

## Malaysian Women and Their Role as the Sandwiched Generation

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### ABSTRACT

Women have been playing the role of caregiver in their families for generations. However, the traditional role of women as caregivers of the family, specifically as a mother and wife, is now being expanded to include caregiving for their elderly parents. The longer life expectancy of the older generation and delayed marriage are putting women in a situation where they are sandwiched between their role as wife and mother of growing-up children and their role as daughter on whom their parents depend in their old age. Based on a study of 150 women respondents working in the banking sector, this paper will focus on the roles of the sandwiched generation. Data were collected via purposive sampling by identifying women staff in selected banks; these women fulfilled the criteria of being married and having living parents. The paper will discuss issues encountered by these women, all whom reside in urban areas in Kuala Lumpur, who are sandwiched between their roles as mother, wife, employee and caregiver to the elderly. What are the problems they face in performing their many and often conflicting roles and what are their coping mechanisms when the roles come into conflict with one another? The main research question in this study is whether the women find the additional role of caregiver to the elderly an added burden causing added conflict beyond that caused by their already conflicting roles as mother, wife and employee. This study also seeks to identify the support systems in place or required to alleviate the problems encountered by these women.

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### INTRODUCTION

Women have long played the role of caregiver. Since prehistoric times, women have been entrusted with the caring and nurturing of their families while men have

traditionally been the breadwinner of the family. This situation can still be seen in many traditional societies where women tend to the home and the men go out to work. However, the scenario has changed in many developing societies, with women now also playing the role of income earner. In Malaysia, for example, more than a third of the workforce are women. This is due to the increasing role of industrialisation in the process of development in the 70s, which led to many women joining the workforce. Women's roles at home and at work are equally important in developing the family as well as the country. Balancing life chores is a hectic endeavour for many women, particularly those who have children and are working full-time. When women have to take on the added burden of providing care for ageing parents or relatives, life becomes even more hectic for them. Today, there are also men who find themselves in this situation. These men and women, who find themselves trapped in a new worldwide phenomenon, are termed 'the Sandwiched Generation'. In the specific case of women, this generation usually arises from the combined trends of delayed childbirth, delayed financial independence of children and the increasing life expectancy of the older generation. Hence, the role of these women has expanded to include being caregivers to two generations. However, the conflict arising from the clash between their previous roles, as discussed in the literature, has yet to be resolved.

According to Raphael and Schlesinger (1994), the term 'the Sandwiched

Generation' was first coined by sociologist Dorothy Miller in 1981, and refers to the disproportion between generations in terms of substituting resources and support. In other words, the Sandwiched Generation refers to a family member who has commitments in raising children and simultaneously provides care-giving support for elderly parents. They are in between depending children and ageing parents, with commitments and responsibilities to both. Hence, these women are sandwiched between their traditional roles and the role of employee.

A report by the Social Issues Research Centre United Kingdom in 2009 stated that young people today got married much later than their counterparts of the middle of the twentieth century did. More people today delay marriage until their late twenties or early thirties, and consequently, delay having children, resulting in having fewer children. At the same time, the pattern of population ageing has changed as a result of increasing longevity and declining fertility. This trend is observable in developed and developing countries alike, where many women whether they are working or not, are delaying marriage or not do not get married at all.

The increasing number of people who get married relatively late in life gives rise to a new trend of care giving, which is caring for young children and ageing parents. When couples choose to have children late, they can also be squeezed into the population of the Sandwiched Generation. They will end up being 'sandwiched' between the

responsibilities of caring for their young children and for an older relative/relatives simultaneously.

The term, 'Sandwiched Generation' is widely known internationally, especially in Western countries. For example, in the United States there are many organisations that function as information support centres for Americans who are of the Sandwiched Generation. The Sandwich Generation Resource Centre in America stated that the Sandwiched Generation, or 'SandGen', as a phenomenon has been apparent in the US for the past 20 years. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary added the term in its body of definitions in July 2006, providing this definition for the term: 'a generation of people who are caring for their aging parents while supporting their own children'.

