

What Does it Mean To Be in the Sandwich Generation? The Lived Experiences of Selected Low-income Urban Filipino Women

Excelsa C. Tongson

ABSTRACT

This research is a first attempt to highlight a relatively unexplored social phenomenon. It examines women's experiences in the context of the types of care they provide children and elderly relatives and the support that these women receive. The phenomenon is without a local term, and this research aims to draw attention to a number of issues like poverty, intersectionality, and VAWC. This article discusses prevailing practices of gender inequality, but also examines the narratives that challenge the stereotyped images of women. It also proposes that future research must provide a compelling argument hinged on the under-fulfillment of these women caregivers' rights and the implications of gendered division of labor on their development. Testimonies and disaggregated data on age, gender, and other identities (such as issues unique to LGBT) may also paint a richer picture of their unique familial position.

Keywords: sandwich generation, poverty, gendered division of labor, rights

INTRODUCTION

Members of the sandwich generation are those in a unique position of providing care simultaneously for the older and younger generations. The “sandwich generation” emerged as a concept in the 1980s when it was coined by Dorothy Miller, a social worker who experienced the challenges of being “sandwiched” between her minor children and sickly elderly parents along with meeting the demands of her career (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010). As an academic interest, it first appeared in the professional gerontological and family literature (Brody, 1981; Miller, 1981).

The sandwich generation, as Miller (1981) describes it, belongs to “four-generation modified extended families—defined as a coalition of nuclear families in the state of partial dependence” (p. 419). Meanwhile, Chisholm (1999) refers to the sandwich generation as “individuals who by a dint of circumstances find themselves in the position of being caregivers for their young and/or adult children as well as on or both aging parents” (p. 178).

Providing care to the younger and older family members has been present throughout most of human history as caregiving has always been the function of families. Cultural ascription, traditional concepts of family, and gender stereotypes have given women the primary responsibility to care for their families of origin and procreation (Dionisio, 1993; Eviota, 1995; National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, 1997; Parrenas, 2010; Williams, 2004).

The interest in investigating the complex and challenging task of caregiving in modern societies surfaced as more women joined the workforce – a result of vast educational opportunities and abundant employment prospects. Childcare and eldercare have increasingly become legitimate personal and workplace concerns (Pierret, 2006).

THE SANDWICH GENERATION FROM A DISTANT SETTING

A survey conducted by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) in 2001 revealed that 44 percent of their participants, with an age range of 44 to 55 years old, were supporting one living parent and

one minor child in the same household. In Canada, about 72 Canadians were in the sandwich generation in 2002, but this number is projected to increase in 2026 (Williams, 2004).

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (2010), those in the sandwich generation in Asia-Pacific are usually between 30 to 45 years old, married and concurrently supporting two children and two parents or parents-in-law. It was found that across China, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Australia, about 20 percent of the working population ages 20 to 70 years old are in the sandwich generation (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010). The growing number of the sandwich generation in developed countries in the Asia-Pacific has led to studies that aim to understand the impact of balancing caregiving and employee role on productivity and well-being.

DeRigne and Ferrante (2012) reveal that caring in a multi-generational household has both negative and positive impacts on the sandwich generation. Women experience higher levels of depression and psychological disorders that can be attributed to long hours spent attending to the needs of their elderly parents. Women are more likely resign from work due to the demands of caregiving. Consequently, leaving work results in income loss and deprivation of other benefits such as health insurance and social security. Caring for a multi-generation household and meeting the demands of work can impose multiple burdens, resulting in the sandwich generation spreading themselves too thinly.

Despite the steep demands of meeting high standards of living, the sandwich generation in developed countries in Asia are committed to sending their children to excellent schools all the way to college and to providing financial support to their parents, which includes spending for their medical needs. Seventy-eight percent of Asians believe that it is their responsibility to care for their parents in their twilight years (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010). In the US, De Rigne and Ferrante (2012) note that Asian-Americans are considered as the most active caregivers and have been seen to prefer to provide care beyond what is expected of them.

De Rigne and Ferrante (2012) have found out that caregiving does not always translate to stressful living, as reciprocity is associated with positive feelings. Caring for children and parents results in a good

relationship among family members and marital happiness. On a similar vein, Russonello, Stewart, and Research/Strategy/Management (2001) states that 70 percent of survey participants in the US revealed that they do not feel that they're "being squeezed." In Canada, more than 60 percent of the sandwich generation believe that taking care of their elderly parent is a form of giving back, and 70 percent experienced renewed and strengthened relationship with their parents.

Support and dependence come in a variety of forms and levels, which include financial, physical, emotional, and social or a combination of the four. On the other hand, dependence may be categorized as full or partial, depending on the capability of the child and the elderly relative (Pew Research Center, 2013; Pierret, 2006).

