Sandwiched Generation (2002)

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Date: October 18, 2002

Basic Concepts & Definitions

The "sandwiched generation" typically refers to parents who are involved in caring both for dependent children and aging parents (Durity, 1991; Ingersoll-Dayton, Neal, & Hammer, 2001; Raphael and Schlesinger, 1993). These individuals have been dubbed the "sandwiched generation" (Fernandez, 1990; Miller, 1981; Nichols & Junk, 1997; Rosenthal, Martin-Matthews, & Matthews, 1996), in that they are sandwiched between the needs of their children and their parents, and often, their jobs.

Importance of Topic to Work-Family Studies

During the 1980s and 1990s, significant research and practice attention was devoted to working adults with children, particularly those with young children (e.g., Bedian, Burke, & Moffett, 1988; Hammer, Allen, & Grigsby, 1997; Marshall & Barnett, 1993; Parasuraman, Greenhaus, & Granrose, 1992; Rice, Frone, & McFarlin, 1992; Sekaran, 1983; Thomas & Ganster, 1995; Williams & Alliger, 1994). The first studies to focus on working adults/families with responsibilities for elder care did not appear until the mid- to late-1980s (Gibeau, Anastas, & Larson, 1987a and 1987b; Neal, Ingersoll-Dayton & Chapman, 1988; Sharlach & Boyd, 1989; Travelers Insurance, 1985; Wagner, 1987). In the past decade, some researchers have begun to study families who are simultaneously assuming responsibilities for the care of dependent children as well as elders (e.g., Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton, & Neal, 1994; Neal, Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton, & Emlen, 1993; Neal, Hammer, Rickard, Isgrigg, & Brockwood, 1999; Stephens & Townsend, 1997; Stone & Short, 1990). The work-family experiences of these families are unique, and information about their situations can help us to better understand a range of work-family issues for individuals, employers, and public policy makers.

It is important to note that combining work, parenting, and parent care may have both positive and negative effects on individuals. Much of the literature has focused on the negative effects of combining work and family, while only recently have more of the enhancing effects been examined. For example, Ingersoll-Dayton, Neal, and Hammer (2001) found that sandwiched generation employees reported beneficial outcomes associated with the care of their parents in the form of receipt of emotional support...
and help with the care of their children. Thus, researchers and practitioners should understand the positive and negative relationship between work and family roles among sandwiched generation employees.

**State of the Body of Knowledge**

It is projected that 20% of Americans will be aged 65 or older by the year 2030, which means that there will be more Americans over age 65 than there are children under age 18 (Bronfenbrenner, McClelland, Wethington, Moen, & Ceci, 1996). At the same time, the number and proportion of women engaged in paid employment has increased (e.g., Johnston & Packer, 1987; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1998), leading to a number of changes in the family, including a redistribution of traditional gender role responsibilities and an increase in the interdependency between work and family (e.g., Barnett, 1998). In fact, considerable research has demonstrated that workers' family lives affect their work, and vice versa (e.g., Hammer, Allen, & Grigsby, 1997; Neal, Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton, & Emlen, 1993).

It is often the case that individuals with elder care responsibilities have multiple role commitments (i.e., spouse, employee, and parent) (Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton & Neal, 1993; Penning, 1998). For example, an NAC/AARP study (1997) found that of all caregivers of persons aged 50 and over, 41% also had children under the age of 18 living in their households. Similarly, in their study of 9,573 employees in 33 different companies, Neal, Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton, and Emlen (1993) found that 42% of the employees who were caring for elders were also caring for children.

The percentage of Americans who have caregiving responsibilities for both children and parents, regardless of work status is undetermined as yet. A few studies specifically of employees and their multiple caregiving responsibilities have been conducted, however. For example, Neal et al.'s (1993) study of employees found that workers with both types of responsibilities comprised 9% of the sample of employees overall. Nichols and Junk (1997) surveyed individuals between the ages of 40 and 65 and found that 15% had responsibilities for aging parents and financially dependent children. Durity (1991) found that depending on the workforce demographics of an organization (i.e., age, gender, marital status), the percentage of employees with both child and parent care responsibilities ranges from 6 to 40. Finally, a recent national study (Neal et al., 1999) estimated that between 9% and 13% of American households having one or more persons aged 30 through 60 are comprised of dual-earner, sandwiched-generation couples. These results are comparable, although somewhat lower, than those of Nichols and Junk (1997).