In Australia, the term has been widely known since the baby-boomers era after World War II. Baby boomers, who are now mostly in their 50s to 70s are the ones who carry the double burden of caring for the both young and older generations (Carson and Kerr, 2003). The young generation in Australia is caught in delayed independence while the older generation is facing growing dependency on family members. (Andrew P, 2007). A study on social stratification and orientations in Singapore by Tan (2001) states that the Sandwiched Generation poses a problem for society. An individual in Singapore becomes part of the Sandwiched Generation when he or she experiences a high degree of difficulty in providing financial support for both children and ageing parents. In Malaysia, the young

generations has been confronted with this phenomenon for a long time; cultural and religious factors have made this the norm i.e. to take on the responsibility of caring for young children and ageing parents at the same time. The term, 'Sandwiched Generation' is terminologically unknown to many Malaysians although the different ethnic groups have been practising this lifestyle for a long time. The Malays, Chinese and Indians have traditionally been tied to the responsibility of caring for their elderly parents at the same time as having to care for their young children. It is important to highlight the term 'Sandwiched Generation' within Malaysian society so that every member of this generation will be aware that his or her situation does not arise from cultural, religious or traditional responsibilities only, but is also a common phenomenon that is occurring worldwide. The term is also a very important determinant of future populations, especially when the generation has to cope with higher costs of living, as they have to support children and the elderly.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Ageing has become a global phenomenon as a result of increasing longevity and declining fertility, due to better diets, improvement in medical facilities and awareness of healthy lifestyles. All countries are experiencing a tremendous growth in the population of elderly people; this will have an impact on many aspects of the family and society. Despite the fact that people are living longer and healthier lives, the size of the younger

generation is decreasing significantly. The reasons for this phenomenon are similar throughout the world, and they are the general trend of late marriages or non-marriage, divorces, low fertility, increased longevity and migration (Narender & Kamlesh, 2008).

The United States of America, the third largest nation in the world, is also experiencing the rapid growth of an ageing population. Hewitt (2001) stated that fertility replacement levels in the US have dropped drastically from 3.7 per woman in 1960 to 2.0 in 2000. The necessary rate for populations to replace themselves is 2.1. The rates have also fallen below the crucial rate in all developed countries over the past four decades. The United Kingdom and France share the same poor 1.7 fertility replacement rate at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Canada is at 1.6, and

in Germany, Italy, Japan and in 47 other European countries, the rate has declined to under 1.3 (Hewitt, 2001).

The ageing of population is also becoming a common phenomenon for many developed and developing nations in Asia. The table below shows the trend of ageing populations in several countries in Asia:

The total population of Malaysia, presently, is approximately 27 million and the projected annual growth is 2%. By 2020, the country's population is expected to reach nearly 34 million. Although the Malaysian population is still not considered an ageing society in Asia, the numbers making up the elderly population have recorded a steady increase since the early 1990s. A census taken in projected that the Malaysian society would qualify as an ageing society by 2035, when the population size of people aged 60 and over would reach 15% of the total

TABLE 1  
Increase and Projected Increase in Number of Elderly Throughout the Region, 1950-2025

Country	Year	Number of Elderly ('000)			
		1950	1975	2007	2025
Asia		49,759.3	100,852.2	198,963.9	354,139.5
Cambodia		197.4	330.7	856.2	1,706.5
Fiji		13.0	25.8	58.4	114.5
Indonesia		4,953.5	7,254.0	19,486.3	34,592.3
India		20,098.2	38,489.0	92,438.5	168,145.5
Iran		1,396.0	1,831.0	4,667.9	9,748.9
Japan		6,437.0	13,048.0	35,822.8	43,992.8
Philippines		1,104.3	2,079.5	5,406.4	11,268.3
RO China		41,572.2	64,334.8	152,064.7	289,984.7
Singapore		38.2	151.5	597.3	1,600.0
Sri Lanka		572.3	859.9	2,357.2	4,292.3
Thailand		991.0	2,072.0	7,187.0	13,957.8

Adapted from Narander K. C and Kamlesh P., 2008.

population. Findings from the Department of Statistics' 2000 Census reveal an increase in the percentage of the elderly from 5.9% in 1991 to 6.2% (about 1.5 million) in 2000. This is a clear indication that demographic ageing is taking shape in Malaysia. The census also projected that by 2020 the percentage of the elderly would increase to 9.5%, which is equivalent to 3.2 million people. Table 2 shows the number of the elderly in relation to the total population according to the Department of Statistics Malaysia.