With the recognition of the challenges of the sandwich generation, Jankowski (2011) noted a variety of policies and programs. For example, caregiver credits are given as part of public pension and childcare credits are now universal in Europe. Norway, UK, and Germany offer respite care and provide childcare and elderly care credits for unpaid care performed by the sandwich generation. Germany has established a separate employment category for informal, unpaid care. In the US, Hallmark pioneered a workplace program in 1986, followed by IBM and Herman Miller, which assist their employees with family-related concerns. Their employees are also entitled to have flexible hours and time off to attend to their caregiving duties.

WITHIN THE LOCAL BORDERS

Despite the recognition of the issues and concerns of the sandwich generation in the West and in developed countries in Asia, the experiences of low-income urban women in developing countries like the Philippines are not found in literature, as it is dominated by studies conducted on middle class, white women in the formal economy. Hence, past actions or ongoing initiatives for the women in the sandwich generation in the Philippines have not been documented, and the estimated number of women in the sandwich generation in the country has not yet been identified. To date, there is still no local term for said generation.

Having an extended family is common in the Philippines. Medina (2001) defines it as a type of structure with mutual financial and emotional support, sharing of responsibilities, pooling of resources, and a strong sense of solidarity. Castillo (1993) describes it as “residentially nuclear and functionally extended.” In a poverty stricken family, the provision of care may take a toll on women who are also tasked to manage their meager resources (Barrameda, 2012; Ofreneo, 2004). The National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (1997, p. 21) noted that “even as women perform a broad range of activities in the home and even as they earn outside the home,” their contribution to their families and society remain to be “secondary or even marginal.” It is this same view that accounts for women’s subordination, which is responsible for their multiple burdens as they perform a variety of productive, reproductive, and community roles (Moser, 1993).

Subordination leads to marginalization. This results in planning processes and development strategies that do not consider the contribution of women as they perform their multiple roles. There is also a failure to address their gender needs and issues, such as access to housing (Laguilles, 2017) and involvement in disaster risk management plans (Barameda, 2012), which can exclude them from the benefits of development (Barameda, 2012; Brett, 1991; Laguilles, 2017; Moser, 1993). According to NCRFW (1997), the prevailing practices of gender inequality are responsible for the neglect of women’s needs for support and social benefits.

Defining and understanding the sources of the gendered division of labor – along with primary and secondary sources of inequality – and the different forms of discrimination and marginalization are necessary in addressing women’s oppression to achieve the ultimate goal of expanding their freedoms, which is crucial to their development. Sen (1999) argued that development is possible when there are equal opportunities to earn and acquire wealth because primary goods are necessary to achieve freedom. Equal opportunities are possible when the condition of liberty is available for everyone, especially for the most underprivileged in society. Drawing from this viewpoint, development is about eliminating the impediments that limit what a person aspires to do and can do in life (Sen, 1999).

The Magna Carta of Women (MCW), the comprehensive women's rights law, is considered a mechanism for development in the Philippines that aspires to eliminate all forms of violence, discrimination, and marginalization that restrict women's fundamental freedom. It provides a legal framework that recognizes the diversity of women's concerns and issues. Hailed as groundbreaking law, Durano (2014) dissected the provisions contained in the MCW and determined whether these provisions are in line with Sen's and Nussbaum's views of development. Durano noted that it contains provisions that address both the primary and secondary sources of inequality, which are discussed lengthily in Chapter II of the MCW. However, she identified two major gaps of the MCW: lack of development indicators and lack of specific provisions on care, which is treated as unpaid work and highlights the gendered division of labor. Durano (2014) also noted that MCW fell short in attaching value to the culturally ascribed role of women as "housewife and mother."

Even in the landmark legislations on senior citizens that recognize the role of households and families in caring for them, there are no specific benefits or privileges for household carers of senior citizens in general, except for tax incentives, and for women in the sandwich generation in particular.

While certain care work provisions are in the Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000 – such as counseling services which focuses on resolution of personal relationship and role conflicts; parent effectiveness services, which provides the expansion of knowledge and skills on child rearing; and critical incidence services for stress management strategy in times of crisis and abuse – these provisions are only applicable for solo parents. Parental leave of not more than seven consecutive days for solo parents are provided so they can be present in milestones of their children such as birthdays, graduation, and other similar events as well as attend school activities such as enrollment, school programs, PTA meetings; however, this particular provision is only applicable to those in the formal economy who have rendered at least one year of service. It does not cover mothers who are in the informal economy and non-regular employees whose contracts are terminated in five months. Likewise, the provision on

parental leaves does not state that it can be used for respite care where solo parents can attend to their personal needs, as the said provision is only intended for the needs and milestones of the child.

The seeming lack of care work provisions in these legislations especially the MCW is in line with Nussbaum's (2000) view about the human need to care and how this need limits the capacity of women to choose from a variety of options. These gaps pose a dangerous prospect for specific issues and concerns of women in the sandwich generation, who provide informal and uncompensated care for their loved ones.

