



Sandwiched and Squeezed

an ippr summary paper on the 'sandwich generation' for the Government Equalities Office

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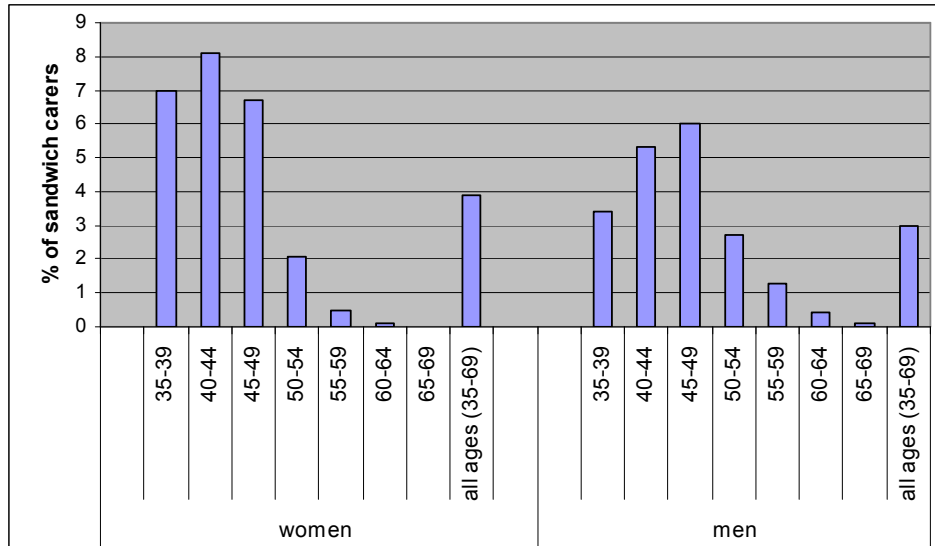
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- The 'sandwich generation' is a term used to describe the group of people who are simultaneously caring for dependent children (i.e. those aged under 18) and dependent adults.
- There is a lack of robust data on the sandwich generation. We don't yet know how changing demographic and social trends – such as increased life expectancy, increased rates of labour participation for women, rising fertility rates and the age at which women are having children rising – may impact the sandwich generation. We do know that those who are simultaneously caring for parents and dependent children are often squeezed – around care, work, time and money.
- This briefing considers the challenges facing the sandwich generation. It presents the demographic, social and employment trends that impact on the sandwich generation; highlighting available data and identifying gaps. It contextualises the sandwich generation primarily through the lens of carers, as it is the dual role of caring for adults and children that defines this cohort. A longer discussion paper will be published in early 2010.

