

# Research Update!

*A Newsletter of the Dual Earner Couples in the Sandwiched Generation Research Project  
at Portland State University, funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation*

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## **Wave 1 of National Survey Completed**

Over the past few months we have been analyzing survey data collected this past spring from 309 couples from across the nation who are caring for elderly or disabled parents while working and raising children. As part of a three-year study funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, PSU professors Dr. Margaret Neal and Dr. Leslie Hammer are now studying the information provided by the "sandwiched generation" research participants on how they manage their multitude of demands and responsibilities.

The couples were recruited to participate in the national survey by PSU students who were trained as telephone interviewers. The interviewers were looking for couples where both members worked, had at least one child age 18 or under living at home and cared for at least one elderly or disabled parent. Over 33,000 phone calls were made to locate and recruit these "sandwiched generation" couples. Those couples who agreed to participate were sent two copies of a survey, one for each member.

### **Who are the survey participants**

The couples represent members of the sandwiched generation from across the United



Researcher Dr. Margaret Neal (center) with graduate students Krista Brockwood (left) and Emily Huang (right) discuss survey data.

States. The women in the study range in age from 27 to 56 years, with the average age being 42. The men range in age from 30 to 60 years, with an average age of 44. The couples have lived together for an average of 17 years. On average, they have 1.8 children age 18 or under living with them.

The women spend an average of 38 hours per week at their jobs while the men report an average of 49 hours per week. Most work a day shift (85% of the women and 78% of the men). About 80% of the men work a standard full-time job schedule, compared with 59% of the women.

Forty-five percent of women and 51% of men report that their childcare responsibility is

shared equally with their spouse or partner.

The majority of the couples in this study are the only or main caregivers for the parent to whom they provide the most care. The women report that they spend an average of 10 hours per week helping parents, while the men report that they spend an average of eight hours per week.

Twenty-seven percent of the women and 25% of the men said their parent is in poor or extremely poor health. Sixty-two percent of the women and 64% of the men said their parent is in fair to good health, while the remaining respondents indicated that their parent is in very good to excellent health.

# Managing Multiple Demands: Advice from the Sandwiched Generation

by Cari Colton, Graduate Research Assistant

"Take care of yourself," was the most frequently mentioned piece of advice from working members of the "sandwiched generation."

Participants in the national survey were asked the following question: "What advice would you offer other working couples who have children at home and who are helping out aging or disabled parents?" Of the 618 people (309 couples) who completed the survey, 415 (or 67%) responded to the advice question, including 234 women and 179 men. We compiled and analyzed the answers to this question and found very interesting responses.

First we found that the advice offered could be placed into two broad categories: increasing resources and decreasing demands. Fifty-two percent of the responses fell into the "increasing resources" category, which involved strategies that individuals might pursue to increase their personal resources to manage their many responsibilities. The other 48% of responses were categorized as "decreasing demands," which included strategies that encouraged individuals to make conscious decisions to stop doing certain activities or otherwise change their behaviors.

We discovered that in the two categories of advice offered, recommendations could be further subdivided into behavioral, emotional, and cognitive groupings. Thus, six categories were created: increasing resources (behaviorally, emotionally and cognitively) and decreasing demands (behaviorally, emotionally and cognitively).

Advice that was classified as "behaviorally increasing resources" involved such themes as making use of job flexibility and workplace benefits. Acquiring formal support (e.g., hiring outside help) and informal support (e.g., involving children in the care of their grandparents), and using technology such as e-mail and cellular

phones, were other examples. "Emotionally increasing resources" included strategies such as taking care of oneself, nurturing the relationship with one's spouse/partner, emphasizing communication, using humor, participating in support groups, and nurturing oneself spiritually.

"Cognitively increasing resources" included planning schedules, preparing for the unexpected, and preparing for one's own future.

Advice that involved "behaviorally decreasing demands" included the following: just saying "no" to some things, reducing work hours, and simplifying one's life. Under the grouping of "emotionally decreasing demands," strategies involved taking one day at a time, not feeling guilty, and adjusting one's attitude. Finally, determining life priorities, within-family priorities, and daily priorities comprised the themes of the advice offered related to the "cognitively decreasing demands" category.

In sum, successful coping with multiple work and family demands appears to involve feeling, doing, or using more of some things (i.e., increasing one's resources) and less of other things (i.e., decreasing

one's demands). Further, advice was offered that addressed issues at three levels: individual, family, and workplace. A great deal of the advice offered concerned the emotional realm. How people feel or what they believe about their multiple roles appears central to successful coping.

These findings were presented by Dr. Hammer and Dr. Neal at a national conference on work and family issues held in Boston this past November. This information, along with suggestions gathered in focus groups in the first phase of the study, will be used to develop two sourcebooks (see "Thanks," page 3).

## Some Advice from Participants

- Take care of yourself!
- Set aside time to spend with your spouse.
- Ask others for help.
- Learn to say "no."
- Join a support group.
- Hire a housekeeper.
- Choose a job with a flexible schedule.
- Work at home.
- Use family-friendly workplace policies.
- If possible, reduce your work hours.
- Gear down your lifestyle.
- Take one day at a time.
- Don't try to be everything to everybody.
- Set priorities and budget time accordingly.
- Keep communication flowing.
- Use a large calendar to schedule family activities.
- Plan for your own future.
- Have patience.
- Don't lose your sense of humor.

