 - Goethe-Universität Frankfurt (Prof. Zapf & S Machowski)
 - Technische Universität Darmstadt (Prof. Stock-Homburg)



Background

- EU Demographic changes:
 - Young adults (25-39) decreasing, 55+ increasing
 - Total working population decreasing by 20.8m between 2010 and 2030
 - Increase reliance on older employees
 - Need to anticipate changes that occur with age
 - Address attitude of managers to older employees

Background: Age

- Older employees face discrimination
- Perception of poorer cognitive functioning, less capable of learning new technology, resistant to change (McGregor & Gray, 2002); more sickness absence
- Younger employees cheaper; socio-political debate
- BUT economic demands are dictating a longer working life

Background: Age (cont)

- BUT indications of superior social and emotional competences and attitudes for older employees
- Age related to maturity: more respect, experience fewer confrontations (e.g. Folkman et al., 1987)
- Wisdom research: higher social sensitivity and perspective taking; more familiar with uncertainties of life and relativity of goals and values (e.g. Baltes & Smith, 1990)
 - should lead to higher acceptance of customer perspective and of uncontrollable situations; more effective stress management strategies

Background: Age (cont)

- Higher job satisfaction, organisational commitment and customer orientation
- Life experiences create awareness of inability to control situations and limitation of resources: look on the bright side
- May contribute to more pleasant customer interactions, more effective stress management strategies and fewer **stressors** (Dorman & Zapf, 2007)

Background: stress management strategies

'How customer service worker handles possible harm, losses or risks and the negative reactions that arise' (John & Gross, 2007)

- Positive and negative stress management strategies – this study focuses on how employees positively influence their health and well-being

Background: stress management strategies (cont)

- Problem-focused (active coping):
 - managing or altering the problem through problem solving actions; seeking out information
- Emotion-focused (intra-psychological):
 - regulating the emotional response to the problem through behaviour or cognitive actions e.g. downplaying events; looking on the bright side (humour); emotion control (Payne, 1991)

Background: stress management strategies (cont)

- Generally problem focused coping seen as more successful (Billings & Moos, 1984)
- Emotion focused can be useful (e.g. Semmer, 2003)
- Emotion focused more useful than problem focused coping in low-control situations (e.g. Begley, 1998)

Background: age and stress management strategies

Older:

- Less confronting, reduce conflict escalation
 - more emotion focused strategies (intra-psychological): accept responsibility, less avoidance, more positive reappraisal

Younger:

- Prefer problem focused (active coping): problem solving, seeking help
- Most research focuses on everyday life not in the workplace

(e.g. Diehl et al., 1996; Folkman et al., 1987)

Background: service industry

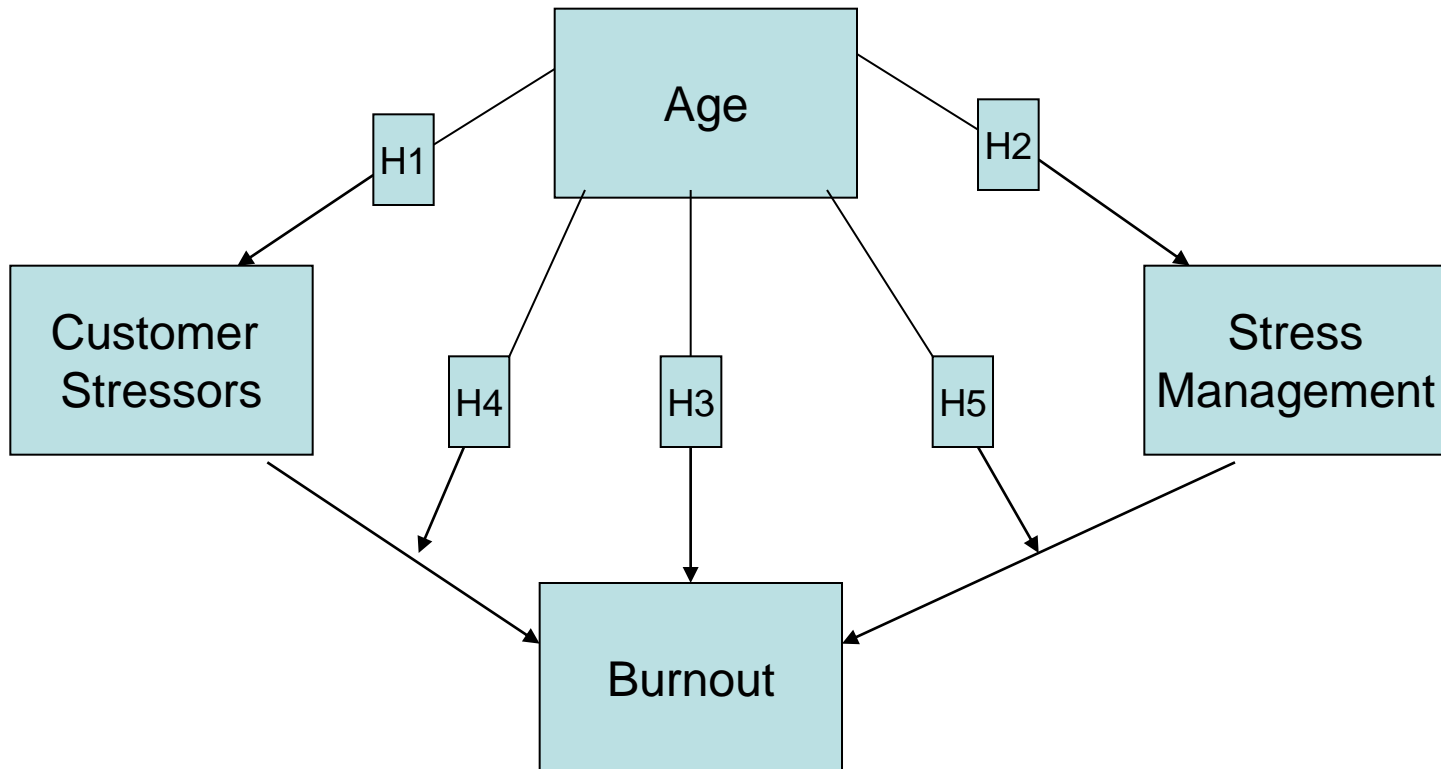
- Emotional labour: *'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display [which] is sold for a wage'* Hochschild, 1983)
- Organisations expect positive behaviour with display rules for interactions e.g. service with a smile
- Service worker may be required to express emotions that are not genuinely felt (emotional dissonance)
- Service worker has little chance of influencing customers particularly with short interactions and low status
- Service interactions characterised as partial low-control situations – active coping strategies are often not possible

