

Exploring Challenges of Working Sandwiched Mothers and Organization Support

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Abstract

The multigenerational commitments and obligations of working mothers who are sandwiched between caring for their children and elderly family members jeopardize their ability to maintain role balance. Previous research on the topic, particularly in a Malaysian context, is limited. This qualitative study aims to address this gap by examining the challenges faced by seven working sandwiched mothers in Malaysia and the social support provided by organizations as they navigate multiple roles as caregivers, spouses, parents, and employees. Specifically, the study investigates (1) how these women manage their combined responsibilities and (2) what types of organizational support are available to them. Drawing on Conservation of Resources theory which emphasizes protecting one's resources from depletion or loss; we found that emotional stress, work-induced stress, and financial constraints pose significant challenges for these individuals. Although flexibility is crucial for managing competing demands effectively, our findings suggest that organizations do not offer enough support in this regard. Overall, our study illuminates the experiences of working sandwiched mothers facing complex role conflicts while highlighting the need for workplace policies that prioritize their well-being.

Keywords: Working Sandwiched Mothers, Stress, Financial, Flexibility, Malaysia

Introduction

In previous decades, women who wedded typically focused on domestic duties rather than pursuing a career. Traditionally, they were responsible for childbearing and rearing while men served as the family's breadwinner. However, in recent years this situation has changed markedly. According to data from the World Bank (2022), more than 50% of women worldwide participate in the labor force. The gender gap in workforce participation is narrowing significantly, with women no longer confined to homemaking roles and men not solely responsible for supporting their families financially.

Malaysia's population has surged over the past two decades; it now stands at 32.7 million as per statistics released by Malaysia's Department of Statistics (2022), up from 23.3 million in 2000. This growth, coupled with rising social and economic demands within Malaysia, is reshaping traditional family structures across the country. As time goes on, we see more Malaysian women choosing to pursue careers or returning to work after childbirth instead of restricting themselves solely to domestic responsibilities - a trend that has directly contributed to an increase in dual-income households within Malaysia (Tey et al., 2015). Other family structures such as commuter families and blended families consisting of "Sandwich" families ("Touch n Go" or "Double Income No Kids") have also emerged since the early 2000s. Due largely to cultural traditions throughout Asia but particularly so within Malaysia - along with improved access to healthcare services - Sandwich Families are common there: these are households where members care both for children and elderly relatives alike

With the surge in female labor force participation in Malaysia, which currently stands at 55.5% as per data from the Department of Statistics (2022), it becomes imperative to emphasize the importance of maintaining role balance for individuals belonging to the sandwich generation who shoulder multiple responsibilities. It is noteworthy that limited research has been conducted on this topic pertaining to working women from sandwich generation samples in Malaysia, with most studies being carried out in Western countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United States of America (Daniel, 2010; Del-Pino-Casado et al., 2011; Evans et al., 2016a; Evans et al., 2016b; Rubin & White-Means, 2009). While a few studies have been cited in Asian countries including Malaysia by Jane et al (2013); Ng et al (2018) Ahmad and Abdullah (2013), significantly more work remains to be done on this subject matter.

This study aims to explore challenges faced by working mothers who belong to the sandwich generation within Malaysia specifically. The following questions will guide our inquiry: Firstly - What are some prevalent issues encountered by these mothers? Secondly - How organizations are supporting these women?

The study is significant in several ways. Firstly, this study contributes significantly towards existing literature on work-life balance, gender roles, and organizational support which researchers can build upon further. Furthermore, the significance of theoretical frameworks like Conservation Of Resources (COR) theory will aid understanding dynamics around work-family conflict and support.

Secondly, organizations and HR practitioners can gain valuable insights from this study regarding the specific needs of working sandwiched mothers. Understanding the challenges these women face when juggling multiple roles allows organizations to tailor their policies and practices accordingly.

Thirdly, policymakers and government agencies could benefit from these findings since they highlight how important it is to support working sandwiched mothers. This may result in creating policies or initiatives aimed at assisting this demographic group. Policymakers can promote gender equality, in line with SDG goal 5, and Malaysia National Family Policy (2010), while achieving economic stability through giving priority to working sandwiched mother's well-being.