

# Burden or Duty?: The Dynamics of Welfare and Careers for Women of the Sandwich Generation

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Sandwich generation;  
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## Abstract

*This study aims to present a conceptual synthesis of the impact of women's roles as the sandwich generation on their health, well-being, and careers. Using a narrative literature review approach, this article analyzes 30 Scopus-indexed articles and books published between 2000 and 2025 that focus on women who work while caring for children and their parents. The results show that sandwich generation women face higher levels of stress, work-family conflict, and irregular self-care, which pose risks to their health. However, negative impacts on subjective health and life satisfaction do not always occur because, in some contexts, the caregiving role provides meaning and social recognition. The study concludes that the role of women as part of the sandwich generation can be a burden or a blessing, depending on how they manage the demands of caregiving and work with adequate support. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of human resource management policies that are responsive to the needs of women of the sandwich generation in Indonesia.*

## Kata Kunci

Generasi sandwich;  
Perempuan;  
Perempuan pekerja  
Perawatan  
Manajemen sumber  
daya manusia

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyajikan sintesis konseptual mengenai dampak peran perempuan sebagai generasi sandwich terhadap kesehatan, kesejahteraan, dan karir mereka. Dengan pendekatan tinjauan pustaka naratif, artikel ini menganalisis 30 artikel dan buku terindeks Scopus yang dipublikasikan antara 2000 hingga 2025 mengenai perempuan yang bekerja sambil mengasuh anak dan orang tua. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perempuan generasi sandwich menghadapi tingkat stres yang lebih tinggi, konflik kerja-keluarga, serta perawatan diri yang kurang teratur, yang berisiko pada kesehatan. Namun, dampak negatif terhadap kesehatan subjektif dan kepuasan hidup tidak selalu terjadi, karena dalam beberapa konteks, peran pengasuhan memberikan makna dan pengakuan sosial. Kesimpulan penelitian mengungkap bahwa peran perempuan sebagai generasi sandwich dapat menjadi beban atau bakti tergantung pada pengelolaan tuntutan pengasuhan dan pekerjaan dengan dukungan yang memadai. Implikasi penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya kebijakan manajemen sumber daya manusia yang responsif terhadap kebutuhan perempuan generasi sandwich di Indonesia.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this study, the sandwich generation is defined as individuals who provide care and financial support to both their parents and children, while also working formally (Alburez-Gutierrez et al., 2021). Life expectancy is increasing, and the transition to becoming an independent adult is taking longer, leading to more adults supporting two generations at once. Women tend to perform more caregiving tasks than men (Friedman et al., 2015). They also assume additional daily caregiving responsibilities, such as administering medications, attending health check-ups, and managing household chores (Do et al., 2014). This significant responsibility is paired with the need to earn a living, which affects the time and energy available (Li, 2024). This situation can lead to conflicts between work and family, increased role strain, and disruptions to career sustainability (Perrigino et al., 2022).

The impact of being part of the sandwich generation on women varies. For example, being a child in the sandwich generation is one such factor. One study found that caring for both parents and children resulted in worse subjective health compared to caring for just parents (Do et al., 2014). On the other hand, another study showed that being part of the sandwich generation did not always lead to lower life satisfaction (Künemund, 2006). Further findings revealed that the sandwich generation was more likely to report good health and avoid depression, despite risks of overweight and irregular self-care practices (Kartseva & Peresetsky, 2023). Thus, the role of a sandwich generation is not necessarily a verdict that automatically lowers life quality; its impact depends on context and available resources.

The sandwich generation employs various strategies to maintain a balance between the demands they face and the resources available to them. Coping strategies include acceptance, managing boundaries between work and family, seeking help, planning, or trying to do everything themselves (Timmers & Lengeler, 2022). Lifelong learning and finding meaning in work can also help women maintain their careers, even when their career paths are interrupted by caregiving responsibilities (Rajahonka & Villman, 2022). Organizational policies and human resource management play a role in the regulations implemented (Andriana, 2024). In this case, the rules applied can either support or hinder the sandwich generation women.

In the context of Indonesia, a predominantly Muslim country, being part of the sandwich generation can be seen as an act of devotion to parents. Sandwich generation women in Indonesia view their experience as both a burden and an act of worship (Khalil & Santoso, 2022). They feel emotionally and financially squeezed but find it difficult to reject family and social expectations. This article has two objectives: first, to present a conceptual synthesis of how the role of the sandwich generation affects the health, health behavior, and life satisfaction of working women. Second, to translate these findings into a gender-sensitive human resource management framework relevant for organizations in Indonesia.