Most countries have begun to realise the impact of the world trend of ageing populations and its effect on existing resources. It is promising to note that globally, the ageing population is getting more attention. In Malaysia, the National Policy for the Elderly formulated in 1995, the setting up of the National Advisory and Consultative Council of the Elderly in 1996 and the National Action Plan for Older Persons in 1998 shows the serious commitment by the government to provide care and services for the nation's elderly. The Department of Social Welfare also plays a major role as the focal point for all issues related to ageing. It is also assuring to note that NGOs, voluntary organisations, the private sector, social support groups and the community are equally committed to supporting the well-being of the elderly.

### THE MULTIPLE ROLES OF WOMEN IN MALAYSIA

Earlier social research on women's roles tended to focus on the roles of women as wife, mother of young children and employee. According to Anita Shreve, who wrote an article entitled *Career and the Lure of Motherhood* for New York Times Magazine in 1982, women in today's labour market must be able to juggle the roles of mother, wife and career-woman. Contemporary women have to juggle multiple roles simultaneously without the support of their extended families. The roles of mother, wife and employee are the basic and common roles that contemporary women play. In addition, women now must pick up the burden of care-giving to elderly parents as well. As the help of extended family is not available, contemporary women have to juggle the demands that arise from the family domain and the workplace with the additional demands of caring for their elderly parents.

The role-juggling that befalls the contemporary woman is contrary to the traditional roles played by women decades ago. Even though 'traditional women' juggled multiple roles of mother, wife, daughter and worker, either in the paddy field, rubber estate or other traditional village workplace, they did not experience the same level of burden that contemporary

TABLE 2  
Total Population and Number of Elderly in Malaysia, 1991-2025

Year	1991	1995	2000	2005	2008	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Total population (millions)	18.4	20.1	23.3	26.1	27.7	28.9	31.8	34.9	38.0	41.1
Number of elderly (60+)	1.1	1.2	1.5	1.7	1.9	2.1	2.7	3.4	4.2	4.9

women today do. This is because they lived within the extended family system. These conditions made it easier and less complicated for traditional women to do their job, as they were not forced to neglect their responsibilities towards their families.

Generally, there are four types of roles played by contemporary Malaysian women. However, the discussion will only focus on their roles in the domestic circle and will not consider their social roles as members of the community etc. This will cover roles that women take on as primary caregiver to elderly parents, as wife, mother and finally, as employee.

#### *Women as Primary Caregivers to Elderly Parents*

Providing care and financial support for the elderly are the general responsibility of the family in Malaysia, which is typical of Asian culture. Children are expected to be filial and take up the responsibility of caring for elderly parents; this is assumed to be part of the duty that one needs to fulfil in life. Generally, both ageing parents and their adult children are aware of this responsibility that society expects from adult children.

Until recently, it was not unusual to find three generations living in one household, with the primary care-giving done by a middle-aged woman in one home (Cara, 2004). According to Noraini (2006), women have always been the prime caregivers in the family and the care-giving responsibilities of women have no limit within the circle of their families; this includes providing care

for husband, children and elderly parents and, in certain cases, also for siblings and other relatives.

Montgomery and Kamo (1989) found that 80% of adult children who provide care for their elderly parents are daughters and the remaining 20% are sons. This may be because the sense of responsibility towards elderly parents is felt more keenly by daughters than by sons, and women tend to play the role of nurturer more often as expected by society expected of daughters. According to Tan (1991), in Malaysian traditional societies, women, especially daughters and daughters-in-law, take on the responsibility of being the main caregiver of sick and elderly parents.

#### *Women as Wives*

Today, a wife is no longer seen as a stay-at-home person, doing household chores only. The role of a wife has expanded to the extent that a wife has become her husband's backbone. Every husband needs a wife to support him in his life, socially and economically. The priorities of wives today are not similar to those of their mothers and grandmothers, as many of them now choose to work to aid their husbands by contributing to the family income because their husbands' salary is generally insufficient to meet the needs of the family in the context of today's economic conditions.

Contemporary wives are more educated and speak their mind openly. Besides supporting their husbands economically, women are still expected to take on the primary responsibility of taking care of their



family members – a traditional role that will never fade. Hence, this also requires a change in the role of the husband. Other than assisting in doing household chores and child care, husbands might consider the need to employ a stay-at-home maid to facilitate their wives' multiple roles.