Who is sandwiched and why? Demographic, social and employment trends

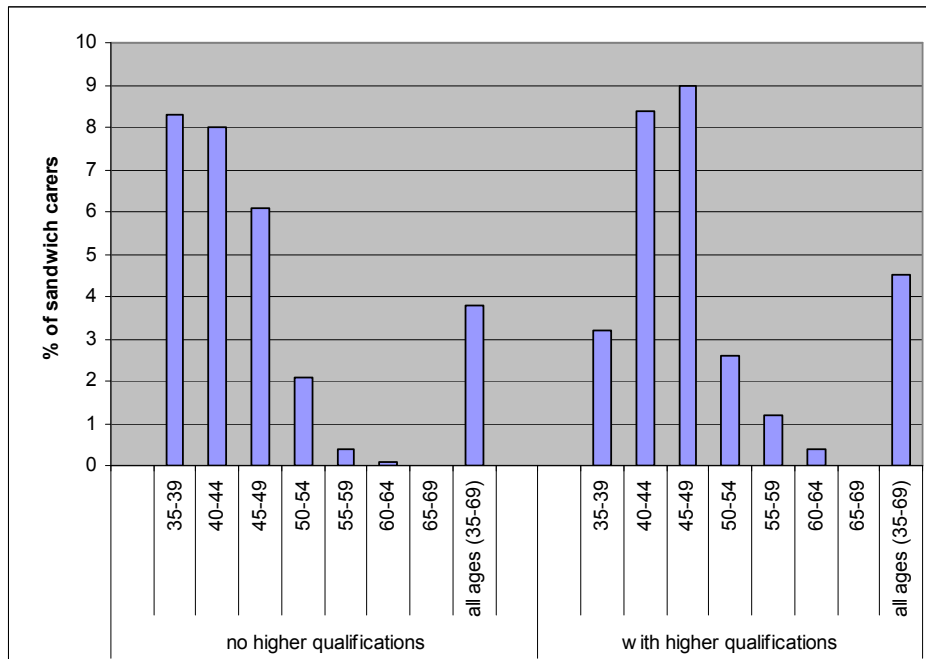
- The sandwich generation are those who simultaneously provide care for dependent children and adults. Sometimes called the 'pivot generation', 'dual carers' or 'those involved in two-way care', the identification of a sandwich generation is relatively new in policy terms. It recognises that people have multiple caring roles and that these may change over the life course.
- The most recent data specifically on the sandwich generation is from 2003. It illustrates that almost 4% of women and 3% of men are sandwiched. The peak age for dual caring 40-44 (8.1%) for women and 45-49 (6.0%) for men (Figure 1) (Agree *et al* 2003).
- For women without higher qualifications, the peak age for being sandwiched is 35-39 (8.3%) whereas for women with higher qualifications, the peak age for being sandwiched is 45-49 (9.0%) (Figure 2) (Agree *et al* 2003). This is partly explained by women with fewer educational qualifications having children at a younger age.

Figure 1: Sandwich carers by age and gender



Source: (Agree *et al* 2003). Data from Table 1: Women and men's parent care and having children under 18 in the household; pooled data from General Household Survey 1990,1995,2000

Figure 2: women sandwich carers by age and qualification



Source: (Agree *et al* 2003). Data from Table 2: Women's parent care and having children under 18 in the household, by education; pooled data from General Household Survey 1990,1995,2000

- Life expectancy continues to rise. And with people living longer, the population is ageing. By 2031 the number of people aged over 50 is projected to increase from 20 million (in 2003) to over 25 million (Soule *et al* 2005). The healthy life expectancy rate in the UK (for 2004-2006) – the age up to which people can expect to live in good or fairly good health – is 68.2 years for men, and 70.4 years for women (Smith *et al* 2008). This means that family members may spend longer caring for the older generation.

- The decrease in family size means that in the future, people will have fewer aunts, uncles and cousins. At the same time the ageing of the population means there will be more older generation relatives, increasing the proportion of people who have grandparents and great-grandparents.
- Patterns around fertility and mortality provide clues of how the sandwich generation may grow, although it is difficult to predict. If fertility rates continue to increase (as is the current trend), and the population continues to age, it may change the dimensions of the sandwich generation.
- Linked to these demographic and social trends – although causality is difficult to determine – is the increase in women’s labour market participation rates. Since the 1970s, despite some fluctuations, the overall employment rate has remained steady at just under 75%. It is the composition of the workforce that has changed with women’s labour market participation rates increasing and men’s decreasing.