The goal of this research is to examine the impact of women's roles as part of the sandwich generation on their health, well-being, and careers, and to provide a deeper understanding of the coping strategies employed by women in facing these challenges. This research focuses on women who work while caring for two generations, namely their children and parents, taking into account various factors that influence their lives, including physical and mental health, subjective well-being, and the impact of organizational policies and family support. Through a narrative literature review of Scopus-indexed articles, this study aims to develop a conceptual model relevant to the Indonesian context to support sandwich generation women in maintaining a balance between family and work demands.

## METHOD

This research adopts a narrative literature review approach, selected to build a conceptual understanding and managerial implications related to the phenomenon of working women in the sandwich generation. This narrative approach allows the study to systematically explore various perspectives and findings from previous research, as well as uncover the connections between relevant topics.

The focus of this research is on studies published in Scopus-indexed journals since 2000, addressing the topics of the sandwich generation, multigenerational caregiving, and its impact on work, particularly among working women. The research focuses on various aspects related to women in the position of multigenerational caregivers while pursuing their careers.

Data collection was conducted through a search of Scopus-indexed journals. Keywords used in the article search included "Sandwich generation," "sandwiched caregivers," "multigenerational caregiving," "working caregivers," and "women." This combination of keywords facilitated the identification of relevant articles on multigenerational caregiving and the relationship between work and caregiving by women. After filtering, 30 journals meeting the research criteria were identified.

Data analysis was carried out using a thematic approach, where findings from selected articles were grouped into relevant main themes. The emerging themes from this analysis include: 1) Definition and prevalence of women in the sandwich generation; 2) Health and health behaviors among women involved in multigenerational caregiving; 3) Life satisfaction and subjective well-being of sandwich generation women; 4) Work, financial conditions, and human resource management practices in the context of working women; 5) Policy context, community influences, and religious culture affecting the sandwich generation women.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### 1. Prevalence of Women in the Sandwich Generation

Research on the sandwich generation uses various definitions. For example, one study defines it based on the time spent daily caregiving for both parents and children (Suh, 2016), while other highlights not only the time provided but also the financial support given to both parents and children (Friedman et al., 2015). The age range studied is also broad. One study focuses on individuals over 50 who support both elderly parents and adult children (Albertini et al., 2022), while another study finds that younger generations tend to make up a larger proportion of the sandwich generation (Lei et al., 2023). This research focuses on individuals who contribute both time and financial support to two generations.

#### 2. Health and Health Behavior

Sandwich generation women with children under 18 at home are more likely to report poor health compared to those without children (Do et al., 2014). This was also confirmed by longitudinal studies showing that caregiving for two generations can increase the risk of mental health problems and depression symptoms (Ervin et al., 2022). Sandwich generation individuals also report higher psychological distress compared to those who care for just one generation (Cheng & Santos-Lozada, 2024).

Caregiving limits time for relaxation and self-care activities, with a greater impact on women (Mussida & Patimo, 2023). Additionally, women caregivers tend to smoke and drink alcohol less but are more likely to be overweight, have irregular meal times, and skip regular health checkups (Kartseva & Peresetsky, 2023). Despite this, women caregivers strive to maintain their health through light physical activity, dietary changes, and social support (Evans et al., 2016). Women's roles are also central to children's education (Aryani & Lindawati, 2025). Despite limited time and fatigue, it is not easy to maintain these health activities. Overall, previous research suggests that caregiving in the sandwich generation can lead to increased strain on both physical and mental health.

#### 3. Life Satisfaction and Subjective Well-Being

Findings on life satisfaction and subjective well-being vary. One study found that individuals in the sandwich generation do not report lower life satisfaction compared to those who do not provide caregiving (Künemund, 2006). Other studies show that women in the sandwich generation are more

likely to report high life satisfaction (Kartseva & Peresetsky, 2023). However, other research suggests that intensive caregiving for multiple generations can decrease life satisfaction, especially when social support is limited, and caregiving is viewed as an obligation (D'Amen et al., 2021). The presence of self-compassion and family support can enhance life meaning and life satisfaction for individuals with caregiving responsibilities (Jeong & Lee, 2022). Overall, with adequate support, positive meaning-making, and self-compassion, women in the sandwich generation can maintain or improve their subjective well-being.

