

## **The Sandwich Generation: Family Responsibilities and Individual Well-Being**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to determine the impact of the dual role of the sandwich generation on the psychological well-being of individuals entering adulthood in Cirebon City who care for parents and fulfill family responsibilities. The main focus is on strategies and efforts to maintain a balance between family responsibilities and personal well-being, in order to achieve a more balanced and harmonious life. This study used a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to understand the subjective experiences of individuals entering adulthood 20-30 years old as a sandwich generation in Cirebon City. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the emotions, expectations, and challenges faced by individuals when caring for their parents and siblings, as well as how they manage their personal health while carrying out these dual roles. The results of this study showed that some informants were forced to take on the role of the sandwich generation due to family demands. This study shows that the sandwich generation faces great challenges in balancing the role of caring for parents and younger siblings with personal well-being. Although their responsibilities are different, good communication skills and stress management strategies, such as taking time for themselves, are both helpful. They hope to create financial stability and a more equitable division of responsibilities.

**Keywords :** Sandwich Generation, Interpersonal Communication, Family Conflict, Dual Role, Family Demands

### **Introduction**

Each generation faces unique challenges in its role in society, such as balancing family responsibilities and personal life. A hotly discussed phenomenon is the sandwich generation. The sandwich generation refers to individuals who have dual roles, where they are responsible for their parents and other family members who still live in the same house or under the same roof (Rari et al., 2021). The sandwich generation faces unique challenges in balancing family responsibilities and personal life, where they often have to put aside their desires and goals in order to fulfill the financial, emotional, and physical needs of their family (Kubota et al., 2022). This phenomenon does not only occur in previous generations, but also among today's individuals, especially those entering adulthood. In Indonesia, where the principle of kinship is strict, it is common to live with relatives in the same house. But in America, 18-year-olds are given the freedom to live independently and no longer depend on others. With this, the sandwich generation has become a tradition among people in developing countries, including Indonesia. Supporting and caring for parents is something that a child must face. The sandwich generation is a generation that always puts aside their desires and aspirations in order to ensure the survival of their family.

The Kompas R&D survey in 2022 found that 67% of Indonesia's population or around 56 million people are a sandwich generation who bear the economic burden of family members outside the nuclear family (Rari et al., 2021) and according to BPS

estimates in 2025, the dependency ratio is estimated to reach 47.2%, meaning that 100 people of productive age will be responsible for the needs of the non-productive age group, including the elderly and children (Ummah, 2019). This condition continues until 2035 with a ratio of 47.3%. Many young people entering productive age have the potential to become a sandwich generation, bearing the burden of two generations as the number of elderly people increases every year (Hermawan, 2024).

According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of marriages in Indonesia has shown a downward trend over the past decade. Today, many young people in Indonesia no longer place marriage as a top priority in their lives. There are various reasons for this, ranging from being a sandwich generation that has to bear the economic burden of the family, to feeling more satisfied and happy living life independently. Some also choose not to have children, which also influences their decision not to get married. Many of them view marriage as a complicated and responsible stage of life, and are reluctant to get involved in it.

The term “Sandwich Generation” was first coined by Dorothy A. Miller (1981) to describe a generation “sandwiched” between responsibilities to parents and children or siblings who still needed support. Over time, the definition has expanded to include supporting other family members, such as younger siblings who are still in school or parents who have retired without adequate financial support. The “sandwich” analogy is used to explain this position, where the sandwich generation is sandwiched between the top bun (parents) and the bottom bun (children/younger siblings). This burden makes it difficult for them to save for the future or fulfill their personal needs because their income is used up for family needs (Khalil & Santoso, 2022).

According to Carol Abaya (in Abrams, 2015), the sandwich generation is divided into two categories, namely the club sandwich and the open faced sandwich. The club sandwich consists of adults aged 50-60 years, who are squeezed between the elderly, children, and grandchildren, or an adult individual in the age of 30-40 years with young children, aging parents, and grandparents. The open-faced sandwich is a person who does not have children or is unmarried who is responsible for the care of their parents and siblings. This category of sandwich generation is a person who belongs to the productive age in the age range of 15-65 years and those who are burdened are two generations that are not included in the productive age, namely age 65 and over and age 0-15 years. (Khalil & Santoso, 2022).

