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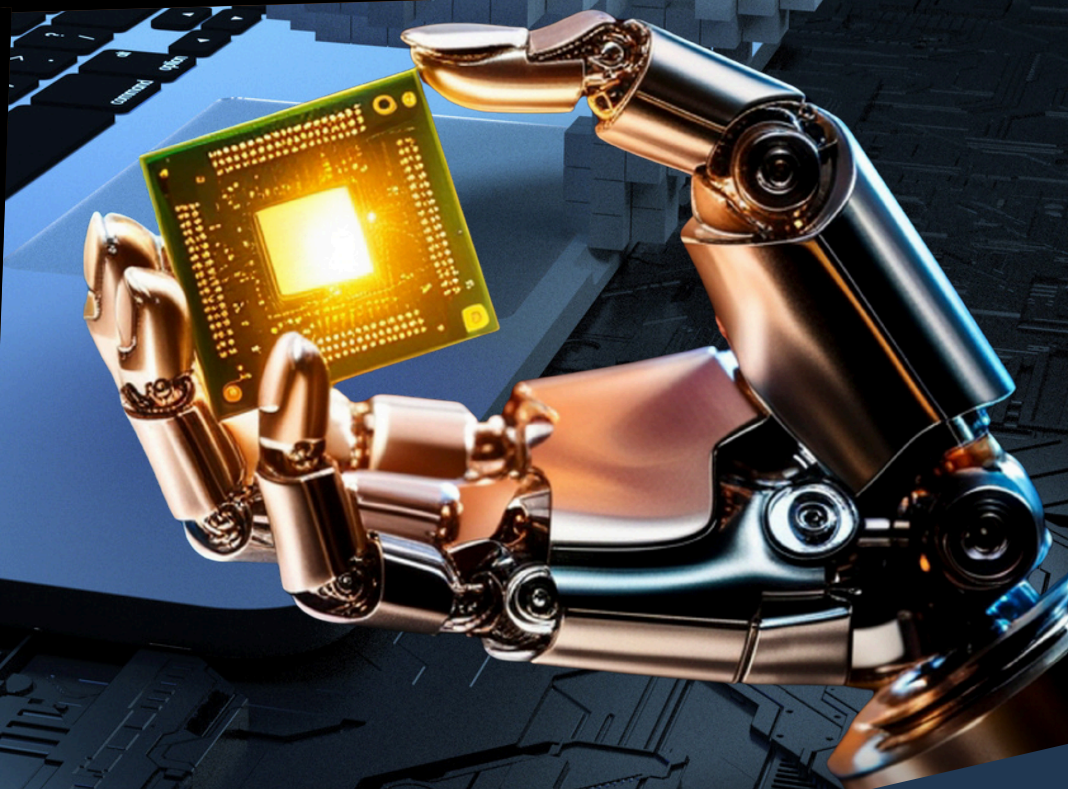


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# THE SANDWICH GENERATION: EXPLORING ITS TYPES AND CONSEQUENCES

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## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of the sandwich generation has become increasingly prominent in contemporary societies due to population aging, extended life expectancy, and changing family structures. Many working adults now find themselves simultaneously responsible for caring for aging parents while supporting dependent children. This dual caregiving role places individuals under significant emotional, financial, and time-related pressure, often during critical stages of their career development.

The term sandwich generation was first introduced by Miller (1981) to describe middle-aged women who were caught between the competing demands of caring for aging parents and raising children. This group has received growing scholarly attention as global demographic shifts intensify intergenerational caregiving demands. These responsibilities frequently intersect with employment obligations, making it difficult for individuals to balance professional and family roles while increasing the likelihood of role overload and work–family conflict (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Honda et al., 2025; Kayaalp et al., 2020;). Since then, the concept has evolved to include both men and women, reflecting changing gender roles and increased labor force participation among caregivers.

Therefore, this paper aims to provide a conceptual understanding of the sandwich generation by examining its different types and the effects and challenges associated with dual caregiving roles.

## TYPES OF SANDWICH GENERATION

Scholars have proposed several classifications to capture diversity within the sandwich generation:

- **Traditional Sandwich Generation:** Adults caring for their own children (usually minors or teenagers) and aging parents simultaneously (Miller, 1981).

- **Club Sandwich Generation:** Adults who provide care for aging parents, adult children, and grandchildren—representing multiple generational layers of responsibility (Pierret, 2006).
- **Open-Faced Sandwich:** Individuals who may not have children of their own but are responsible for elderly relatives or dependents while managing demanding careers or social obligations (Grundy & Henretta, 2006).

These classifications illustrate that membership in the sandwich generation is not determined solely by age or parental status, but rather by the convergence of caregiving roles, intergenerational relationships, and responsibilities that occur within the same life stage.