Background: burnout

‘An individual reaction to high emotional demands in service work’ (Maslach, 1982)

- Develops into 3 states where employees:
 - feel emotionally drained (emotional exhaustion)
 - develop cynical attitudes (cynicism)
 - feel a loss of professional self-efficacy (reduced professional efficacy)
- Research suggests relationship between employee-customer interactions and higher burnout (Dorman & Zapf, 2004); a negative relationship between age and burnout (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003)

Hypothesised model



Hypotheses

- H1: Age is negatively related to the exposure of customer stressors
- H2: Age affects strategies of stress management
- H3: Age is negatively related to burnout in the service sector
- H4: Age will moderate the impact of customer stressors on employee burnout. In particular older employees will experience fewer stressors and less burnout
- H5: Age will moderate the impact of stress management strategies on employee burnout

Method: measures

- Customer stressors (15-items): CSS scale (Dorman & Zapf, 2004): disproportionate customer expectations, verbally aggressive customers, disliked customers, ambiguous customer expectations ($\alpha = .81$ to $.93$)
- Stress Management (11-items): SVF-S (Janke et al., 2002): downplay, emotion control, active coping ($\alpha = .62$ to $.82$)
- Humour (3-items): maintaining a sense of humour during, and as a means of coping with, a stressful interaction ($\alpha = .78$)
- Burnout (16-items): MBI (Schaufeli et al., 1996): emotional exhaustion, cynicism, professional efficacy ($\alpha = .87$ to $.92$)

Method: participants

- Participants:
 - UK national retail organisation
 - 259 stores received 3 questionnaires for customer facing employees
 - N = 272; response rate 35%
 - 63% female
 - mean age 30.2 years; range 16 to 61 years
 - 67% full-time
 - mean length of service 4.49 years
 - typical of the organisation

Findings H1: Age is negatively related to the exposure of customer stressors

- Age negatively related to all customer stressors
- Significant negative correlations with overall customer stressors, disliked customers, ambiguous customer expectations
- Partial support
- Older employees are typically exposed to fewer customer stressors
- Supports existing research

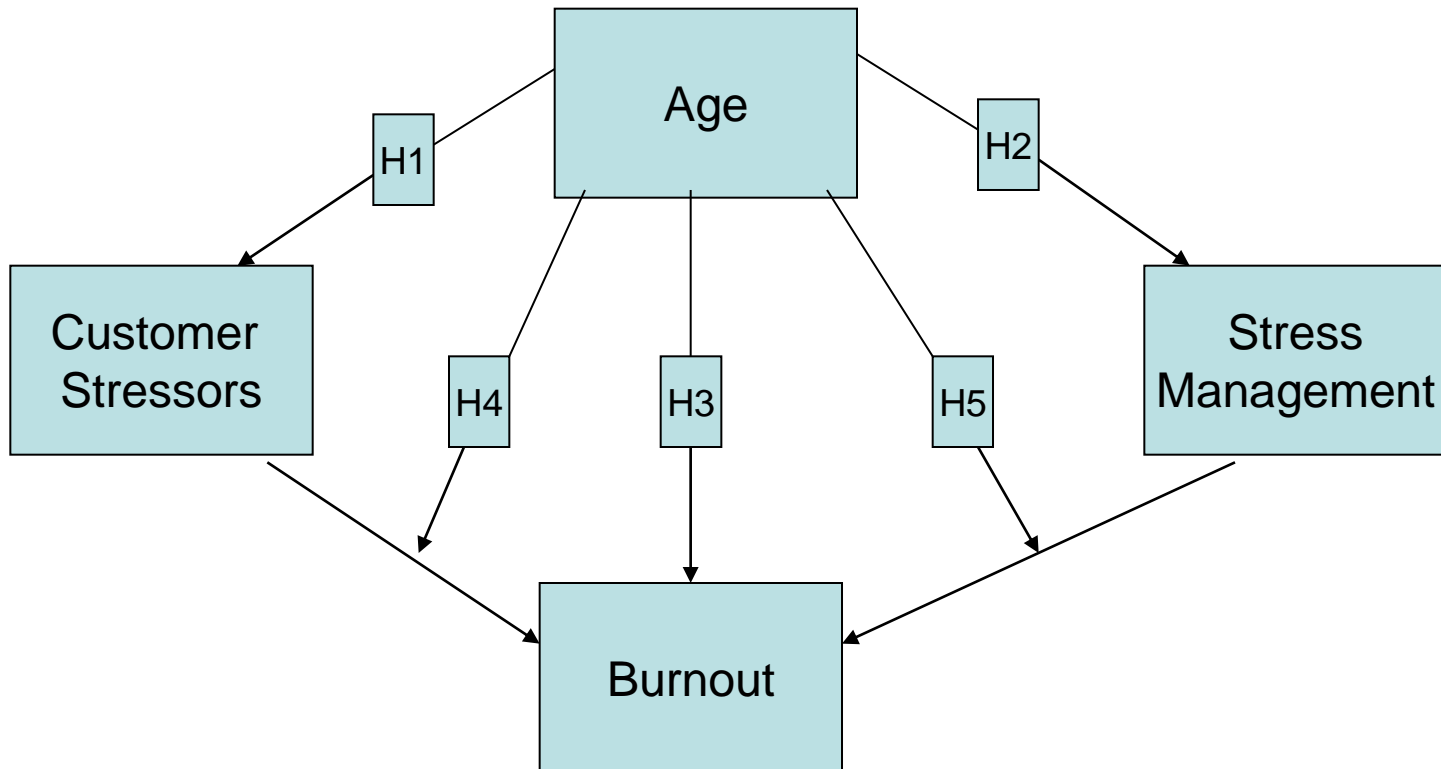
Findings H2: Age affects strategies of stress management