#### *Women as Mothers*

The bonding between mother and children starts as early as during pregnancy and continues to develop through childhood. Thus, mothers have a special place in their children's lives because of the strong emotional and social bond they have with their children. Mothers have been traditionally expected to contribute their whole life to their family.

Today, many problems arise within society that clash with the role played by mothers. Traditional beliefs are being tested because many mothers are now involved in multi-tasking jobs and have to take on a bigger role in the life of their child. Not only must they provide the care and support a child needs, but they must also provide enough income for the family to live on. This is a huge role for anybody to take on.

Regardless of the contemporary multi-tasking that a mother has to take on, wives are still obliged to retain the traditional role of mothering, which is to care for and support both husband and children. The contribution a mother provides is incomparable; it is an important part of a child's care. A good mother is still obligated to care for her family and put them before everything else.

#### *Women as Employees*

Urbanisation and industrialisation have brought many changes to the urban population. In Malaysia, many younger Malay families have migrated to urban areas in search of better employment opportunities (Noraini, 2006), and women have entered the labour force in response to economic pressures, better opportunities in education, declines in fertility, increases in life expectancy and growing social acceptance of dual-earner families. In Malaysia, the number of women going out to work since national independence in 1957 has increased from 30.8% to 47.1% in 1995 (7th Malaysia Plan, 1996-2000). In 2007, the total number of working women in Malaysia, according to the Department of Statistics Malaysia, is 3.79 millions. This increase is even more rapid in the younger age bracket (16 to 25 years).

Increasing numbers of women entering the labour force has become a challenge for women, as they now have to balance work and family responsibilities. Being a working mother has changed how women allocate their time and negotiate their work and family roles. The trend has also altered the traditional breadwinning patterns of a family. Due to financial constraints, many women feel that they have to work to support the family. Today, it is common for both women and men to share the same breadwinning role. When a woman chooses a career, indirectly, she has to understand the consequences it would have on her family life. In this situation, a husband plays a crucial part in helping and supporting his

wife emotionally and socially. If husband and wife are supportive of each other, they will be able to succeed in their different and shared roles.

## METHODOLOGY

The data were derived from self-administered questionnaires sent to women who worked in various banking institutions. The sample was selected via purposive sampling. The population was women in different sections of the banking sector who fulfil the criteria of being a caregiver. The banking institution was selected as the main organisation in this research because it is one of the most challenging and stressful organisations in modern urban life due to the nature of the job. The research area included urbanised city centres around Klang Valley, which includes Klang, Shah Alam, Subang Jaya, Petaling Jaya, Serdang and Seri Kembangan in Selangor. There were 150 married respondents in this study, whose age ranged from 20 to 55 years old, who had children and were living in urban areas. Five appointed enumerators sent the questionnaires to the respondents working in the selected banks around the study area; the women who fit the criteria filled in the questionnaires. The process involved calling for bank managers or persons in-charge of customer service in the selected banks to confirm the number of married women workers in their institutions and to select a certain date for them to receive the questionnaires. The respondents were given a week to fill up the questionnaires after which, the enumerators collected the

questionnaires. The cycle continued until all 150 sets were confirmed received by potential respondents; the enumerators then went back to the banks to collect the questionnaires. The questionnaire had three sections; the first section consisted of questions on demography; the second section focussed on the roles of the women as caregivers; and the third section was on their coping mechanism.

## FINDINGS

### *Demographic Background*

The study showed that the average age of respondents was 34 years old with the youngest respondent being 20 years old and the oldest 51 years old. The majority of the respondents were in the productive age range of 30-39 years old totalling 56.4%, while 16.1% of the respondents were in the age range of 20-29 years old. In terms of race, most of the respondents were Malay; the figures are given -- Malay (56.3%), Chinese (30.7%) and Indians (12.0%). In terms of religion, the majority of the respondents were Muslim; the figures are given – Muslim (56.3%), Christian (16.0%), Buddhist (15.3%) and Hindu (11.3%).

### *Level of Education*

This research also looked into the respondents' level of education and found that the respondents had a high level of education with 0.7% having a Master's Degree and 19.3% being degree holders. Diploma or STPM holders totaled 45.3%, while 4.0% had a certificate in their



respective fields. The rest of the respondents (30.7%) were SPM holders, which qualifies them to work in their current field of work.