Impact of being sandwiched

- The lack of robust data on the sandwich generation makes it difficult to determine the current and future potential impact. The available data around carers is beneficial in highlighting the challenges faced by carers. The following attempts to understand the impact of being sandwiched, recognising that the sandwich generation are also mothers and fathers.
- Caring responsibilities, particularly more intense caring can influence people’s abilities to participate in the labour market, and therefore often have a financial impact. Given their age profile, the sandwich generation are likely to be active in the labour market.
- Using a much wider definition of the sandwich generation (where dependent children were aged up to 25), a report published by the insurance firm Aviva found that 53% of sandwich generation carers found their caring responsibilities affected their ability to participate in the labour market (Opinion Leader 2008).
- The financial legacy of caring can also include an adverse affect on pensions. With the gender pay gap still at 22% (ONS 2009), many mothers experience a ‘pay penalty’ for working part time. In addition to the pay penalty, there is often a ‘pensions penalty’ to caring, especially for women. Giving up work to care for a sick, disabled or elderly person can reduce the number of years during which carers are able to accrue entitlements to state, occupational or private pensions.
- In addition to labour market and financial implications, there may also be health implications – particularly for carers. Caring for an elderly or disabled family member can produce substantial stress and can result in poor physical or mental health for caregivers. The prevalence of ill-health is correlated with the number of hours spent caring; those who are caring intensively are more likely to be in poor health themselves (Young *et al* 2006). This may also have a significant impact on labour force participation.

Supporting the sandwich generation: surveying the policy landscape

- There have been significant policy developments over the last decade in the area of care. Launched in 1999, the Carer’s Strategy set out an agenda to support carers for the first time by providing information, support and care for carers. Increasingly, carers are recognised as

being in need of personalised care and support that meets their specific needs (DoH 1999; HM Government 2008). This commitment was extended in 2008 with further funding commitments.

- There has also been significant policy development around the work-life balance agenda to provide opportunities for people to combine paid work with other responsibilities or aspirations. The focus has been primarily on parents (and particularly mothers), but the right to request flexible working was extended to carers recognising the difficulties that carers also face in balancing work and care.
- Family services are increasingly responding to the needs of diverse families. The expansion and personalisation of social care services and the Government's 'Think Family' agenda recognise that families often need tailored, responsive and flexible services. Consideration should be given to whether these types of services should be connected in some way to provide support to the sandwich generation.

Possible policy responses for discussion

- Building on what we know about the sandwich generation as carers, and many of the consequences that they face, the following policies emerge as possible responses. They are underpinned by recognising that care is a normal and necessary part of life, rather than occurring in exceptional circumstances.
 - *Employees should be entitled to paid leave to care for a dependent:* The right to time off to look after dependants (partner, child, parent or someone living with you) was introduced in the UK in December 1999. This right provides protection for employers to take leave to deal with certain circumstances. In 2007, 38% of employees had experienced an emergency and 34% had taken time off to deal with it, with parents and carers most likely to have experienced an emergency (Hooker and Neathey 2007). International examples provide a framework for considering how this could be applied in the UK with a focus on duration and pay (Moss 2009; Ben-Galim 2009 forthcoming). A right to paid leave would help parents and carers.
 - *The right to request flexible working should be extended to all, with more flexibility:* Introduced in 2003 for parents with children under 6, extended in 2007 to adult carers, and in 2009 to parents with children aged 16 or under, many have called for the right to be extended to all employees (Hughes and Cooke 2007). And more flexibility is required. The current eligibility criteria (i.e. conditional on 26 weeks employment) acts as a barrier for many potential employees wanting to (re)enter the labour market, since they may not be able to begin employment until they know they can work flexibly.
 - *Service delivery and design: an intergenerational approach:* The expansion of services for carers and for the cared has vastly expanded. But as the evidence demonstrates an intergenerational approach to the design and delivery of services is not yet widely considered. Public, private and voluntary sector services should respond to the increasing need highlighted by the sandwich generation in considering the links between and access to a range of services.

Next steps

- Sandwiched between dependent children and adults, this research has highlighted some of the specific challenges that the sandwich generation face. It also highlights that there is a lack of research evidence on the sandwich generation. It is clear that policy needs to focus on recognising that 'everyone is a carer' and the needs of care are not static; changing over the life-course.
- Key questions to consider in taking this agenda forward include:
 - How different are the needs of the 'sandwich generation' to carers and parents more generally?
 - What additional data/research is required to understand the size and future impact of the sandwich generation?
 - What are the principles that should guide policy development for the sandwich generation and how does this fit with carers more generally?
 - How should labour market policies be prioritised in the current economic climate?

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