- Significant positive correlation with age and emotion control
- Significant negative correlation with age and humour
- Partial support
- There are age differences in strategies of stress management – older more likely to use emotion control but less likely to use humour as a strategy

Findings H3: Age is negatively related to burnout in the service sector

- Significant negative correlations with age and emotional exhaustion and cynicism
- Partial support
- Older workers less likely to experience emotional exhaustion and cynicism
- Supports existing research

Hypothesised model



Results

Table 2. Moderated Regression Results for Customer Stressors and Age on Burnout

Predictor		B	SE B	β	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²	Adj <i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
Cynicism	Step 1					.12	.11	.12
	Age	-0.12	.06	-0.13**	.028			
	Verbal Aggressive	0.29	.06	0.30****	.000			
	Step 2							
	Age x Verbal Aggressive	-0.11	.06	-0.11*	.074	.13	.12	.01
	Step 1					.12	.11	.12
Disliked customer	Age	-0.08	.06	-0.08	.159			
	Disliked customer	0.03	.06	0.31****	.000			
	Step 2							
	Age x Disliked customer	-0.12	.06	-0.12**	.049	.13	.12	.01
	Step 1					.12	.11	.12

p*<0.10 **; *P*<0.05; **p*<0.01; *****p*<0.001 (In line with other research, it can be inappropriate to use conventional significance levels for moderation effects, therefore a higher significance level for moderation is accepted at *p*<0.10)

