

# What is the Sandwich Generation?

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The **Sandwich Generation** is a generation of people (usually in their 30s or 40s) who care for their aging parents while supporting their own children.

According to the [Pew Research Center](#), just over one of every eight Americans aged 40 to 60 is both raising a child and caring for a parent, in addition to between seven and ten million adults caring for their aging parents from a long distance. [US Census Bureau](#) statistics indicate that the number of older [Americans](#) aged 65 or older will double by the year 2030, to over 70 million. In Australia, the term 'sandwich carer' relevant to the 2.6 million unpaid caregivers.<sup>[1]</sup> A Carers UK report in 2012 said that approximately 2.4 million people are combining childcare with caring for older or disabled relatives.<sup>[2]</sup>

Carol Abaya, nationally recognized as an expert on the sandwich generation, aging and elder/parent care issues, categorized the different scenarios involved in being a part of the sandwich generation.

- Traditional: those sandwiched between aging parents who need care and/or help and their own children.
- Club Sandwich: those in their 50s or 60s sandwiched between aging parents, adult children and grandchildren, or those in their 30s and 40s, with young children, aging parents and grandparents.
- Open Faced: anyone else involved in elder care.<sup>[3]</sup>

Merriam-Webster officially added the term to its dictionary in July, 2006.

The term "Sandwich Generation" was introduced to the social work and the gerontology communities, respectively, by [Dorothy Miller](#) and Elaine Brody in 1981.<sup>[4][5]</sup> The construct refers originally to younger *women* in their thirties and forties who were taking care of their children, but also having to meet the needs of their parents, employers, friends, and others. Now that people are living longer and children are growing up and needing continued care, the "sandwiching" is felt by both men and women who are in their fifties and sixties. The demographic could continue to change, but the idea remains the same,<sup>[6]</sup> with recent research focusing on the concept of the [senior sandwich generation](#).<sup>[7]</sup>

Due to poor economy, research shows that modern American society has had substantial increase of young post-college kids who return home to live with their parents or continue living with their parents throughout college. In a study done by the Pew Research Center<sup>[8]</sup> in 2012, published in an article called "[The Boomerang Generation](#)," about 29% of young adults ranging from the ages of 25–34 live with their parents. It is also becoming more acceptable; therefore, people who are in this situation are generally satisfied with their situation, which is likely to make it more common and less temporary. Now the parents of these young adults are being held responsible to care for their children longer than they expected, as well as now also being

expected to assume the role of caretaker for their elderly parents. These sandwiched people become responsible for helping their loved ones with daily functioning, medical services and supervision, giving medications, and aiding in financial, legal, and emotional difficulties of their loved ones as well as themselves.<sup>[9][10]</sup>

## **Korea**

In 1950 the [Korean War](#) resulted both in many war injuries, and in widespread poverty. Therefore, unfortunately, there was no way for survivors to prepare for old age. They had to work for economic renewal, not for private finance. As a result, Korea has the highest number of Sandwich Generation members than any other [Asian](#) country. That is why [Korea](#) still has a large family system. Especially in rural areas, large, extended families live together. As with the Sandwich Generation in other countries, the main concern in Korea is the additional cost of caring for elderly parents.<sup>[11]</sup>

## **Financial problems and statistics**

On average, adults in the Sandwich Generation are spending approximately \$10,000 and 1,350 hours on their parents and children combined per year. Typically, children require more money and “capital-intensive” care, while aging adults require more time and labor-intensive care.<sup>[12]</sup>

Becoming part of the Sandwich Generation can put a huge financial burden on families. On average, 48% of adults are providing some sort of financial support to their grown children, while 27% are their primary support. Additionally, 25% are financially supporting their parents as well.<sup>[13]</sup>

With that being said, some of the adults living in this sandwiched generation face financial problems regularly. They are supporting three generations at one time: their parents, their immediate family (self and spouse) and children.<sup>[13]</sup>