The focus of this study is to document the experiences, issues and concerns of low-income urban women who attend to the older and younger generations in their families. While it touches on eldercare and childcare, it does not tackle them separately but rather it looks at the provision of simultaneous care to these members of the family. This paper is an initial attempt to unearth gender-based stereotypes and biases in families of low-income women in the sandwich generation, in the hopes that when these issues are addressed, they can lead to gender equality and empowerment of these women. It has the following aims:

1. To describe the experiences of selected women in the sandwich generation;
2. To examine the types of care women in the sandwich generation provide their children and elderly parents;
3. To examine the types of support women in the sandwich generation receive.

METHOD

Feminist standpoint epistemology claims that those who are immersed in a situation have an enormous epistemic privilege to talk about their multiple realities. Those who recognize that women belong to underprivileged groups equally understand that certain types of knowledge are accessible only through them. This view presents a fertile ground for the evolution of knowledge that targets not only achieving heightened consciousness but also social change by empowering women (Brooks, 2014; Guerrero, 2002).

The need to consider “women’s lives, as they themselves experience them” (Brooks, 2014, p. 56) is not only beneficial but urgent as their input in the discourse provide a wider base for the best course of action paving the way for social reform.

This paper highlights how five low-income urban women in the sandwich generation understand their situation, painting a picture of social reality in the most depressed areas of Barangay San Isidro: Sitio Verde and Sitio Azure. They are located in Caloocan City, one of the major cities in the National Capital Region. The barangay is the smallest political unit in the Philippines and composed of small villages called sitios. Barangay San Isidro is the fourth largest barangay in Caloocan City, the third most populous in the country based on the 2010 national census of population. In 2013, the Philippine Statistics Authority reported that in 2010, Barangay San Isidro has a population of 75,548. Based on the Barangay Profile available at the Office of the Barangay Captain, it has an estimated population of 120,000 as of 2008, of which 48,000 were males while 72,000 were females.

The Asian Development Bank released a report in 2013 estimating that about 45 percent of the total Filipino population are urban dwellers and about 56 percent will be residing in urban areas by 2050. Hence, there is a pressing need to investigate how unpaid care is provided and how urban living will continue to shape it.

Case study is a method that covers contextual conditions present in the phenomenon being studied. As an inquiry, this paper endeavors to investigate a “contemporary phenomenon with its real-life context” (Yin, 2003, p. 13).

The semi-structured feminist in-depth interview provided flexibility and allowed the participants to take control of what they felt were necessary to share or enact during the interviews. This is important to carry across the message that they are the owners of their stories (Brooks, 2014; Verceles, 2015). Drawing from their double consciousness as what Brooks (2014) pointed out, the participants’ heightened awareness of their own lives enabled them to share their insights as they perform familial and work related responsibilities.

Table 1. Profile of Research Participants

Name	Age	Marital Status	Education	Occupation	Younger Generation	Older Generation
Helen	38	Single	Computer Secretarial	Barangay employee	Niece	Father and mother
Madel	38	Single with partner	Elementary	Laundrywoman	8 children 1 grandchild*	Mother-in-law
Vanessa	55	Married	High School	Sari-sari store owner	1 grandchild* nephews and nieces	Father
Josie	36	Married	High School	Barangay employee	daughter and aunt-in-law	Mother-in-law
Bernie	62	Single	High School	Barangay Volunteer, billiards operator	3 nephews	Mother

* Soon-to-be born

Except for Vanessa, who gave only her verbal consent as she refused to write anything, written consent was obtained from each participant. All participants agreed to audio record the interview, with the exception of Bernie, who requested the researcher to merely jot down her answers. Three women were interviewed at the Barangay Hall while the other two were interviewed at their homes. All home visits were conducted with their permission. To protect the researcher from her abusive husband and brother-in-law, Josie did not agree for a home visit.

In order to avoid disruption of their daily routines, the participants were interviewed at their most convenient time, usually in the afternoon when they have finished attending to their reproductive roles.

The five selected women were chosen based on the following criteria: primary caregivers of minor children and elderly relatives, living in three-to-four generation households, at least 35 years old, belong

to the informal economy, and earn not more than PhP10,000.00 a month. All of them were identified through the assistance of a Barangay Women's Desk staff assigned by the barangay captain to assist in conducting the study.

The first meeting was solely devoted to setting an appointment and establishing rapport to ensure that the interview would be a conversation between two women done in a relaxed manner. Both of them were free to ask questions and to clarify matters. To ensure anonymity, all the names of the participants and the locale were changed.

PROCESSING OF DATA

Context-bound patterns and information (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013) resulted from generating categories and themes from data collected from the interviews. Answers that are relevant to the study were highlighted or labeled. Once meaningful statements were generated, they were clustered to represent different themes related to the research topic. Each theme was supported by direct quotes.