Based on the book “The Interpersonal Communication (2016)” by Joseph A. DeVito, interpersonal communication is the process of sending and receiving messages between two people or among a small group of people with some effect and some immediate feedback. Interpersonal communication is essential for managing family needs. The ability to listen and communicate information clearly can reduce conflict and improve family relationships. Effective communication can also help divide responsibilities, increase emotional support, and reduce stress. Feedback plays a role in adjusting expectations to maintain a balance between family responsibilities and personal well-being (DeVito, 2016).

Fisher (1980) explains that communication is a dynamic process that is influenced by perception, experience, emotions, and interpersonal relationships. The sandwich generation often experiences emotional pressure because they have to meet the needs of the family, thus affecting the way they receive and respond to messages. Empathy is the key to responding constructively and reducing conflict. Feedback also plays an important role in adjusting communication strategies, so that the needs of all parties can be met without sacrificing personal well-being (Rakhmat, 2007). Fisher (1980) emphasized that

effective communication involves understanding the psychological context and helping the sandwich generation find a balance between family responsibilities and personal needs.

First, in previous research conducted (Khalil & Santoso, 2022a) in the title *Sandwich Generation: Role Problems in Achieving Social Functioning*. Shows that the feud experienced by the sandwich generation can interfere with their social functioning. In the context of individuals entering adulthood in Cirebon City, this reality can be more complex. These individuals, who are known to be a generation that is more open to social and technological change, may have a misaligned perspective on dealing with family responsibilities. Second, research conducted (Putri et al., 2022) on the title *Urgency of Financial Literacy for the Sandwich Generation in Aceh* highlights the importance of financial literacy for the sandwich generation, which can be a determining factor in their exclusive welfare.

This explains that a good understanding of financial management can help reduce the burden felt by the sandwich generation. However, although there are several studies that discuss the sandwich generation, there is still a gap in the literature that studies the specific experiences of individuals entering adulthood in small cities such as Cirebon City. Most of the previous studies emphasized the sandwich generation generically or in metropolitan areas. Third, research conducted (Salsabila & Annisah, 2024) entitled *Fulfillment of Social Functioning in Sandwich Generation Women*. This research seeks to fill the void by exploring how the sandwich generation in Cirebon City manages family responsibilities while trying to achieve personal well-being.

This study aims to identify how the dual role of the sandwich generation affects the psychological well-being of those who are in the midst of caring for their parents and being able to play an important role in fulfilling various family responsibilities while fulfilling their personal interests, focusing not only on the burden they bear, but also on the strategies and efforts they make to maintain and improve their personal well-being in order to achieve a more balanced, happy and harmonious life.

This research makes significant contributions both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on the sandwich generation by focusing on the local context in Cirebon City, which has been underexplored. The findings of this study can be the basis for the development of theories related to psychological well-being, stress management, and interpersonal communication dynamics in multigenerational families.

## **Research Method**

This research uses a qualitative method that aims to understand social phenomena in depth. The focus of this research is on collecting descriptive data in the form of words or narratives. The purpose of qualitative research is also stated by Sani, Marunung, Suswanto, and Sudiran (2017) to reveal existing phenomena and understand the meaning behind these phenomena (Helaluddin, 2018). Qualitative research is very suitable for understanding subjective experiences, as is the case in this study which uses a phenomenological approach to understand the experiences of individuals who undergo dual roles as a sandwich generation. According to Alase (2017) phenomenology is a qualitative methodology that allows researchers to apply and apply their subjectivity and interpersonal skills in the exploratory research process (Helaluddin, 2018). The phenomenological approach emphasizes the importance of understanding people's subjective experiences and their interpretations of the world. The main purpose of phenomenological studies is to reduce individual experiences to get the essential (basic)

things related to phenomena (Hamzah, 2020). The focus is on how the individual feels and understands the situation and reality around them (Moleong, 2017). In this study, phenomenology is used to understand how individuals in Cirebon City experience and give meaning to their role as a sandwich generation.

Through in-depth interviews to gain a broader understanding of individual experiences including their feelings, expectations, and perceptions, these interviews were conducted with four informants namely, Elang, Ryu, Nabila, and Raga who are part of the sandwich generation in Cirebon City. This study uses the data triangulation method as a data validity measurement technique. Triangulation is an approach to confirming research results with various methods or data sources aimed at increasing the reliability and validation of findings. This method is used when the data from the research subject is doubtful by verifying it through relatives or coworkers (Creswell, 2014).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Older adults in Cirebon City face the challenge of being a “sandwich generation”, where they have to balance responsibilities towards their aging parents and younger siblings, while maintaining personal well-being such as maintaining physical and mental health, setting aside time to rest, exercise, or do activities they enjoy. Through a phenomenological approach, this study explores how they narrate the emotional, social and economic burdens.