# We Thank You!

by Dr. Margaret Neal and Dr. Leslie Hammer, Co-Principal Investigators

We want to take this opportunity, once again, to thank you for your participation in this study. As focus group members or as national survey respondents, you have been very generous in sharing information vital to this research. Your responses have been enlightening, and ultimately will help other couples in similar situations.

You have told us about what makes your lives easier and more difficult. Analyses of your responses have shown, for example, the positive effects of a supportive job environment on feelings of life satisfaction, and the importance of increasing resources (such as support from family and friends) and decreasing demands for management of work and family responsibilities. In addition to answering the many questions on the survey, many respondents wrote comments on their surveys describing their situations and the coping strategies they use.

Next, we will be asking the national survey respondents to complete one more survey, very



Project staff (pictured left to right): Krista Brockwood, Cari Colton, Dr. Leslie Hammer, Dr. Margaret Neal, Jo Isgrigg, and Angie Rickard. Staff not pictured include Dr. Jason Newson, Emily Huang, John McLeod, and Jeff Johnson.

similar to the last one, which will be mailed in March and April. A few couples will then be selected to be interviewed by telephone. Also, we will reconvene some members of the focus groups this summer.

The primary objective of this study is to determine how sandwiched generation couples manage their multiple work and caregiving roles from one year to the next. Your past and future participation is invaluable; no other such study has been conducted to date. You may remember that a major product of this study is a sourcebook for sandwiched generation couples; this booklet will include your advice to couples facing situations similar to yours. We will also be preparing a sourcebook for employers, community leaders and policy makers based on the findings from the study. Again, we thank you so much for your help in this effort and look forward to continuing to work with you as the study proceeds!

## Predicting Life Satisfaction Among Sandwiched Generation Couples

by John McLeod, Research Assistant

One area of interest in this three-year study is the way that the positive and the negative aspects of work and family roles contribute to overall feelings of satisfaction with life. One set of analyses, for example, has examined how rewards and stresses of work and family roles affect life satisfaction for husbands and wives.

The first finding in these analyses showed that, as expected, the stress of being a spouse and that of being employed led to decreased satisfaction with life. Interestingly, the stresses associated with being a parent and a caregiver to parent did not have the same negative effect on life satisfaction. Second, as expected, the rewards associated with being employed led to greater life satisfaction for both men and women. Also, for women but not for men, the positive aspects of being a spouse were found to increase life satisfaction. The rewards of being a parent and of being a caregiver to a parent

had no significant effect on respondents' reports of overall life satisfaction. Finally, after taking into account both the stresses and the rewards associated with participants' various work and family roles, the positive spillover effects from family life onto work were found to be related to life satisfaction for women, but not for men. The positive spillover effects from work onto family life did not contribute to life satisfaction for either men or women.

Particularly perplexing are the lack of significant effects on life satisfaction of either stresses or rewards in the roles of parent and caregiver to a parent. Future analyses will be conducted to attempt to understand why this is the case. Also, the effects of one spouse's role rewards and stresses on the other spouse, and vice versa, will be studied.

# Internet Resources

by Krista Brockwood, Graduate Research Assistant

For those of you who have Internet access, we wanted to share some web sites that you might find interesting. After entering the keywords "Sandwich Generation," a total of 407 matches were found. (This is obviously a growing area of interest: when we did a similar search in November of last year, only 97 matches were found.) Here are some of the highlights:

## **www.parentsplace.com**

This web site contains a wealth of practical information. Once they are registered through a very simple process, patrons of this site can post questions and concerns regarding their "sandwiched" situations, answer other people's questions, or simply browse through previously posted questions and answers. Parents' Place has hundreds of bulletin boards on different topics, ranging from relationships with spouse and friends, to children's health, to loss of a parent, to work-related topics. There are also chat sessions that are scheduled, where people can log on and have "virtual discussions." This site is a great resource for anyone who is a parent, but it may be particularly helpful for "Sandwich Generation" folks. Lots of practical advice, as well as emotional support, are to be found here.

## **www.workfamily.com**

This web site has information from many perspectives. It is a subscription service designed primarily for researchers, but it also includes a lot

of free information for the general public. It includes a Q&A forum, lists of family-friendly organizations, and links to a host of other related web sites.

**www.kiplinger.com/magazine/archives/1995/June/sandwich.html**

**www.mainstayfunds.com/viewer/wsh-nyl.nts/nyl/pfwhsa.html**

These are just two examples of web sites offering financial information on being a member of the sandwiched generation. These sites offer some practical advice on how to manage financially, as well as list various resources.

**http://www.geocities.com/Wellesley/1749/listindex.html**

This is an e-mail support group for caregivers in the Sandwich Generation. Detailed instructions on how to sign up for the group are given and also some rules of etiquette.

**http://www.pla.org/links/bib.htm**

This is a resource list from the Public Library Association. It contains a vast bibliography of resources related to the Sandwiched Generation, including articles, books, magazines, organizations, and videos.

**http://boomersint.org/bindex.html**

This is a web site specifically for Baby Boomers. It has a whole range of items, from the fun to the more serious.

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