Figure 1: Cynicism, Age and Verbally Aggressive Customers

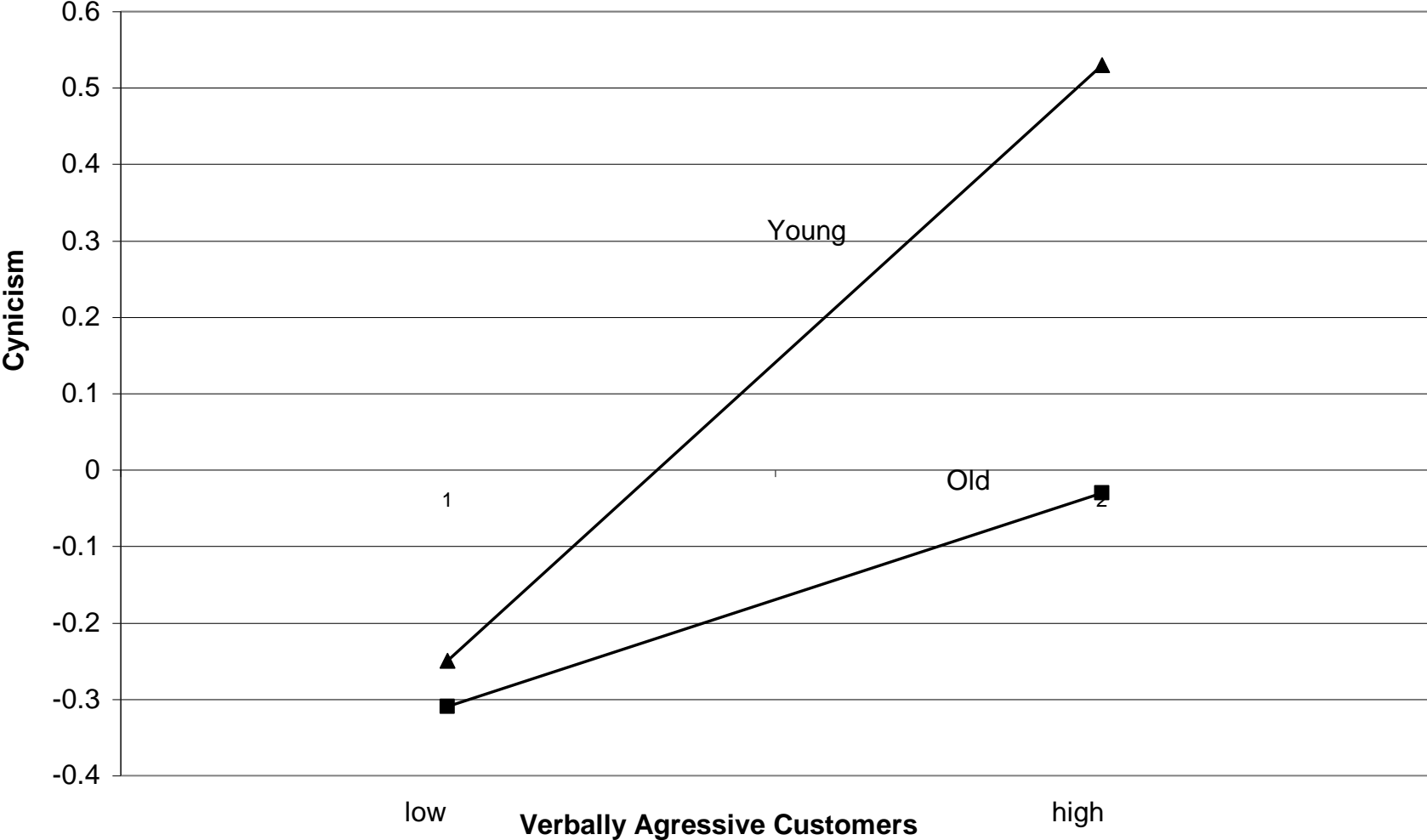


Figure 2: Cynicism, Age and Disliked Customers

Figure 2: Cynicism, Age and Disliked Customers. The figure shows the relationship between cynicism, age, and disliked customers. The x-axis represents age, and the y-axis represents cynicism. The data points are plotted, and a regression line is shown. The regression line indicates a positive relationship between age and cynicism, suggesting that older customers are more cynical. The data points are scattered around the regression line, indicating a moderate correlation. The regression line is labeled with its equation, which is not clearly visible in the image.

Findings H4: Age will moderate the impact of customer stressors on employee burnout. In particular older employees will experience fewer stressors and less burnout

- Moderation effect between age and verbally aggressive customers on cynicism
- Moderation effect between age and disliked customers on cynicism
- Partial support
- Younger employees are likely to feel more cynical at work when exposed to verbally aggressive and disliked customers than older employees

Results

Table 3 Moderated regression results for stress management strategies and age on emotional exhaustion

Predictor		B	SE B	β	p	R^2	Adj R^2	ΔR^2
Emotional Exhaustion	Step 1					.09	.07	.09
	Age	-0.31	.08	-0.29****	.000			
	Active Coping	-0.01	.08	-0.01	.935			
	Step 2							
	Age x Active Coping	-0.17	.09	-0.15*	.063	.11	.09	.02
	Step 1					.09	.07	.08
	Age	-0.31	.09	-0.29****	.000			
	Humour	0.01	.08	0.01	.950			
	Step 2							
	Age x Humour	0.17	.08	0.16**	.042	.11	.09	.03

* $p < .0.10$ ** $P < .0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; **** $p < 0.001$