#### *Information on Number of Children*

This study took into consideration the ages of the eldest and youngest children. The study showed that the average age of the eldest child was 7 years old and the average of the youngest child was 3 years old. The study also showed that there were no significant differences in the maximum age of the oldest child and the youngest child, where the maximum age of the eldest child was 26 years old and the maximum age of the youngest child was 16 years old. Respondents who had children in the range of 7-12 years old totaled 25.3%. In general, the respondents were from the 'young family' category.

#### *Siblings and Family Background*

The number of siblings, brothers and sisters, was also studied. The study found that most of the respondents were in a family of 5-8 siblings (53.3%) and 0-4 siblings (41.3%). Only a small number of respondents (4.0%) fell into the 'big family' category, where the family consisted of 9-12 members and more than 12. This could be seen from the number of maximum number of siblings per family, which is 13 persons; the average number of siblings is 5 persons. Child order was also studied, with the finding that middle child monopolised this study for this criterion, with more than half of the respondents (50.7%) falling into this category, while 21.3% were the eldest child and 26.0% were

the youngest. Only 2.0% were in the 'single child' category. The objective of this study was to consider the roles of working women and hence, it focussed on whether the parents or parents-in-law of the respondents were still alive. This study showed that almost all the respondents had living elderly parents and in-laws. While 69.3% had a living father, 80.7% had a living mother and 60.7% had a living father in-law while 69.3% had a living mother in-law. Therefore, most of the respondents came from a family where there were siblings who could assist them in care-giving of their parents or in-laws.

#### *Employment Background*

The study also considered the employment background of the respondents. The study found that 36.7% were still new in their field of work. Only 2.0% had worked for more than 25 years and 2.7% had worked for 20-25 years. The rest of the respondents had worked in the banking sector for 6-10 years (20.0%), and 10-15 years (30.0%). Only 8.7% had worked for 16-20 years. The average number of working years for the whole group under study was 9 years with a maximum number of working years being 28 years. In terms of working days, most of the respondents (97.3%) worked on a five-day-week basis and only 2.7% worked on a six-day-week basis. In terms of working hours, the average number of working hours was 9 hours per day while the minimum number of working hours was 6 hours, the maximum being 12 hours. Of the respondents, 59.3% worked 9-10 hours per day and another 8.0% of them worked 11-12

hours per day, while 30.0% of them worked 6-8 hours per day. This study also examined the frequency of working overtime and found that 37.3% of the respondents worked overtime quite frequently or most of the time. However, 18.7% of them seldom worked overtime. A small number of the respondents (3.3%) rarely or never worked overtime. This might be due to the fact that they had to focus their attention on their family.

### *Domestic Helpers*

To further study the role of these working women at home, this study also focussed on whether these women had domestic helpers. One third of the respondents (31.3%) did not have domestic helpers and 68.7% preferred to manage their own households with no assistance from domestic helpers.

### *Care-giving Responsibilities*

To study the roles of caring for their family members, the study first viewed the respondents' households and found that 20.7% of the respondents either lived separately from their spouses, or had divorced/been widowed. However, the rest of them (79.3%) lived with their respective spouses and with their children, and only 12% of them had a child who lived separately. Only a minority of the respondents had their grandchildren also living with them. In extended families such as this, there might be more than one family head in the household.

The findings also viewed each respondent's role of care-giving for their

parents or parents-in-law. The results showed that a small number of them (9 respondents) had parents (either father or mother) who lived with them. Meanwhile, 7 respondents had parents-in-law (either father-in-law, or mother-in-law) living with them. This result showed that women contributed equally in assuming their roles as own daughter, and as a daughter-in-law.

On being asked who was the main caregiver for their own parents, only 135 of the respondents answered this question, where 34.4% said that it was they themselves as a team with their spouses, while 63% said that their siblings were the main caregivers and 1.5% said that the main caregiver was their parent's spouse, while another 1.5% said there was no caregiver for their parents. On being asked who was the main caregiver for their parents-in-law, only 106 of the respondents answered this question, where 41.7% said that they were the caregivers together with their spouses, while 56.7% said that it was their parent's spouse and another 1.6% said there was no caregiver for their parents. On being asked if they received help from other family members in caring for their parents and parents-in-law, 41.3% of the respondents replied in the positive, while the rest (58.7%) replied in the negative.