The following are the results of research analysis based on the results of interviews that researchers have conducted with informants. With the characteristics of informants that researchers have determined, there are four informants, namely, Elang, Ryu, Nabila, and Raga. The four informants are a sandwich generation in Cirebon City aged between 20-23 years. The following are the results of the discussion on the dual role of the sandwich generation in their psychological well-being who are able to carry out important roles in fulfilling various family responsibilities while fulfilling their personal interests, as follows :

### **The Sandwich Generation's Responsibility to the Family**

Family responsibility in the context of this study refers to the role that individuals play in meeting the financial, emotional and physical needs of family members who depend on them. This phenomenon is often experienced by the sandwich generation, which is individuals who are in between two generations of aging parents and younger siblings who still need support.

Young people begin to take over family responsibilities from their productive years, either by initiative or as a result of family expectations. They face situations where family needs take precedence over personal needs, such as savings, career, or time (Zahra & Wulandari, 2022). The reasons why children work are due to various factors, such as poverty, lack of access to proper education, and lack of employment opportunities for adults. Children are often forced to work to help support their families or because of their parents' instructions (Khumayah et al., 2023).

Based on the results of interviews conducted by informants, it shows that they have the same positive state of emotion. Informants Raga and Ryu view the role of the sandwich generation as a big responsibility towards the family. However, although both feel that being a sandwich generation is a big responsibility towards the family, the way they view the role has significant differences. Raga, for example, initially felt that his responsibility in helping the family economy, such as the needs of the house and his

sister's needs, was important after she started working. Raga felt that these responsibilities were part of his role as a child who had to help the family, although he did not mention feeling overwhelmed or other challenges (Nurmansyah, 2024).

Ryu viewed his family responsibilities as very important, especially in helping with household expenses and ensuring his younger brother could continue his education. However, he revealed that the feeling of being overwhelmed was more profound, indicating the emotional pressure he faced in carrying out this role (Ramadhan, 2024). On the other hand, although both informants shared the view that being a sandwich generation is a big responsibility towards the family, Raga focused more on the responsibility aspect without expressing feelings of being overwhelmed, while Ryu emphasized the emotional challenges and feelings of being overwhelmed that she often faces in carrying out the role.

Different things were found with informants Elang and Nabila, although both initially found it hard to accept the role of the sandwich generation, over time they tried to adapt and accept the situation in different ways. Elang, for example, revealed that at first the burden of his responsibilities, such as paying for electricity, internet, and his younger brother's school fees, felt very heavy. However, he later saw this as part of his role as the first child that he had to live with (Putra, 2024).

Nabila feels a deep sense of pressure due to the responsibilities she has to live up to, especially in managing various family needs, such as emergency funds, debts, and her sister's education costs. She expressed feelings of frustration arising from the growing and often unexpected burden of responsibility. However, Nabila slowly began to realize that this role was part of her reality. The sandwich generation generally views their role as a great responsibility towards the family. They realize that helping the family is part of their role as children and siblings. In addition, social support, both from family and the surrounding environment, is needed to help them manage this pressure and maintain a balanced life. (Khalil & Santoso, 2022).

### **Personal Well-Being of the Sandwich Generation**

Personal well-being refers to an individual's physical, mental, emotional, and social condition that is influenced by the balance between family responsibilities and personal needs and how the role of interpersonal communication helps them manage pressure and maintain personal well-being through openness, empathy, supportive behavior, and equality, they can create healthier and more harmonious family relationships (Rahayu & Rifayani, 2024). This not only reduces psychological distress, but also helps individuals achieve a balance between personal and family needs, so that their personal well-being can be better maintained.

Elang initially had difficulty conveying his feelings to his family, but over time he learned to be more open, especially when he felt tired or overwhelmed. She began to express honestly that she was not in optimal condition. In addition, Elang also maintains a balance between her responsibilities and personal well-being by watching movies or hanging out with friends (Putra, 2024).

Elang and Ryu's explanations show that by slowly opening communication, they feel more relieved and able to share their feelings without fear of judgment. Openness in interpersonal communication is an important step for both of them in managing emotional pressure and maintaining personal well-being amidst the responsibilities of being a sandwich generation. Support from family members who listen with empathy also plays a big role in creating a safe space for them to talk about what they feel (Ramadhan, 2024).