## **EFFECTS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY THE SANDWICH GENERATION**

The dual caregiving role experienced by the sandwich generation often leads to a variety of challenges that affect their personal, social, and professional lives. The following section discusses several key challenges commonly faced by individuals in this group.

### **EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS**

Members of the sandwich generation frequently report high levels of emotional distress due to their multiple and often conflicting roles. The simultaneous demands of caring for aging parents and dependent children can create role overload and role conflict, leaving individuals with little time for rest or personal fulfillment (Ipsos Report, 2024). Feelings of guilt and inadequacy are common among sandwich caregivers because they often perceive themselves as failing in one domain, either as parents, children, or professionals, when unable to meet competing expectations. Studies have linked these pressures to increased rates of anxiety, depression, eroded self-esteem, reduced life satisfaction, and caregiver burnout. This emotional toll may lead to compassion fatigue and emotional exhaustion if sufficient coping resources are unavailable (Ju, 2024).

### **SOCIAL AND RELATIONSHIP CHALLENGES**

Balancing caregiving responsibilities can disrupt social relationships and interpersonal functioning. Individuals in the sandwich generation may experience marital strain as emotional energy and time are increasingly devoted to caregiving duties. At the same time, the demands of caregiving often limit opportunities for social interaction and leisure, contributing to social isolation and emotional fatigue among caregivers (Liu et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). Intergenerational tensions may also emerge, particularly when disagreements occur among adult siblings regarding caregiving responsibilities or when children perceive reduced parental attention. Such relational strains may intensify feelings of loneliness and emotional disconnection, thereby compounding psychological stress and family conflict among caregivers (Kokorelias et al., 2022; Lei et al., 2023).

### **FINANCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL IMPACTS**

Financial strain is another significant challenge faced by individuals in the sandwich generation. Expenses such as education, healthcare, housing, and eldercare services can place substantial pressure on household finances, often reducing savings and increasing financial

vulnerability. Individuals who simultaneously support dependent children and aging parents frequently experience greater economic burden due to the need to allocate resources across multiple generations (Lei et al., 2023; Rachmawati et al., 2024). In many cases, members of this generation also contribute financially to their parents' medical care or daily living costs, particularly in societies where formal welfare systems or long-term care support are limited (Raj & Jayashree, 2024). Such financial obligations may affect their long-term financial security and retirement planning.

At the same time, caregiving responsibilities frequently disrupt employment. Many caregivers reduce their working hours, decline promotions, or even leave the workforce to manage caregiving duties, resulting in lost income, reduced career progression, and diminished retirement savings. Employers may perceive caregivers as less available or committed, which can lead to subtle workplace discrimination (Mirage News, 2025). Together, these financial and professional sacrifices compound the long-term economic vulnerability of the sandwich generation (Pew Research Center, 2013).

## **PHYSICAL HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

The physical consequences of sustained caregiving stress are significant yet often overlooked. Caregivers juggling multiple roles commonly experience chronic fatigue, poor sleep, and physical exhaustion, which can adversely affect overall health (PubMed, 2025). Over time, the prolonged stress associated with caregiving can negatively affect caregivers' physical health. Chronic exposure to caregiving stress has been linked to physiological changes such as increased allostatic load, weakened immune functioning, and elevated risk of cardiovascular and cardiometabolic conditions (Lee et al., 2022; Sánchez-Martínez et al., 2024). Prolonged caregiving demands may also contribute to fatigue, chronic pain, headaches, and musculoskeletal problems.

Furthermore, the intensive nature of caregiving often leaves limited time for self-care activities such as exercise, rest, and routine medical checkups, leading many caregivers to prioritize the well-being of care recipients over their own health (Pashazade et al., 2024). This pattern of self-neglect can lead to the worsening of preexisting health conditions and heighten susceptibility to illness. When physical strain is combined with emotional exhaustion, a cycle emerges in which declining health diminishes caregiving capacity, further intensifying stress and overall vulnerability (PubMed, 2025).

## **CONCLUSION**

As life expectancy increases and parenthood is delayed, many adults find themselves responsible for the care of both their aging parents and their dependent children. This dual caregiving role, while rooted in love and duty, often creates overlapping pressures that affect emotional well-being, financial stability, health, and family relationships.

Understanding the sandwich generation is vital for shaping sustainable family and social policies in aging societies. As caregiving demands continue to grow, efforts to support this generation will not only improve the quality of life for caregivers but also strengthen the fabric of intergenerational solidarity. Future research and public initiatives should continue to explore innovative ways to balance caregiving duties with personal and professional fulfillment, ensuring that those who care for others are themselves cared for in return.

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