#### 4. Work and Finances

When it comes to careers, being part of the sandwich generation has several implications. Individuals who care for multiple generations report higher levels of work-family conflict, time pressure, exhaustion, and lower work flexibility (Honda et al., 2025). Caregiving also leads to reduced working hours, increasing the likelihood of women leaving the workforce (Ansari-Thomas, 2024). Financially, the sandwich generation faces limited ability to save and increased long-term financial vulnerability (Wiemers & Bianchi, 2015). Flexible working arrangements and support for employees with caregiving responsibilities are needed (Deller et al., 2025). Organizations that support family caregiving and supervisor support can help employees navigate caregiving challenges while maintaining their work performance (Perrigino et al., 2022).

#### 5. Policies, Communities, and Macro Context

Long-term caregiving institutions can reduce the intensity and pressure felt by the sandwich generation in caregiving (Kääriäinen et al., 2024). The position of women as key figures in the family is significant (Nurmadani et al., 2025). Women play a significant role in caregiving, particularly when caregiving services are limited or expensive (Gösenbauer et al., 2025). The role of family caregiving became especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it also highlighted the lack of policies that support and improve caregivers' quality of life. A simple example is the availability of age-friendly public transportation, which significantly benefits the sandwich generation women who rely on public transportation for caregiving both for parents and children (Park & Lee, 2018). Therefore, it can be said that structural factors contribute to how the sandwich generation manages their pressures.

### Discussion

This study reveals that women in the sandwich generation face multiple challenges simultaneously, such as child caregiving, elder caregiving, work responsibilities, and providing financial support to two generations. Moreover, caregiving increases stress, reduces time for rest and self-care, and heightens risks for both physical and mental health. However, the adverse effects of caregiving for two generations can be mitigated. In some contexts, women who provide care report high levels of life satisfaction, especially in cultures that value caregiving and offer support, such as family backing, coping skills, and support from work and communities (Andriana, 2024). Thus, the sandwich generation can be viewed through the demand-resource framework, where well-being is achieved when individuals can handle the pressures they face with available resources.

Coping strategies and personal resources play an essential role and are more effective when supported by a supportive organizational climate. Without acknowledging caregiving responsibilities and without support from their company, women in the sandwich generation may resort to unhealthy coping strategies, potentially reducing their career advancement opportunities (Okoye et al., 2025).

In human resources studies, working women who provide caregiving represent a crucial yet often invisible segment of the workforce (Pangestu, 2024). The pressures of caregiving can lead to work-family conflicts, increased stress, and reduced workforce participation, particularly among middle-aged women (Ramanan & Mohamad, 2025). If organizations fail to recognize this reality, they risk losing experienced women due to burnout, performance decline, or resignation.

Companies can offer several options, such as flexible working hours, where employees can choose their working hours, or the option to work remotely. This helps sandwich generation women manage their time between work and caregiving. Additionally, supportive supervisors and an organizational culture that normalizes discussions about caregiving responsibilities can reduce stigma, making it easier for employees to request adjustments when caregiving demands increase (Perrigino et al., 2022). Providing leave for caregiving, as well as support such as caregivers for elderly parents or childcare services for children, can reduce stress and maintain employee engagement with the company.

This study has several limitations. First, it is a narrative review rather than a systematic review, so it does not include all research from 2000 to 2025 on the sandwich generation. Moreover, the studies discussed are primarily from North America, Europe, and East Asia, so generalizations to other cultural contexts should be made with caution. Additionally, this article focuses on women and does not explore the role of men in the sandwich generation. Future research could focus on Indonesia or other predominantly Muslim countries and directly measure the role of caregiving in relation to organizational support, as well as its impact on individual performance.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that women in the sandwich generation face significant challenges in balancing caregiving for two generations, work, and financial responsibilities. Juggling both work and caregiving increases stress, limits time for self-care, and raises the risk of deteriorating health. However, the negative impact of these challenges is highly dependent on the balance between the demands faced and the resources available.

This study also highlights that support from family, employers, or the community, such as flexible working hours or caregiving services, can help sandwich generation women maintain or improve their well-being while advancing in their careers. In contrast, without such support, these women are at risk of health issues, financial vulnerability, and career stagnation.

From a human resource management perspective, women in the sandwich generation must be recognized as a key workforce segment. Therefore, organizations need to develop policies and career paths that cater to their specific needs. Future research should focus on empirical studies in Indonesia to explore how organizational support can help sandwich generation women balance their work and family roles.

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