In terms of time spent in caring for their family per day, about half of the respondents (50.7%) said that they spent less than 2 hours taking care of their families, while 22.7% spent 3-4 hours daily, and another 22.7% spent 5-6 hours daily, and 5 (3.3%) spent 7-8 hours daily, while 0.7% said that they

spent more than 8 hours daily caring for their families. It would be logical to assume that these women need assistance in caring for their families. The questionnaire listed three choices with regards to what these women needed most; the choices were financial support (48.3%), time out (32.9%) and in particular, home help services (18.3%).

### **Social support given to the elderly**

The study also analysed the social support given to senior citizens with the finding that, generally, not much support was being given to senior citizens. Most children provide only social, emotional and financial support (83.3%). Other respondents did not provide emotional or financial support. Only 22.0% provided a home for their parents; this might also be caused by the fact that their parents had a much more comfortable home. This differed from the medical aspect where a majority of the respondents (66.0%) were responsible for providing medical support for their parents.

In terms of social support for personal care, the study found that not many (28.7%) were providing this kind of support. The trend is the same for support in monitoring and accompanying family members, where only 32.7% of the respondents gave such support. These women also got less support in the form of preparing meals, doing household chores and providing transportation assistance, with less than half of the total number of respondents (43.3%) having to do household chores and provide meals, while 46.0% had to give social support by providing transport. Half (50%)

of them got support in the form of going shopping together.

The findings of the study suggest that while these working women play multiple roles including taking care of elderly parents or in-laws, they do not consider the additional roles as a burden that overwhelms them. They consider it a responsibility that a woman must carry. In this context, this study aimed to see how these women managed their multiple roles and how much stress, if at all, they experienced as a result of having to play multiple roles in life.

### **STRESS EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN CAREGIVERS WHO PLAY MULTIPLE ROLES IN LIFE AND THEIR COPING MECHANISM**

#### *Stressors*

This study looked into the primary causes of stress for the respondents, and found that the primary stressor was time management, care, finance and relationship. This study found that only a small number of the respondents considered raising children (10.7%) and managing the family (8.0%) as stressful. This small number of respondents might have small children and, at the same time, might have to take care of ailing parents or parents-in-law. This is in addition to work-related responsibilities that might contribute to stress. A small number of respondents (22.7%) admitted that taking care of children caused them to feel stress. Only 9.3% said that the responsibility of taking care of their children had never caused them stress, or had never raised negative feelings in them because they felt

that it was their responsibility to take care of their children despite their obligations to their career. Other than that, about half of the respondents (57.3%) admitted that taking care of their children did not cause them stress. Similarly, on the responsibility of taking care of the family, 44.7% admitted that it rarely caused them any amount of stress, while 28% said that it was not the major factor that caused them stress. Only 19.3% said that taking care of their family caused them stress.

Other than caring for children and the family, unsurprisingly, time and financial management also contributed to stress felt by more than half of the respondents, with 79.3% admitting that stress could come from time management and 84% saying that stress came from financial management. Interpersonal relationships could also cause problems. This is why this study also looked into the relationship between respondents and spouses/husbands, families, fellow employees and employer. The study showed that the respondents' relationship with their husband/spouse was not the primary cause of stress although 16.7% of the respondents admitted that their relationship with their husband could occasionally cause them stress.

Regarding the relationship between respondents and family members, 74% of the respondents said that their relationship with family members rarely caused them stress. Only 10.7% of the respondents stated that their relationship with family members could cause stress, while 4.7% said that most of the time, stress was due to their relationship with their family members.

Other than studying the relationship between the respondents and their husband and family, which are classified as micro relationships, this study also looked into the social relationship of the respondents i.e. their relationships with fellow employees and their employer. This is because these relationships can sometimes cause stress. However, in this study, only a small number of respondents, 3.3 %, said that their relationship with their colleagues caused them stress. Clearly, the relationship between the respondents and their employer and fellow employees did not cause stress to the respondents.

### **Emotional and Financial Support**

This study also examined the support that the respondents got either emotionally or financially. Without such support, the Sandwiched Generation might have to deal with multiple problems at the same time. Emotional and financial support for the respondents was given by their husbands/spouses. The table above shows that 88% got emotional support and 87.3% got financial support from their spouses, while 51.3% of the respondents got emotional support from their siblings. Only 16% got financial support from their siblings.