RESULTS

All participants in this study came from agricultural communities in the southern Philippines. They migrated to Manila in search of better sources of livelihood for their large families. With their low educational achievement, they are left with no choice but to engage in the huge informal economy in the city either as household help, vendor, or bus conductor.

Stories of Lost Love, Abuse, and Deprivation

Josie, 36, a high school graduate from Cebu is a Violence Against Women (VAW) survivor. She has experienced financial, physical, and emotional abuse from her husband, a shabu (methamphetamine) user, as well as daily verbal abuse from her brother-in-law. She lives with her husband's elderly and sickly mother and aunt. She has long wanted to leave her husband, but her US\$108.00 monthly salary is not enough to support herself and her 12-year old daughter.

Josie came to Manila when she was 17 as a nanny to her relative's children. With promises of a good life, she left her job and married her husband, a college graduate and an employee of a telecommunications company at that time. She moved into her husband's family house, where she assisted her mother-in-law and her husband's aunt in performing their domestic responsibilities. When her mother-in-law had a stroke, Josie took full responsibility of caring for her and managing their male-dominated household. Her husband is currently out of a job due to issues that came up at work related to his illicit drug use. He now relies on financial support from his elderly father and brother who are working abroad. Josie suspects that her husband occasionally sells drugs in small quantities to earn a living and to support his vices.

Josie has filed a complaint against her husband at the Barangay Women's Desk where she was given a protection order. She described her marital relationship as "separated but not". She never allows him to enter their bedroom, where she had caught him having sex with another woman. He now sleeps on the couch in the living room. She has never allowed him to touch her again. In spite of her husband's attempts to make amends, images of abuse and deception remain vivid in her mind. Josie said:

I don't love him anymore... He now has gonorrhoea... I make do with my little salary to save money so my daughter and I can move out of that house. But, I am not yet able to do it. My mother-in-law has also pleaded to me not to leave. I feel guilty at the thought that no one would take care of her.

Josie does not want anything for herself. All there is in her life is to ensure that her daughter will finish college. To protect her daughter from gossip and unfair judgment from others, she keeps her marital problems to herself and performs like she and her daughter are part of a happy family. She dreams endlessly of the day when she and her daughter will live on their own, but for now, she accepts the sad reality that the current arrangement will have to remain.

Vanessa, who is 55 years old and a high school graduate, migrated from Samar province with her entire family to escape their abusive father.

Growing up, she has witnessed how her father would beat up her mother – often after a drinking spree. Even as children, Vanessa and her siblings were not spared from physical beating and verbal abuse either. They grew up terrified and shaken. Because of this, they had never learned how to love him. When he had a stroke, the entire family refused to fetch him from Samar. But because of the insistence of their relatives and as she is the eldest among ten children, Vanessa relented. Since then she has been taking full responsibility for the care of their bed-ridden father without any help from her mother and siblings.

When Vanessa worked in Qatar as a maintenance staff in a ladies' room, she paid her sister US\$87.00 a month to take care of their father. But when she came home from Qatar, caregiving for their 75-year old father fell, once more, to her. Being a born-again Christian, Vanessa found the grace to forgive and take care of him. Her mother and siblings have not forgiven him even to this day.

Vanessa's main source of livelihood as a small storeowner is complemented by her husband's wage as a provincial bus driver and her daughter's salary as an overseas contract worker in Qatar. Vanessa's daughter is pregnant with her first child with an Arab. She intends to deliver her child in the Philippines and leave the baby to Vanessa. Her daughter will go back to Qatar to work and live with her partner.

Vanessa lives in their family compound. Since her siblings have full-time work during the day, she is also tasked to look after her nephews and nieces from time to time and to ensure that they do not wander out into the busy street. Given the choice, she wants to work again in Qatar where her only task is to make the ladies' room tidy. Due to the age limit set by her work agency, she is no longer qualified to go overseas. Vanessa said:

I just sit there, especially when no one is using the ladies' room. Here, all the work is mine. My husband is already tired from driving, so he does not help in household chores. That's life. No other person will take care of my father. They hate him. It is okay if I will take care of my grandchild. My daughter will send money anyway.

Vanessa does not have concrete plans on how to juggle the responsibility of simultaneously caring for her father and grandchild. She does not plan to involve her husband in accomplishing her many tasks, as he needs to rest after a long day driving. Despite her daily schedule full of chores, the physical demand required for caring, and the lack of time for herself, she believes that is her obligation to help care for her daughter's baby.

Madel, 38, is a mother of seven. She came to Manila from Mindanao upon her insistence when she was 14. She became a household helper in the city. She has already lost contact with her family and never had the opportunity to visit them due to financial difficulty. She now lives with Mario, her live in partner for 17 years, her mother-in-law, stepdaughter and her partner in a makeshift house made of wood scraps and rusty iron sheets at the farthest end of an informal settlers' area in Sitio Azure. Mario has several bullets lodged in his armpit and left shoulder from two separate shooting incidents in 2015.