Figure 3: Emotional Exhaustion, Age and Active Coping

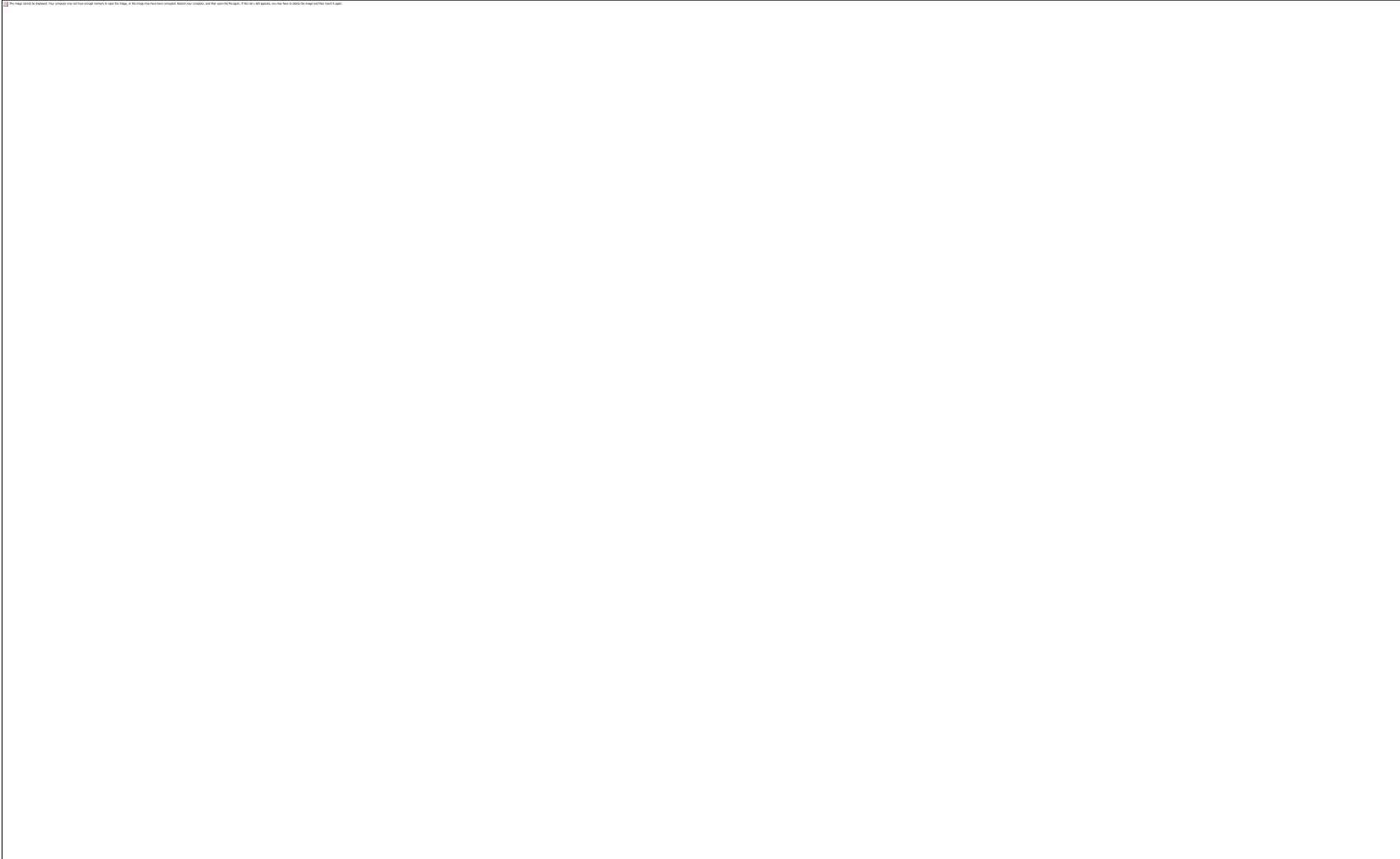
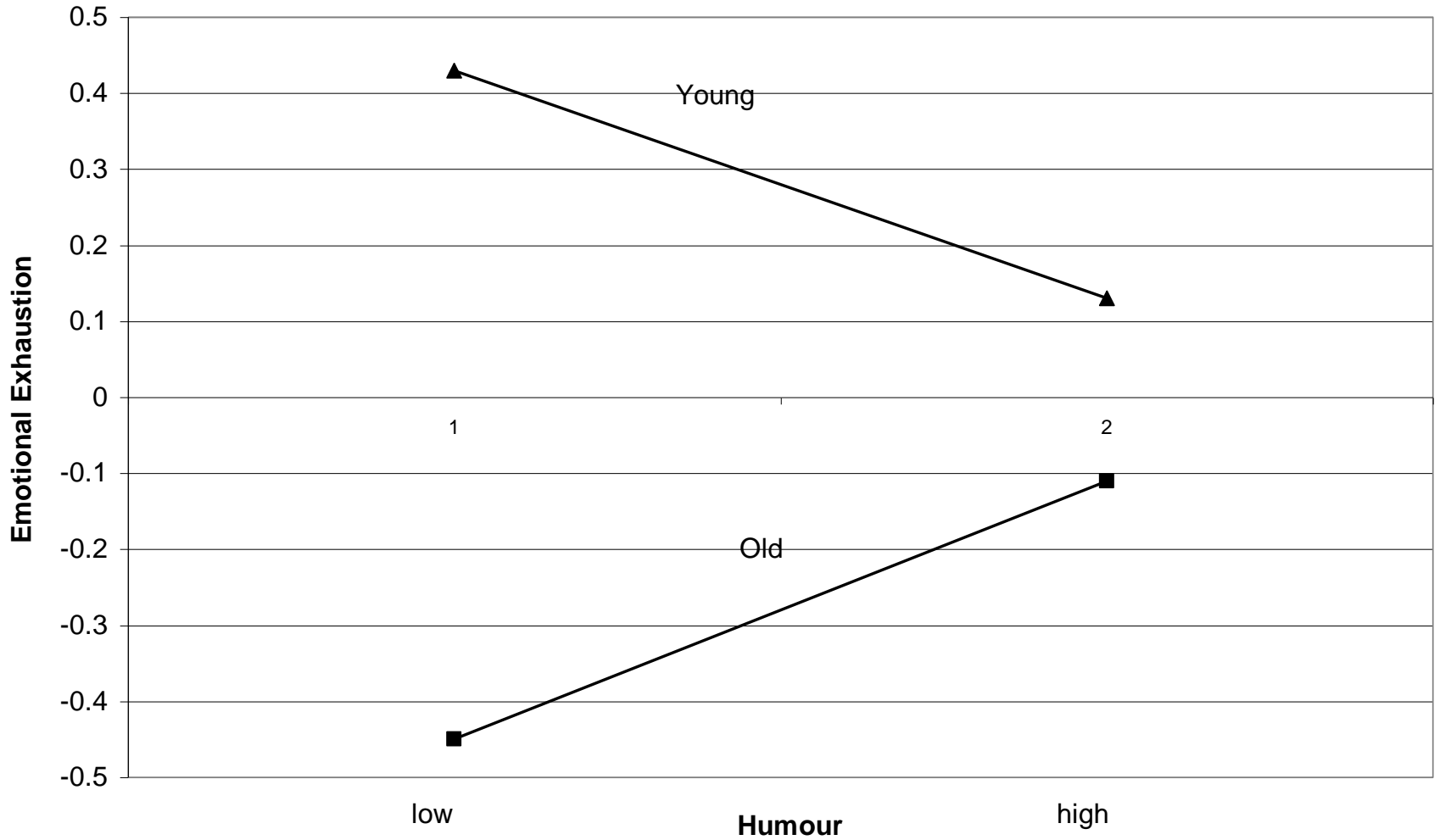