### **Coping Mechanism**

The findings indicated that more than half of the respondents faced stress head on and tried to resolve it (82%). Other means of overcoming stress were praying, while 68.7% of the respondents chose rest and sleep to relieve stress. Other methods

chosen by the respondents to relieve stress were shopping and confiding in friends or close friends, while 50.7% chose eating as a means of escapism to relieve stress and 51.3% chose to occupy themselves with more work to get over the stress and problems they were facing.

Of the respondents, 42.7% relieved stress by listening to music while 43% did so by spending time with their families. There were also respondents who took the easy way out by engaging in negative actions, hoping that they would help them deal with the stress. Among the negative actions taken were smoking (14%) and drinking alcohol (24.7%). Only a small number of respondents faced major stress that forced them to seek therapy to manage stress (4.7%) and 1.3% had to see a counsellor, while 3.3% required a visit to a doctor for stress relief. Other steps taken to relieve stress were exercise, walking/sightseeing, yoga and proper diet and taking supplementary medications such as stress-relief pills.

## CONCLUSION

Most of the Sandwiched Generation women studied here felt stressed in their multi-tasking roles, as others expected them to be a *superwoman* although not at extreme levels. From this it may be concluded that for employed women with young children and ageing elderly to care for, conflict between work and family is inevitable. Furthermore, such women feel inadequate and unfulfilled in either role, which leads to what is called 'the career-mothering dilemma'. Regardless of success in their career, women

often feel guilty about not meeting family responsibilities. This dilemma can affect the women's well-being, decreasing their career performance and resulting in stress and job burnout. It is difficult to measure the amount of stress that haunts this population of women; however, the cost to society may be damaging. If stress on this population becomes too great, both the family and the economic productivity of the nation could be seriously affected.

Regardless of race and religion, Malaysian women face the dilemma of having to juggle many roles; this dilemma is most probably a conflict they prefer to deal with alone within their inner selves. These women have to balance the demands arising from juggling their multiple roles. A large number of women may find this juggling act stressful and unfair, although some of them have learnt to accept and cope with the situation. However, not all women are able to cope with this stress, and to a certain extent, it also can affect their sense of well-being.

Besides the attention given to an ageing society globally, a counter measure should be created for caregivers for this segment, especially women, as a token of support and appreciation. Support from husbands, families, employers and members of the community is essential. The government too, is not spared from this obligation, and should recognise the responsibility to implement appropriate policies regarding care-giving. Employers need to be more responsive to the needs of workers with multiple family-care responsibilities by



offering not only child-care resources and referral programmes but also extending help for elderly care. For example, a special caregiver financial scheme would be helpful for workers involved in care-giving but are faced with financial constraints in doing so. More public day-care centres for the elderly which provide one-stop facilities for the elderly also need to be provided. Working caregivers can drop off their elderly parents or relatives at these centres in the morning and pick them up after work, not having to worry anymore about elderly parents or relatives who have to be alone at home while they are at work. Employers could also offer flexible working hours for caregivers so that they do not have to take too many days off from work in the year to take care of their elderly.

Women of the Sandwiched Generation play major roles in the new pattern of family relationship, especially in Malaysia. Malaysian women, who stereotypically see care-giving for family members as their given responsibility, need to reconsider this typically traditional way of thinking. Their family and the community should also show more appreciation for them. It is important for the community to note that combining work, parenting and care-giving for elderly parents may have both positive and negative effects on individuals.

Another important consideration is that traditionally, women were the primary caregivers for family members. However, today, when more women prefer to work outside the home, the challenge of providing care for the elderly is even greater, physically,

emotionally and financially. The problem of work roles, care-giving roles, the mothering role and the spousal role can be too much for one person to handle alone. This can cause these women stress. A good marriage relationship is a source of support for stress relief for the Sandwiched Generation. This support may be in the form of emotional or instrumental support.

Women of the Sandwiched Generation must not neglect the quality of their own life just because they are caring for others. Besides this, to reduce stress, women must also utilise every support system in their community to help them in caring for children and elderly parents. Furthermore, they have to love their personal lives and try to seek emotional support from their family circle, friends, neighbours, community or relevant organisations.

This paper recommends pro-active and early intervention to support these trapped women from continuously feeling unrewarded for what they have contributed. Every member of society must play their part in supporting these women with new acts and policies formed by the government.

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