Madel earns US\$22.00 a week as a laundrywoman on weekends for two nearby households. Her eldest son, 17, is a dishwasher in a restaurant in the city, and gives her US\$22.00 every 15 days. Meanwhile, her stepdaughter who worked as a saleslady before she became pregnant gives her US\$11.00 weekly, but she is currently out of a job. She is seven months pregnant. Her stepdaughter's partner helps out in paying the household expenses.

With a large family, food takes a big chunk of the family income, leaving no budget for children's education and Mario's operation and medicine. Mario is not able to find work or help around the house, as the bullets have never stopped causing him pain and discomfort. Among Madel's children, only Trisha, 14, is in school attending second grade. Since Madel gave birth at home and was assisted by an unlicensed midwife, her other children – ages 11, 8, 6, 5 and 2 – do not have birth certificates necessary for school enrollment.

Madel's mother-in-law, 75, brings along Madel's two youngest sons to beg for money on the streets. This has been a source of major conflict between the two, which usually results into verbal and physical violence. Madel said:

She always takes my children with her when she goes out. I am afraid that they will meet an accident. Because of that I hit Mama. Sometimes I curse her. She fights back and curses me, too. My partner gets mad at me, so he curses me.

As a woman, Madel believes that it is her responsibility to take care of her partner's mother, as well as her soon-to-be born grandchild. Given the choice, she does not want to have her partner's mother in the house, but they have lost contact with Mario's siblings. Hence, they were left with no choice but to have his mother around.

Like Josie, Madel no longer aspires for anything for herself because she is always preoccupied about where to get a kilo of rice for the next meal of her large family or where to get money for her husband's medical needs.

Stories of Renewed Hope and Unconditional Love

Helen is 38, single, and a second born child. She is the only one in the family who has finished a two-year course through scholarship. She now lives temporarily in a small concrete house in a relative's compound with her parents, three sisters, brother, and niece, Ella, 3.

She is the primary earner in her family, and her informal income from assisting in the processing of business permits, filing registration papers, securing birth certificates, and renewing passports complemented her contractual job at the barangay hall and her brother's irregular work as a stockman in a mall. Her two sisters have difficulty finding work as they are often ill. Ella's mother, Camille, is single and never speaks about Ella's father. Helen's family has never met him. Camille works as a cashier and earns enough only for her personal needs. Oftentimes, it is Helen who spends for Ella's milk, vitamins, and hospitalization.

Helen's parents migrated from Bicol province when her father, now 81, became an employee of a Manila-based company. He receives a monthly pension of US\$65.00, which is not enough to cover his maintenance medicine. Her mother, 70, has no source of income. When she was a child, Helen dreamed of working abroad, but her mother said that because of the way she looked, working as a domestic helper in

Manila would fit her better. Helen was hurt, but she never hated her mother for it. Instead of being discouraged, she strove to prove her mother wrong. Through her perseverance, Helen now supports her entire family – not as a domestic helper but through her multiple livelihood activities. Their concrete, single-story family house, which she financed, is half-finished. They plan to transfer there within the year. She also pledged to send Ella to college. Helen said:

I never thought of getting married... I endured a lot of hardships in taking care of my family. Sometimes, I forget to comb my hair... It is difficult but I will endure everything for them.

Bernie, 62 and single, takes care of her 85- year old mother and three nephews. Her low and small house of plywood walls and galvanized roofing is located in the middle of their family compound, amidst her siblings' houses. Being the eldest, she was expected to support her family when their father died. She migrated from Samar province and worked as a bus conductor. In trickles, her mother and 12 siblings followed her.

As a lesbian, she experienced discrimination from the workplace and received harsh words from co-workers. Through hard work, she was promoted to bus inspector and then to bus dispatcher. Her income provided for their daily needs and education of her siblings. The bus company closed down in 1987. She now earns from renting out her billiard table located in front of her house. Once or twice a week, she volunteers to keep peace and order in the barangay. She does not get paid for it, but she has gained many friends, who call her "Auntie."

Her entire clan has long accepted her sexuality. Bernie was in a relationship with three women when she was younger. One of them lived with her, but they eventually separated.

When she was born, her parents were not sure if she was male or female. Since the female genital is more prominent, she was given a female name. According to her, she has breasts but she never had her monthly period. Growing up, they noticed that a penis-like part was also developing. There was a group of doctors who persistently offered to take her to Australia for medical tests. She refused the offer because she and her family do not find anything wrong with her.

Even if all her siblings now have their own families, Bernie is still recognized as the head of the family. Her mother never left her side and her siblings, nieces, and nephews come to her for help and comfort. Her opinion on familial matters is always given importance. Bernie said:

My family accepts me for who I am. They don't have problems with my sexuality. It is the others who have problems with it... They are my only family. It is okay with me if they stay in my house.