Nabila does not find it difficult to express her feelings because she is the type who is

open and likes to share stories, especially with her family. Although the responses from her family members vary, such as her mother who is more understanding and her father who often responds with denial, Nabila still makes her family the main place to share her problems. For Nabila, open communication is a way to release emotional burdens, while time for herself is used to rest (Nabila, 2024).

In stark contrast to the three informants, Raga has difficulty in conveying his feelings to his family. He tends to refrain from expressing his feelings or needs, especially when he needs financial assistance or feels pressured by demands from family members. He worries that if he speaks up, it will add to his family's burden, so he chooses to keep things to himself. This approach reflects Raga's attempt to maintain her emotional balance even without direct support through communication with his family.

The results show that the sandwich generation's personal well-being is influenced by their ability to communicate with their families. Informants such as Elang, Ryu, and Nabila felt more relieved and able to maintain personal well-being after being open about their feelings, supported by an empathetic family. Open communication with family is essential for maintaining personal well-being, reducing stress and helping to find a balance between family responsibilities and personal needs (Pramudito Anwar & Fauziah, 2019). Meanwhile, Guardians who have difficulty expressing their feelings choose to cope with stress on their own, which exacerbates their emotional distress. The inability to communicate can worsen emotional conditions (Pramudito Anwar & Fauziah, 2019).

### **Experience and Meaning of Life as a Sandwich Generation**

The lived experience and meaning of being part of the sandwich generation reflects how individuals, especially among the younger generation, articulate the immense responsibility towards their families as well as the challenges they face in maintaining personal well-being. For them, this role is often an internal conflict between the need to fulfill family expectations and maintain a personal life balance. On the one hand, they feel a responsibility to help their families financially and emotionally. But on the other hand, they also have to deal with mental and physical burdens that can compromise their emotional health and personal well-being. (Sudarji et al., 2022)

Elang felt forced to take on great responsibility after losing her father, especially to provide for the household. According to him, being a sandwich generation is an obligation, not a choice. Despite being depressed and overwhelmed, Elang began to find meaning in her role, learned to take responsibility, and felt grateful despite facing physical and emotional exhaustion. This role, although exhausting, has made her stronger in the face of adversity (Putra, 2024).

The role of the sandwich generation provides a deep understanding of the importance of family and balance in life. Ryu realized that his role made him appreciate the value of family more and the importance of supporting each other in difficult situations. He also learned to maintain a balance between giving to his family and taking care of his personal well-being. Although he feels that he gives a lot to his family, he realizes that time for himself is essential in order to live an emotionally and physically healthy life. This approach reflects her efforts to maintain personal well-being in such a responsible role.

Nabila expressed deep feelings of fear and anxiety in living the role of the sandwich generation. She disclosed her experiences, especially in mental health issues, to her parents, but this added to the burden and created tension in the family. Feeling unprepared for the future and fearful of getting married for fear of having to continue helping her parents despite having a family and greater financial pressures (Nabila, 2024).

The importance of adapting and finding solutions in the face of financial hardship is a challenge often faced by the sandwich generation. Experience provides valuable life lessons, although poor financial conditions bring a sense of difficulty, Raga feels that it is an important learning and teaches him to be stronger and wiser in managing finances. This reflects how difficult experiences in the role of the sandwich generation not only present challenges, but also provide learning that strengthens individuals in dealing with financial issues and life as a whole.

The sandwich generation is often caught in a conflict between meeting family expectations and maintaining a personal life balance. Research shows that individuals in this position face not only financial challenges, but also significant emotional burdens (Cahayani et al., 2024). This can be seen from the experiences of informants such as Elang, who after losing her father felt forced to take on the huge responsibility of providing for the family. He felt heavy pressure, but also found meaning in this responsibility, which helped him to grow and become stronger (Yanuar et al., 2021). Ryu, as another informant, highlighted the importance of family support in facing the challenges of being a sandwich generation. He realized that although this role demands a lot of sacrifices, maintaining a balance between giving to the family and maintaining personal well-being is crucial. Research shows that the quality of family relationships can affect the sandwich generation's quality of life, where emotional support from family members is crucial in reducing the burden they feel (Cahayani et al., 2024). Ryu recognizes that although he gives a lot to his family, time for himself is also very important to maintain his mental and emotional health (Pamukti & Sa'diyah, 2024).