Figure 4: Emotional Exhaustion, Age and Humour



Results

Table 3 Moderated regression results for emotion control and age on burnout

	Predictor	B	SE B	β	p	R^2	Adj R^2	ΔR^2
Emotional Exhaustion	Step 1					.09	.08	.09
	Age	-0.30	.09	-0.28***	.001			
	Emotion Control	-0.05	.08	-0.05	.563			
	Step 2							
	Age x Emotion Control	-0.20	.10	-0.16*	.057	.11	.09	.02
Cynicism	Step 1					.13	.12	.13
	Age	-0.22	.08	-0.21***	.008			
	Emotion Control	-0.24	.08	-0.24***	.002			
	Step 2							
	Age x Emotion Control	-0.20	.10	-0.17**	.047	.15	.13	.02
Professional Efficacy	Step 1					.09	.08	.09
	Age	0.01	.05	0.01	.902			
	Emotion Control	0.17	.05	0.30****	.000			
	Step 2							
	Age x Emotion Control	0.10	.06	0.14*	.097	.11	.09	.02

* $p < .010$ ** $P < .005$; *** $p < 0.01$; **** $p < 0.001$

Figure 5: Emotional Exhaustion, Age and Emotion Control

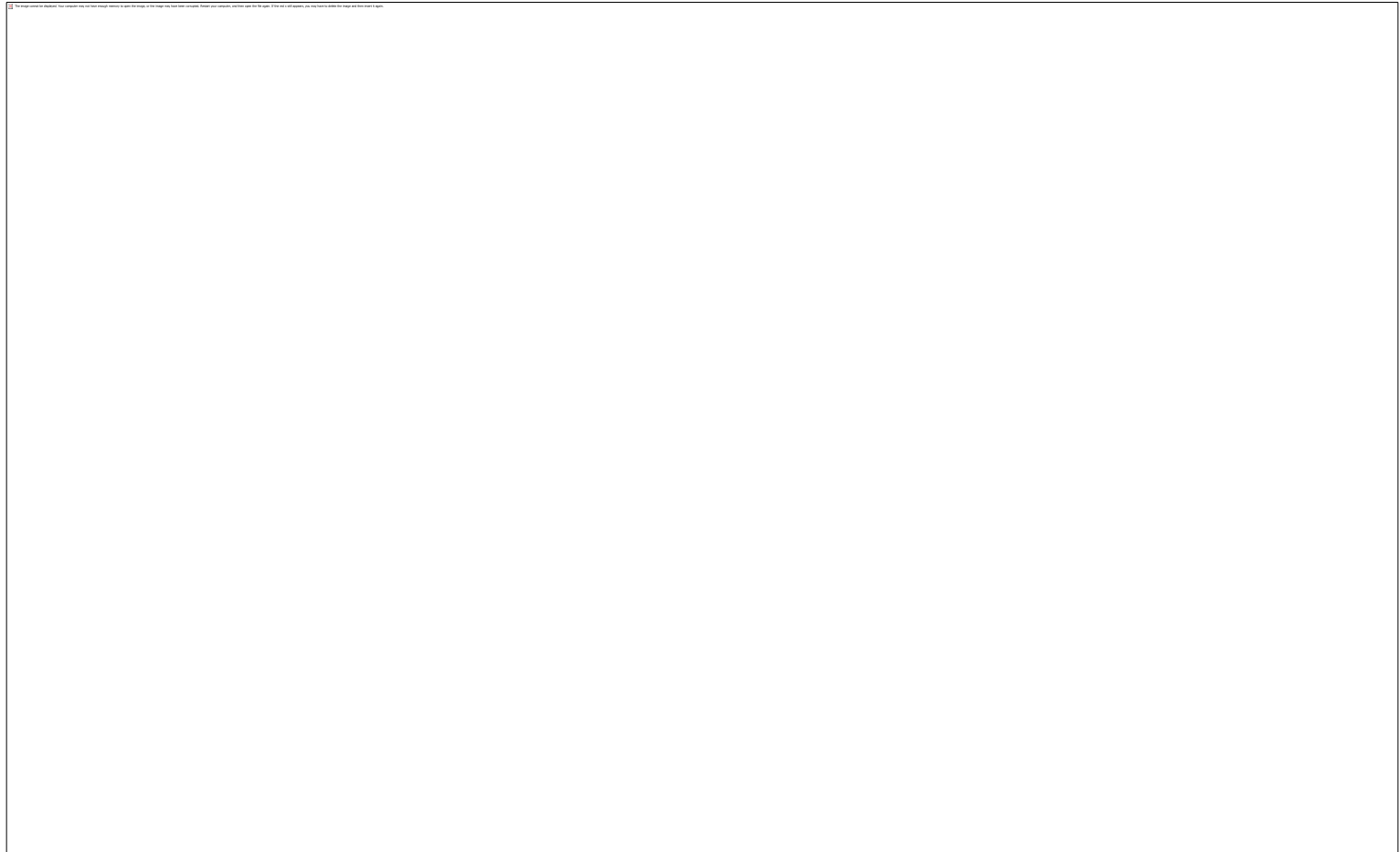


Figure 6: Cynicism, Age and Emotion Control

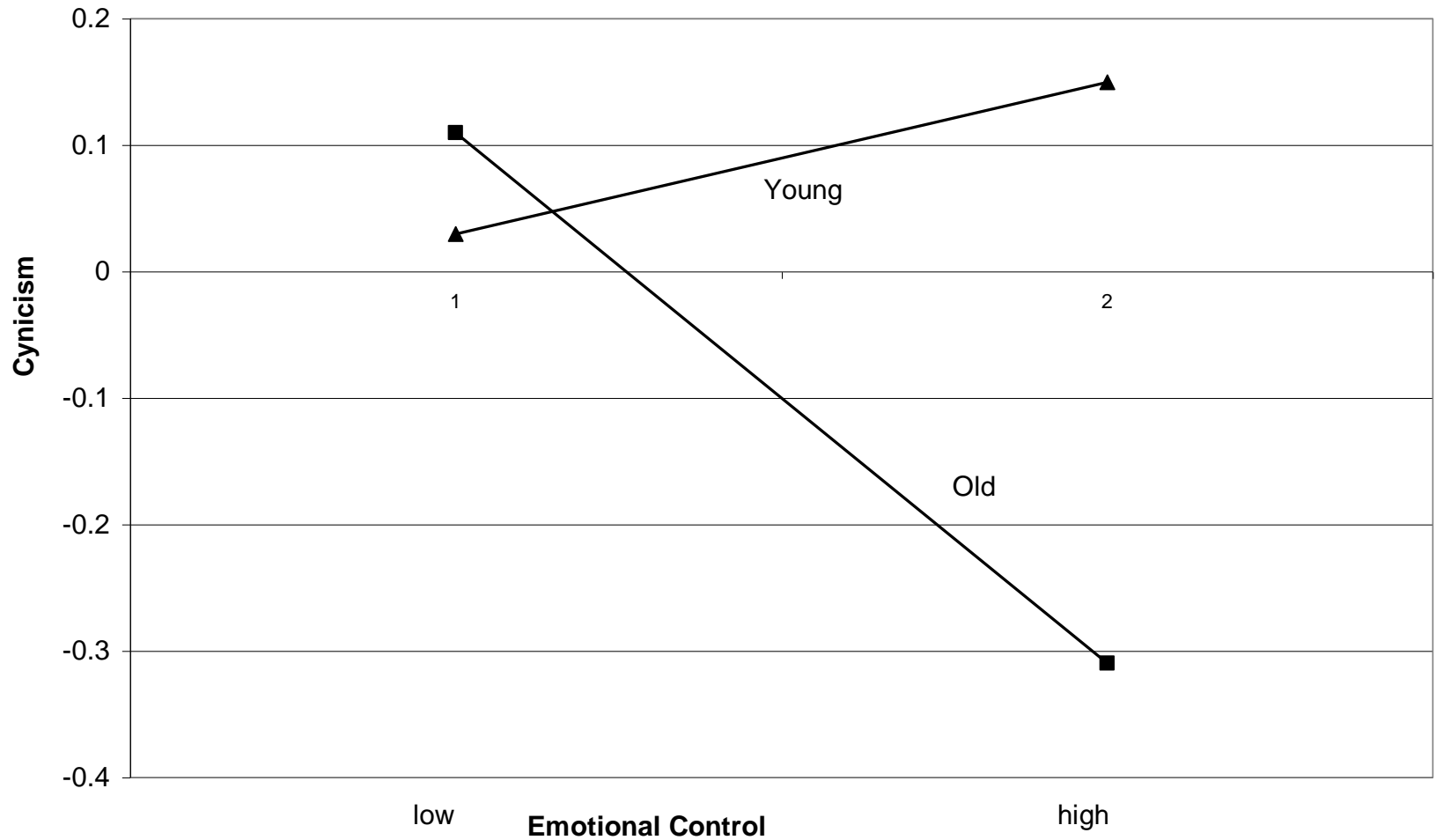
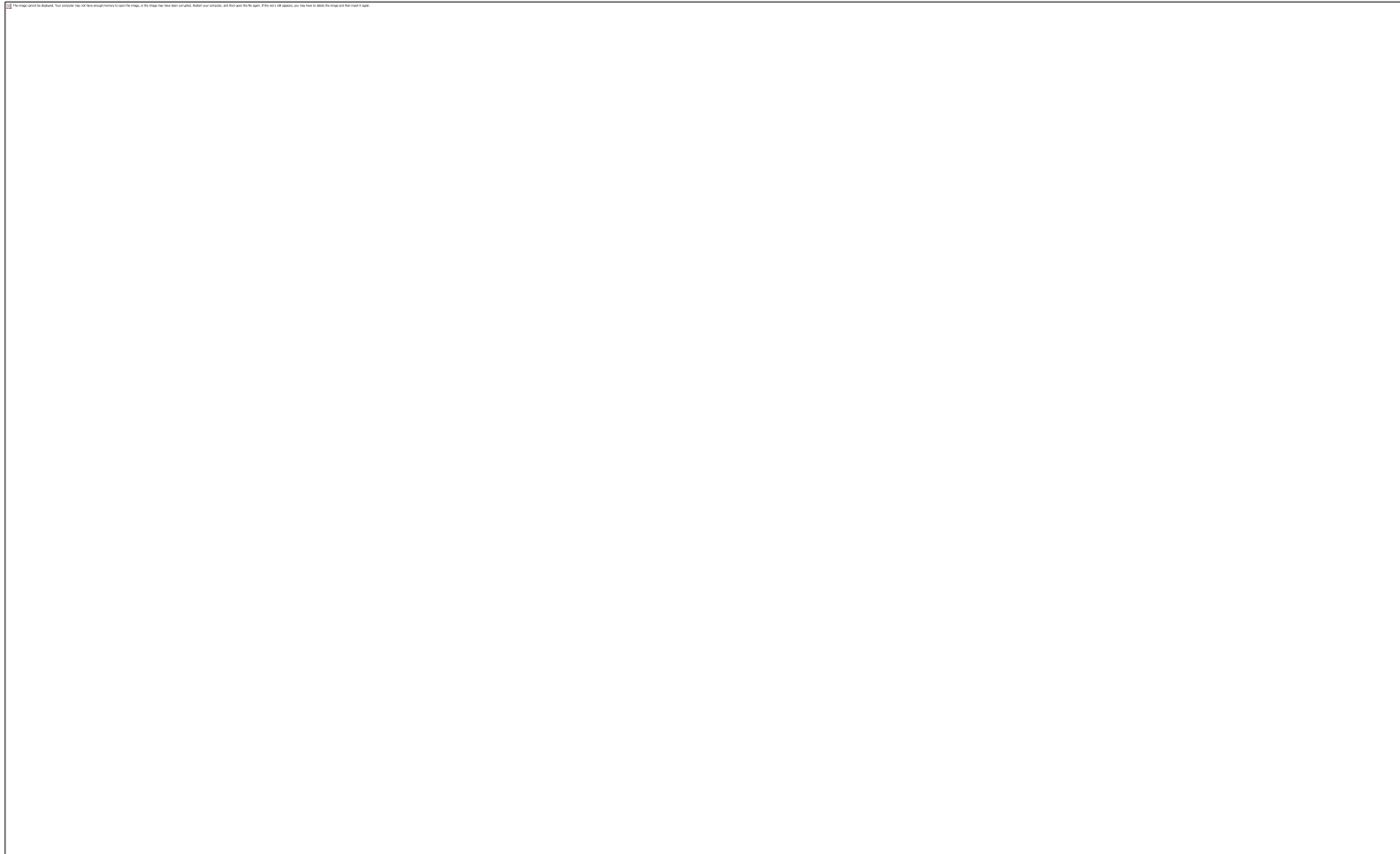