ON CARING AND GIVING

The Bare Physical Necessities

Despite their lack of emotional attachment, Josie and Madel primarily provide physical support to their in-laws. Believing that it is their moral obligation to do so, they never cease to prepare food, wash the dishes, do the laundry, and take care of them when they become sick.

Josie continues to assist her mother-in-law in taking her maintenance medicines, help her to move around the house, accompany her during regular medical visits, and watch over her whenever she is hospitalized.

Madel is thankful that her mother-in-law can still move around, rarely gets sick, and has never become seriously ill that would require hospitalization or demand full-time care. Considering the present condition of her partner, she recognizes that when this happens, the responsibility of providing physical and financial support will surely fall on her shoulders. Madel said:

My mother-in-law does not have serious disease or ailment that requires full time care... Washing of clothes and cooking are the things I do for everyone in my household. My husband helps out in household chores when his wounds are not hurting.

Vanessa's long journey to forgiveness allowed her to provide for the physical needs of her bedridden father. She goes only to his small bedroom with a low roof and equipped only with a steel bed and a small plastic table during feeding or wash up time. Other than this, she leaves her father to himself all day and night until he shouts again or makes noises to

ask for help. Because of huge logistical requirements, Vanessa stopped bringing her father to the doctor or out of his bedroom to get some fresh air. “He stays in his bedroom all the time... He is heavy and I could not carry him. No one helps me take care of him because they do not like him.”

As a mother of eight children, Madel is busy thinking of how to feed her large family three meals a day. It is not clear what support she provides them apart from doing their laundry and preparing meals that requires all her income from washing other people’s clothes. Based on observation from one of the home visits, her youngest child would play outside their house naked from head to toe. Her other children wear tattered and dirty clothes and have no slippers. All her children except for Trisha are out of school.

Transcending Beyond the Physical

Helen and Bernie provide a combination of physical, financial, cognitive, social, and emotional support to both younger and older generations at any given time. Depending on the circumstances, they go the extra mile to give whatever is necessary.

When Helen’s father found out that his sister in Bicol is in a coma, she comforted him by immediately filing a leave of absence for a week to accompany him to the province to see his dying sister. She also shelled out money for the trip even if it meant postponing purchasing floor tiles for their house. Recognizing her parents’ dietary restrictions and individual preferences, she accommodates these by cooking two viands almost every meal. When it comes to Ella, she teaches her about numbers and letters. As a preparation for her first year of schooling, Helen bought Ella some posters, pencils and crayons. Ella will attend the nearby public nursery school in June. Helen was delighted to see her count from one to twenty and identify some letters of the alphabet. She praised her for singing some children’s songs when the researcher was in their house for a visit.

For many years, Bernie has provided all sorts of support and the source of strength for her large family. When the parents of her three nephews needed to work outside of Manila, Bernie took them in without reservation. She acted both father and mother to them providing their

daily needs and attending school activities such as Parent-Teacher Conferences. The children also got doses of advice on the importance of education and proper behavior. Bernie's mother does not pose a lot of problems, as she is easy to deal with. She does not have dietary restrictions and moves about the house with minimal assistance. But, she has to save money for medicines for her mother's cataract operation. Since they live in the family compound, she has plenty of people to talk to, including Bernie's billiard clients. However, their main source of conflict is her mother's refusal to take a bath. Her mother gets mad at her every time Bernie insists on bathing her. While Josie provides bare physical necessities to her mother-in-law, as a mother she ensures that her

Table 2. Types of support provided by women
in the sandwich generation

Type of support	For the younger generation	For the older generation
Physical	Provision of food Doing the laundry Bathing and changing clothes Bathing and changing clothes	Provision of food Doing the laundry Assistance in moving around
Financial	Spending for hospitalization and other medical expenses Providing school allowance	Spending for hospitalization and other medical expenses
Emotional	Comfort in times of emotional stress or anxiety Praising for a job well done Listening to stories	Comfort in times emotional stress or anxiety Listening to stories
Cognitive	Provision of educational materials Assisting in doing assignments	
Social	Going out Attending Parent-Teacher Conferences Giving advice on proper behavior	

daughter's physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs are addressed. Before she leaves for work, she prepares her daughter's lunch and snacks for school. When she could, she tutors her in doing her assignments. She hugs and kisses her and always listens to her stories. Once in a while, they eat spaghetti and fried chicken at their favorite food chain as a form of mother-daughter bonding.

ON RECEIVING AND GIVING BACK

Except for Vanessa who receives nothing from her family, all the participants recognized that they would not be able to provide for their families without mutual support and cooperation of their families, friends, and neighbors.