**Implications for Practice & Research**

The study of the sandwiched generation helps challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about family structures and responsibilities. In the past, some family life stage perspectives had suggested that
different types of families (e.g., families in different life stages) would provide caregiving to children and elders. Research on the sandwiched generation contributes to our understanding of the diversity of families and the complexities of their work-family experiences.

The challenges confronted by the sandwich generation suggest that innovative solutions are necessary. For example, the federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 enables employees to take leave when a family member is ill, however in most cases this leave is unpaid, limiting individuals’ ability to take advantage of such a solution. In addition, workplaces are becoming more responsive to the needs of workers with multiple family care responsibilities by offering not only child care resource and referral programs but also extending those to elder care. Organizations are also beginning to recognize that paying attention to the well-being of their employees is important to the overall health of the company. Finally, community-business partnerships might be more effective, in some instances than supports that are solely workplace-based.

References
* Indicates a Recommended Reading


**Other Recommended Readings on this Topic:**


Locations in the Matrix of Information Domains of the Work-Family Area of Studies

The Editorial Board of the Teaching Resources section of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network has prepared a Matrix as a way to locate important work-family topics in the broad area of work-family studies. (More about the Matrix ...).

Note: The domain areas most closely related to the entry’s topic are presented in full color. Other domains, represented in gray, are provided for context.

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Domain F: Theoretical Underpinnings to All Domains
Introduction

It was appropriate that the members of the Founding Editorial Board of the Resources for Teaching began their work in 2000, for their project represented one of the turning points in the area of work and family studies. This group accepted the challenge of developing resources that could support the efforts of teaching faculty from different disciplines and professional schools to better integrate the work-family body of knowledge into their curricula. The Virtual Think Tank began its work with a vision, a spirit of determination, and sense of civic responsibility to the community of work-family scholars.

A fundamental challenge emerged early in the process. It became clear that before we could design resources that would support the teaching of those topics, we would first need to inventory topics and issues relevant to the work-family area of studies (and begin to distinguish the work-family aspect of these topics from "non work-family" aspects).

The members of the Virtual Think Tank were well aware that surveying the area of work and family studies would be a daunting undertaking. However, we really had no other choice. And so, we began to grapple with the mapping process.

Purpose

1. To develop a preliminary map of the body of knowledge relevant to the work-family area of study that reflects current, "across-the-disciplines" understanding of work-family phenomena.

2. To create a flexible framework (or map) that clarifies the conceptual relationships among the different information domains that comprise the work-family knowledge base.

It is important to understand that this mapping exercise was undertaken as a way to identify and organize the wide range of work-family topics. This project was not intended as a meta-analysis for
determining the empirical relationships between specific variables. Therefore, our map of the workfamily area of study does not include any symbols that might suggest the relationships between specific factors or clusters of factors.

**Process**

The Virtual Think Tank used a 3-step process to create the map of the work-family area of studies.

1. **Key Informants:** The members of the Virtual Think Tank included academics from several different disciplines and professions who have taught and written about work-family studies for years. During the first stage of the mapping process, the Virtual Think Tank functioned as a panel of key informants. Initially, the Panel engaged in a few brainstorming sessions to identify work-family topics that could be addressed in academic courses. The inductive brainstorming sessions initially resulted in the identification of nearly 50 topics.

Once the preliminary list of topics had been generated, members of the Virtual Think Tank pursued a deductive approach to the identification of work-family issues. Over the course of several conversations, the Virtual Think Tank created a conceptual map that focused on information domains (see Table 1 below).

The last stage of the mapping process undertaken by the Virtual Think Tank consisted of comparing and adjusting the results of the inductive and deductive processes. The preliminary, reconciled list was used as the first index for the Online Work and Family Encyclopedia.

2. **Literature review:** Members of the project team conducted literature searches to identify writings in which authors attempted to map the work-family area of study or specific domains of this area. The highlights of the literature review will be posted on February 1, 2002 when the First Edition of the Work-Family Encyclopedia will be published.