## **Other challenges**

Becoming a part of the Sandwich Generation can affect your financial status, your personal time, health, and career development. Although this can affect both men and women, women are typically seen by the society as the primary supporter. In other words, women are the ones who are primarily affected; men support financially while women support emotionally and physically (they bathe, dress, toilet, clean the home, etc. while the men solely provide the money).<sup>[14]</sup>

Taking care of an elderly parent while caring for your own children is a very time consuming task. It can really affect your personal time; you are no longer able to do the things that you like to do, relax, sleep, etc. When all of these tasks start consuming your life, you become at risk for mental health problems. [Depression](#) and [anxiety](#) are a huge risk factor for the Sandwich Generation, especially for women who are involved. On the contrary, men, and some women, are typically at risk for loss of career development. They might be at the peak of their career and have to take a step down and lose their opportunity to be able to help care for their aging parent or growing children.<sup>[14]</sup>

Due to these struggles, caregivers may develop strong feelings of stress, burnout, and depression.<sup>[9]</sup> Locational aspects aside, most caregivers experience some common difficulties. Some of these difficulties include how to manage their time efficiently between children, older parent, family, work, and personal well-being. Another challenge may be how to find the time to ensure a healthy marriage and a healthy self for the caregivers themselves. Caregivers are also dealing with the feelings of isolation and guilt that come along with being in this overworked role, oftentimes making the caregiver feel as if they are still not doing enough to help.<sup>[9]</sup> These caregivers often feel like they are “being pulled in two directions” causing symptoms of depression, marriage difficulties, and other emotional and psychological issues.<sup>[15]</sup> Many caregivers deal with older parents who are experiencing [Alzheimer's](#) and [dementia](#), which makes daily functioning and memory very difficult for them.<sup>[3]</sup> Caregivers also struggle to help protect the assets of those they are caring for who are no longer competent enough to do it themselves.<sup>[3]</sup>

### **How to handle the problem**

Though becoming part of the Sandwich Generation might be unavoidable, there are ways that you might be able to help prevent financial burdens, career development problems and personal health risks.

First of all, set some boundaries for your financial spending. Give your kids “X” amount of money per month or tell your parents that you have set aside “X” amount of money for them for the year. Second, if your children are eighteen or older and still dependent on you, give them some advice on how to get started on their own. Next, you might think about having your aging parents move into your home. It would save time and money while lessening the pressure of caring for someone in a different house. Not surprisingly, three generations living together is increasingly becoming a more popular trend. Additionally, claim tax benefits for caring for the elderly. You are also able to claim medical care reduction and deduct the medical bills on your tax returns. Finally, make sure that everyone is on the same page. Have a family meeting with all three generations involved with an attorney present. If everyone is on the same page, it will cause less stress and a smoother living situation for everyone involved.<sup>[16]</sup>

Another solution to keep in mind is to have a family meeting to discuss tasks that are needed to be done to care for all members of the family.<sup>[3]</sup> It is important to acknowledge the contributions of the caregivers and other members, as well as highlight the tasks that may need further attention or assistance. It is vital to actively communicate with the caregivers, children, and elder people in order to keep dialogue open about feelings, struggles, and expectations within the family.<sup>[3]</sup> Some other solutions for caregivers could be to elicit some sort of outside help to assist in taking care of their aging parents and struggling children.<sup>[3]</sup>

### **How to care for yourself**

If the Sandwich Generation cares for everyone else, then who is caring for him or her? It is important to take care of yourself when put into this type of situation because self-care can easily be ignored. Some tips to maintaining self-health would include, being kind to yourself, taking spontaneous breaks, being mindful and meditative, eating nutritious food, sleeping, laughing and finally, seeking professional help from a counselor.<sup>[17]</sup>

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## Further reading

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### External links

- [Dealing with the Perfect Storm](#)
- [Becoming a Caregiver – a How to: A Survival Course for the Sandwich Generation \(New York Times article on Carol Abaya\)](#)
- [The Sandwich Generation®](#)