Support From Family Members

Despite Madel's strong hostility to her mother-in-law's begging on the streets, she could not ignore her food contributions. She brings home something to keep our hunger at bay, Madel said. On rare occasions that her partner feels better, he helps out in the house while she rests her tired body. She can also rely on her older children to look after the younger ones while she is at work. Her working children also provide financial support to the family.

Josie never received direct payments in cash or in kind for looking after her in-laws, but she interprets her father-in-law's offer of paying for her daughter's tuition fee and school bus service as a form of compensation for her services. Aware of her difficulties, her daughter constantly gives her emotional support. Her daughter appreciates her sacrifices, and Josie finds comfort that she is part of her daughter's future plans.

Helen and Bernie could always count on their siblings for all types of support. It is easy for them to employ their help when necessary. Being closely knit, they could not imagine living without their siblings at their side. When they fell ill, it was their siblings who took turns looking after them until they felt better. "They took turns taking care of me in the hospital," Helen shared. Likewise, both Helen and Bernie could rely on

their siblings in doing household chores and in taking care of their parents when they are not around. When Bernie accompanied her nephews in Pampanga for a week, it was her siblings who looked after their mother. Likewise, when Helen accompanied her father to Bicol, her sisters and brothers became in-charge of the daily needs of their mother and Ella.

Helen also appreciates that her brother augments her income and helps out in mixing cement for the construction of their house during his days off. This means that she did not need to pay another carpenter to finish their house. When Bernie learned about her mother's need for an eye operation, she did not hesitate to tell all her siblings to raise the needed budget.

Support from Friends and Neighbors

Friends and neighbors come in handy in times of need. Both Helen and Vanessa rely on the generosity and emotional support of their friends.

Helen acknowledges her neighbors' and clients' help in times of need by lending her money. She also acknowledges her best friend who now resides in the US for emotional and occasional financial assistance. They regularly communicate through letters and text messages where she receives words of encouragement.

Vanessa's pastor and churchmates accompanied her in her long journey to forgiveness. They have become her source of strength in facing the difficulty of attending to her father in the midst of strong opposition and lack of concern from her family.

When her family runs out of budget, Madel borrows money or asks for food from friends and neighbors. But, it is not always easy as they are also in dire need for their large families.

Support from the Workplace

All participants belong to the informal economy where employee-employer relationship is not present. Only Helen and Josie could rely on small loans from their workplace where they are both contractual employees. Apart from this, there are no other forms of support and benefits from their workplaces as they simultaneously care for the younger and older generations.

Table 3. Types of support received by women
in the sandwich generation

Type of support	From family members	From friends and neighbors	From the workplace
Physical	Help in household chores Assistance in caring for parents and children Care when they are sick Assistance in house construction	Irregular provision of small amount of food	
Financial	Provision of school needs (tuition, bus service) Contribution for food expense Contribution for medical expenses	Occasional financial assistance	Small loans through salary deduction
Emotional	Comfort in times of emotional stress or anxiety Expression of appreciation Words of encouragement	Comfort in times of emotional stress or anxiety	Comfort in times of emotional stress or anxiety

DISCUSSION

In spite of a small sample size, the narratives contained in this paper provide glimpses of urban poverty, abuse, deprivation, love, and hope grounded in the daily familial experiences of women in the sandwich generation. While the paper interrogates the prevailing practices of gender inequality that led to the neglect of the needs and interest of the participants, added nuance to the relations can be found in the narratives of two women: Bernie and Helen. Their status as single in charge of their entire families' well-being reveals a deviation from the definition of the sandwich generation currently available in literature – married and supporting two children and two parents or parents-in-law (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010). Being a lesbian and elderly, Bernie's narratives

highlights the intersection of gender and age. The available literature has gaps on low-income, single, elderly lesbians as members of the sandwich generation.

Filipino families are known for their closely-knit structure and have been regarded as consaguineal and primarily responsible for the biological maintenance and provision of emotional security, economic support, and loyalties (Sevilla, 1982). As Guthrie (1967) observed, goodwill is offered and accepted with the full understanding that the act is part of the constant need to renew and reaffirm the kin relationship. In a culture that values reciprocity, Filipino families like that of the participants are permitted to readjust their care provisions (Trager, 1988).

Findings confirm this observation as all participants provide a wide array of support for their multi-generation household such as physical, financial, social and emotional. However, it was noticed that cognitive and social support are given only to the younger generation. According to Chan (1992), the very closely-knit nature of Filipino families may be attributed to two central concepts: *tayo-tayo* or “our family first” and *utang na loob* or “life-long debt of gratitude,” which allow them to decide collectively and make sacrifices to a great extent to ensure family sufficiency.

