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Topic (iv) Balancing work and family responsibilities

**THE SANDWICH GENERATION: INTRA-FAMILY TRANSFERS  
AMONG MIDDLE-AGED AMERICAN WOMEN**

Submitted by the U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics<sup>1</sup>

The term “sandwich generation” describes people who are squeezed between the simultaneous demands of caring for their aging parents and supporting their dependent children. How many people comprise the sandwich generation depends on how one defines it. This paper attempts to determine what proportion of middle-aged American women can be said to be part of the sandwich generation. I use data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Young Women (NLSYW) and its 1997 and 1999 sections on intra-family transfers to provide estimates based on various definitions of membership in the sandwich generation.

The NLSYW cohort was started in 1968, with 5 159 women ages 14 to 24 as of December 31, 1967. In 1999, the “Young Women” were 45-56 years old and were interviewed for their 20<sup>th</sup> time. During this interview, respondents were asked about transfers of time and money to their adult children. In 1997, respondents had reported similar information about their parents. Almost 45% reported giving some support to their parents in the form of co-residence, financial assistance, or help with personal care or household chores and errands. A more restrictive definition, where annual financial support was at least \$1000 or other assistance was at least 500 hours, resulted in about 16% of women being defined as supporting their parents.

The percentage of women at this age who were supporting children was even greater. Almost half of them had co-resident children and almost one-fifth were providing financial support (averaging \$8900) to children in college. Fifty-five percent of these women had children under 21 in their household, were supporting children at college, or were giving at least \$1000 or 500 hours to help their children. Including college expenses, this group averaged almost \$6500 in financial support and 315 hours of assistance in childcare, personal care, errands, or chores.

Membership in the sandwich generation is defined as simultaneously giving assistance to both parents and children. Using various measure of assistance, from 1% to 33% of women in this age group belong to the sandwich generation. My preferred definition, where support for parents is defined as either co-residence, \$1000 of financial aid, or 500 hours of other assistance and support for children is defined as co-residence of a child under age 21, support in college, \$1000 of financial aid, or 500 hours of other assistance, places about 9% of all 45 to 56 year-old women in the sandwich generation.

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