Figure 7: Professional Efficacy, Age and Emotion Control



Findings H5: Age will moderate the impact of stress management strategies on employee burnout

- 5 out of 12 moderation effects
- Partial support
- Emotion control has greatest influence:
 - Older employees who use more emotion control experience less emotional exhaustion and cynicism but more emotion control results in more emotional exhaustion and cynicism for younger employees
 - Using emotion control increases feelings of professional efficacy for all employees, and particularly for older employees

Findings: Hypothesis 5 (cont)

- Using humour increases emotional exhaustion for older employees but reduces emotional exhaustion in younger employees
- Using active coping decreases emotional exhaustion for older employees but increases emotional exhaustion in younger employees

Conclusions

Younger employees:

- Experience more customer stressors
- Use less appropriate stress management strategies, or use appropriate strategies less successfully
- Only humour is a positive strategy

Conclusions (cont)

Older employees:

- Experience fewer customer stressors and tend to use more appropriate stress management strategies, suggesting coping strategies that draw on lessons from the past
- As a result experience less burnout
- Organisational benefits - potential increase in customer satisfaction, lower sickness absence and turnover

Conclusions (cont)

- Emotion control: older employees are better able to manage their emotions at work and have fewer negative health outcomes from stressful interactions
- Humour: generational norms? Maybe older employees take work more seriously and use humour as a last option in highly stressful situations. Requires more research

Conclusions (cont)

- Active coping: older can identify when active coping is relevant and use it more appropriately. Younger use it as a default strategy, maybe in inappropriate situations, resulting in emotional exhaustion
- Indication is that general discrimination against older employees is not justified

Implications for service organisations

- Training:
 - Coping strategies ‘one size does not fit all’
 - Emphasise emotion control is *part* of the job
 - Encourage older employees as mentors
- Burnout prevention programmes:
 - Younger employees more susceptible
- Age orientation of organisations:
 - Reduction of age prejudices?

Limitations and further research

Limitations:

- Cross sectional v longitudinal
- Self report measures v direct observations; feedback from co-workers
- Homogenous population

Further research:

- Other occupational groups
- Full range of stress management strategies
- Discrete age groups