Helen’s and Bernie’s families demonstrate collective decisions, making it easy for them to mobilize their respective siblings to lend them a hand. However, in the case of Madel, Josie, and Vanessa, attending to the needs of older generation has never been a collective family decision. Their subordinated status has made them decide to do it. Statements like “I am a woman” and “Women are in charge of those things” are manifestations of their voluntary subordination to men (Dionisio, 1993). Madel was never in favor of having her mother-in-law permanently reside with them. Despite being the breadwinner, she followed her husband’s desire for his mother to be around and to attend to her domestic duties when she is not at work. Josie has long wanted to stop taking care of her sickly mother-in-law and to look after her husband’s aunt, but her lack of economic capability – that resulted in dependence on her father-in-law’s financial support for her daughter’s education and her desire to protect her from judgment of coming from a broken family – prompted self-sacrifice on her part to maintain appearances as a traditional family. Despite her daily

multiple doses of economic and domestic duties, Vanessa takes it upon herself not to demand her husband to have a share in domestic chores. She rationalized that he is already tired from work as a provincial bus driver. The narratives of these women expound on Dionisio's assertion that "sexual division of labor exists in the production-reproduction distinction" (1993, p. 34), where the women's place is in the home and the men's primary responsibility is to provide economically.

Even if they have taken the responsibility of performing productive, reproductive, and community roles (Moser, 1994) for their multi-generation households, the narratives unfortunately present a blatant reality of male predominance manifested in the women's full acceptance of their traditional sex roles as mother and wife and even the tolerance of Violence Against Women (NCRFW, 2005). Josie, Vanessa, and Madel have witnessed or experienced violence and abuse at some point in their lives, with the husband or the father as the perpetrator. As products of socio-cultural conditioning in a patriarchal society (Dionisio, 1993; Tengco-Labayen, 1998), Josie, Vanessa, and Madel married in their teens or early twenties with the belief that life would be better with a husband.

Meanwhile, Helen's and Bernie's narratives comprise an internal resource that can replace the stereotyped images of women as helpless, weak and dependent on men. Helen's multiple livelihood activities and belief in oneself and Bernie's acceptance of her sexuality opened a textured window for analysis of the situation of Filipino women in the sandwich generation.

The lived experiences of the participants illuminate that women in the sandwich generation are not a homogenous group. With widespread poverty in the Philippines, the discourse on women in the sandwich generation is not a simple matter of providing them with respite care, flexible working hours, and caregiving credits from public pensions available in developed countries. Nor is it enough to merely equate their care services with monetary value, a notion influenced by the predominant view of development, which is focused on macroeconomics and liberal feminist ideas (Ofreneo, 2004). The compelling argument must be hinged on the under-fulfillment of their rights as women and the daunting implications of gender division of labor on their freedom to make decisions

on matters that affect their lives. Nussbaum (2011, p. 25) posited that “capacity means opportunity to select,” and the freedom to choose is dependent on the capacity of people to make choices (Sen, 1999). The narratives especially of Josie, Vanessa, and Madel show otherwise as many of their decisions are based on the predominant sex-gender system that have shaped their lives (Dionisio, 1993). Even the unprecedented passing of the Magna Carta of Women has not recognized the tremendous efforts women in the sandwich generation have provided in caring for their families (Durano, 2014).

It must be recognized that, with an entirely different context and a whole gamut of issues and concerns present in the five women’s narratives, the description of “being sandwiched” (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010) provides a very dull picture of Filipino women providing unpaid care for younger and older generations. For now, it is a phenomenon in the Philippines with no name but when not addressed properly can become a serious development problem.

RECOMMENDATION

This study highlights a number of issues and concerns overlooked in literature about women in the sandwich generation such as poverty, intersections of different vectors of identity, and Violence Against Women and Children. As one of the first attempts to document the plight of women in the sandwich generation in the Philippines, it highlights the experiences of women living at the margins – women who are suffering from different types of oppressions.

The contract among generations concerning care is made up of socially constructed roles and relationships at both the macro and the micro levels. Macro pertains to practices, policies and programs from institutions while micro is within the bounds of the family. Although this study provided glimpses of how low-income, urban women in the sandwich generation live their lives, there is not enough critical mass to draw out policies and programs for their specific needs. Due the nature of this case study, results are not intended to apply to all low-income women taking care of minor children and elderly parents and relatives.

Hence, there is a need to gather information from below by asking questions that accounts for diverse factors that shape their lives. Personal accounts and testimonies, as well as disaggregated data on age, gender, ethnicity and other identities may help paint a richer and fuller picture of their situation. Issues on the LGBT community await future research.

Efforts should not only be concentrated on determining their number using the available data from government agencies like the Philippine Statistics Authority, finding where they are located, and searching for an appropriate local term to call their unique familial position but on documenting how being in the sandwich generation has restricted their growth and potential as women.

Meanwhile, conscientization about a “world shaped and ruled by men” (Tengco-Labayen, 1998, p. 19) is a worthwhile endeavor that would facilitate society’s awakening about Madel, Josie, Vanessa, Helen, and Bernie, and other women who occupy the same familial spot.

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