On the other hand, Nabila feels deep anxiety and fear for the future because of the many responsibilities she faces. Nabila feels trapped in a role that not only demands material responsibility, but also adds a heavy mental burden (Rari et al., 2021) (Muhammad Daffa Al Fahreza et al., 2024). Meanwhile, Raga considers difficult experiences in managing finances as life lessons that teach him to be stronger and wiser. Raga feels that although difficult financial conditions bring challenges, the experience also provides valuable life lessons, teaching him to be wiser in managing finances and dealing with life problems as a whole (Cahayani et al., 2024) (Rari et al., 2021).

Overall, the experiences of the four informants show that although the role of the sandwich generation is full of challenges, they also find meaning in their responsibilities. Elang and Ryu learn to be more responsible and find gratitude, while Nabila faces deep anxiety, and Raga sees difficulties as learning. This reflects the complexity of the sandwich generation's experience, which is not only related to material responsibilities, but also to mental and emotional health, which is crucial in maintaining individual and family well-being (Rari et al., 2021) (Yanuar et al., 2021) (Khalil & Santoso, 2022).

### **Sandwich Generation's Hope for the Future**

The sandwich generation, caught between caring for their parents and younger siblings, faces significant pressures in maintaining a work-life balance. However, many of them develop strategies to cope with the stress and have hope for a better future. As stated by Ryu, he uses coping strategies by giving himself space. Activities such as going for a walk or doing a favorite hobby can help reduce stress and maintain emotional balance. This is important for sandwich generation individuals to keep their energy and mental stability to face their responsibilities. Ryu also continues to improve his financial condition, which is one of the crucial aspects in supporting his family. This expectation also shows a great sense of responsibility for the well-being of his parents and younger siblings, as well as a desire to provide a better life for them. (Ramadhan, 2024).

In line with Ryu's strategy to cope with the pressure or stress that arises. Through similar strategies, both Ryu and Elang show that the sandwich generation not only find ways to deal with daily pressures but also have a vision for the future of their family. This emphasizes the importance of balancing personal needs and commitment to family as key to their sustainability in this complex role (Putra, 2024).

Raga reinforces the similarity of the sandwich generation's strategies and expectations, namely maintaining mental health through simple activities and working hard to provide a better future for their families. These three statements show that they use recreational activity-based coping strategies to relieve pressure. In contrast to the strategies of the three informants, Nabila prefers a simple but effective way to cope with pressure, namely sleep, which is a way for her to calm down and refresh her mind in the midst of the burden she faces (Nabila, 2024). The sleep strategy she chooses as a form of coping shows that each individual has a unique way to deal with pressure, according to their needs.

Nabila has very clear expectations for her future, both for herself and her family. Nabila's statement highlights a more complex and realistic perspective in dealing with the situation as a sandwich generation. She not only hopes to improve her financial condition, but also wants a fairer division of responsibilities within the family. In addition, Nabila has strong personal dreams, such as continuing her career, having savings, a house, and achieving financial freedom as the first step towards self-actualization (Nabila, 2024).

All four informants pointed out that despite the pressures of being a sandwich generation, they have different ways of coping with stress, such as going out, hanging out with friends, sleeping, or doing physical activities. They also have strong hopes for the future, namely improving financial stability, giving their best to their families, and ensuring the education and well-being of their younger siblings. In addition, they hope for a more equitable division of responsibilities in the family so that the burden is not only borne by one person, with personal dreams such as achieving financial freedom and having a successful career.

Individuals interpret and live their experiences, and how they give meaning to the reality they face, especially for the sandwich generation. In the context of the sandwich generation, this phenomenology provides insight into how individuals live out their experiences in living a dual role, caring for their parents and younger siblings, which can put a strain on their well-being as individuals.

It can be stated that some informants felt forced to take on the role of the sandwich generation due to family demands, while others saw it as an opportunity to develop themselves and provide the best for their parents and younger siblings.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research reveals that the sandwich generation views their role as a big responsibility towards the family, such as household expenses and education. Although the role often feels overwhelming, especially at first, the sandwich generation tries to adapt to the situation. Some feel a deep sense of pressure and frustration due to the growing and often unexpected responsibilities, such as emergency expenses and parental debt. However, over time, many have come to accept the role as part of the reality of life.

Despite the feeling of being overwhelmed, the sandwich generation does not focus on the burden they bear. They also seek various strategies to cope with stress, such as taking time for themselves, doing hobbies, going out with friends, and hoping for a better future. Communicating honestly and openly is also very important for the sandwich generation to manage stress by conveying their needs and feelings. If communication is

effective such as being honest in expressing their feelings with their family, they will feel more helped and supported, but if not, they can feel more stressed because they have to bear the burden alone. Therefore, open communication with their families is necessary to help them better navigate this role.

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