3. **Peer review:** On October 1, 2001, the Preliminary Mapping of the work-family area of study was posted on the website of the Sloan Work and Family Research Network. The members of the Virtual Think Tank invite work-family leaders to submit suggestions and comments about the Mapping and the List of Work-Family Topics. The Virtual Think Tank will consider the suggestions and, as indicated, will make adjustments in both of these products. Please send your comments to Marcie Pitt-Catsouphes at pittcats@bc.edu
Assumptions

Prior to identifying the different information domains relevant to the work-family area of study, members of the Virtual Think Tank adopted two premises:

1. Our use of the word “family” refers to both traditional and nontraditional families. Therefore, we consider the term “work-family” to be relevant to individuals who might reside by themselves. Many work-family leaders have noted the problematic dimensions of the term “work-family” (see Barnett, 1999). In particular, concern has been expressed that the word “family” continues to connote the married couple family with dependent children, despite the widespread recognition that family structures and relationships continue to be very diverse and often change over time. As a group, we understand the word “family” to refer to relationships characterized by deep caring and commitment that exist over time. We do not limit family relationships to those established by marriage, birth, blood, or shared residency.

2. It is important to examine and measure work-family issues and experiences at many different levels, including: individual, dyadic (e.g., couple relationships, parent-child relationships, caregiver/caretaker relationships), family and other small groups, organizational, community, and societal. Much of the work-family discourse glosses over the fact that the work-family experiences of one person or stakeholder group may, in fact, be different from (and potentially in conflict with) those of another.

Outcomes

We will publish a Working Paper, “Mapping the Work-Family Area of Study,” on the Sloan Work and Family Research Network in 2002. In this publication, we will acknowledge the comments and suggestions for improvement sent to us.

Limitations

It is important to understand that the members of the Virtual Think Tank viewed their efforts to map the work-family area of study as a “work in progress.” We anticipate that we will periodically review and revise the map as this area of study evolves.

The members of the panel are also cognizant that other scholars may have different conceptualizations of the work-family area of study. We welcome your comments and look forward to public dialogue about this important topic.
Listing of the Information Domains Included in the Map

The members of the Virtual Think Tank wanted to focus their map of work-family issues around the experiences of five principal stakeholder groups:

1. individuals,
2. families,
3. workplaces,
4. communities, and
5. society-at-large.

Each of these stakeholder groups is represented by a row in the Table 1, Information Domain Matrix (below).

Work-Family Experiences: The discussions of the members of the Virtual Think Tank began with an identification of some of the salient needs & priorities/problems & concerns of the five principal stakeholder groups. These domains are represented by the cells in Column B of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individuals' work-family needs & priorities
- Individuals' work-family problems & concerns
- Families' work-family need & priorities
- Families' work-family problems & concerns
- Needs & priorities of workplaces related to work-family issues
- Workplace problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs & priorities of communities related to work-family issues
- Communities' problems & concerns related to work-family issues
- Needs and priorities of society related to work-family issues
- Societal problems & concerns related to work-family issues

Antecedents: Next, the Virtual Think Tank identified the primary roots causes and factors that might have either precipitated or affected the work-family experiences of the principal stakeholder groups. These domains are highlighted in Column A of the Information Domain Matrix.

- Individual Antecedents
- Family Antecedents
• Workplace Antecedents
• Community Antecedents
• Societal Antecedents

Covariates: The third set of information domains include factors that moderate the relationships between the antecedents and the work-family experiences of different stakeholder groups (see Column C in Table 1).

• Individual Covariates
• Family Covariates
• Workplace Covariates
• Community Covariates
• Societal Covariates

Decisions and Responses: The responses of the stakeholder groups to different work-family experiences are highlighted in Column D.

• Individual Decision and Responses
• Family Decisions and Responses
• Workplace Decisions and Responses
• Community Decisions and Responses
• Public Sector Decisions and Responses

Outcomes & Impacts: The fifth set of information domains refer to the outcomes and impacts of different work-family issues and experiences on the principal stakeholder groups (see Column E).

• Outcomes & Impacts on Individuals
• Outcomes & Impacts on Families
• Outcomes & Impacts on Workplaces
• Outcomes & Impacts on Communities
• Outcomes & Impacts on Society

Theoretical Foundations: The Virtual Think Tank established a sixth information domain to designate the multi-disciplinary theoretical underpinnings to the work-family area of study (noted as Information Domain F).
Table 1: Matrix of Information Domains (9/30/01)

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