



# Online Journaling Project: A Window into the Lives of Sandwich Generation Women

A qualitative research project prepared for  
The National Association of Social Workers &  
The New York Academy of Medicine



Embargoed until 12:01 a.m.,  
March 20, 2008



# Background and Research Goals

Introduction to and Purpose of Research





## Background and Research Goals

- The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and its strategic partner, the New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM), are in the midst of a campaign to raise awareness of social workers' role in providing elder services and support to sandwich-generation women (SGW).
- A qualitative survey about SGW conducted last year by Pursuant for NASW and NYAM attracted significant media attention to the issues these women face.
- The purpose of this new research project is to capture a snapshot of the diverse experiences of SGW by allowing them to share directly their thoughts on a wide range of subjects.
- This project will complement a separate, quantitative survey of social workers that will measure their experiences working with SGW and elders. The research projects together will provide insight into the needs of SGW and their elder parents, and how social workers may help address them.



# Methodology

Research Process





# Qualitative Research Methodology

- The survey group consisted of 41 women with the following demographic characteristics:
  - Lived in either Irvine, CA (14); Westchester County, NY (14); or Chicago, IL (13).
    - They ranged in age from 35 to 64, with a mean age of 46.
  - Vast majority lived with their children (82%).
    - They had between 1 and 6 children, with an average of 2 children per household.
    - The children's ages ranged from 2 months to 44 years.
  - About half of the participants were married; about one-fifth were single; another one-fifth were divorced and the remaining 2 participants were separated.
  - Three-quarters were Caucasian; other races represented were Black/African-American, Hispanic, and Asian.
  - Four in ten had a household income greater than \$90K; about equal numbers fell into less than \$49K, \$50-\$69K, and \$70-\$89K household-income categories.
  - As for highest educational level obtained, 40% had at least a college degree, one-sixth had a post-graduate degree, one-quarter had some college, and approximately one-fifth had a high school degree.
  - About one-third did not work outside the home. The occupations of the remaining two-thirds included everything from an administrative assistant to college dean.
    - One participant identified as disabled and another reported being unemployed.



# Qualitative Research Methodology

- Each weekday (Monday-Friday) from November 5, 2007, through November 16, 2007, a group of 41 SGW—women between the ages of 35 and 64 who are in some capacity taking care of their children and elderly parents—completed an online journal entry. Each entry consisted of a daily “check” of the women’s daily emotions and experiences, and a thematic set of 6 to 9 questions.
- Every day throughout the period, the women were emailed a link to a new series of questions and completed the series online any time during the day.
- The women’s responses were read and analyzed for common themes and insights into their lives.
- With any study there are limitations. It is possible, for example, that knowing that their personal journals were going to be read by researchers could have elicited different kinds of responses than had the journals been kept private.
  - Further, the small sample size and lack of probability sample makes it difficult to know whether the experiences being shared are indicative of those of the larger population of sandwich-generation women.



# Key Findings From 2006

Finding a Story in the Numbers





# Insights from 2006 Quantitative Study with SGW

**This qualitative research project was derived from a quantitative, online survey conducted in 2006 with SGW. Some of the key findings from that survey, listed below, were used to provide direction and content for the journaling project. For example, last year's research told us that their own finances and health were of concern to SGW. These two issues were intentionally included in this year's project to flesh out the quantitative data gathered and gain a better understanding of these women's lives.**

## **A Sampling of Key Findings from 2006:**

1. Sandwich-generation women are less happy than the general population of U.S. adults. Additionally, sandwich-generation women who have an aging parent whose health they are concerned about are significantly less likely to say they are "very happy" than those without an aging-parent health concern.
2. Financial issues (including rising health-care costs) and concerns for their family (including aging relatives and not having enough time to spend with family members) were the top concerns reported by sandwich-generation women.
3. While 4 in 10 SGW have sought professional help for their own concerns, only 2 in 10 have sought professional help outside of a nurse or doctor for their aging relative.
4. Two in 10 SGW said they have received help for themselves from a social worker, most commonly for counseling.
5. When making decisions about their relative or other aging adult's health care for whom they are entrusted, the following are "very important" to SGW: quality of health care (76.5%), his or her mobility issues (66.0%), proximity to aging adult (64.8%), and cost of care not covered by Medicare or other insurance (64.7%).



# Research Insights





## Research Insights

1. Sandwich-generation women are striving to achieve or maintain optimism about their lives despite their many challenges in juggling the needs of their families and themselves. They most cherish time spent with family and friends, and simple activities such as reading or eating a good meal.
2. The two areas where the women could use the most help are with housework and fundamental parenting: juggling schedules, disciplining the children, keeping up with chores, and helping with homework. Many say they don't get enough help from their spouses.
3. A significant number of sandwich-generation women are not only providing emotional, physical, and financial support to their own parents, but to their aging parents-in-law, adding to stress they already experience helping their own parents.
4. Sandwich-generation women feel that their own emotional and physical well-being frequently suffer because of the time and stress associated with taking care for their families.
5. Providing continuous emotional support, taking their parents to doctor appointments and helping them navigate the healthcare system, and performing routine domestic tasks are the chief ways the women help care for their parents.



## Research Insights, cont.

6. Simple activities such as exercise, reading, and talking with a friend are effective mood-lifters for sandwich-generation women enduring the stress of keeping up with everyday life.
7. A significant number of sandwich-generation women do not ask for help when they need it or do so reluctantly. Reasons for this vary, but chief among them are that they do not want to be a burden or perceived as incapable, they are not used to requesting help, or there is no one to ask.
8. About one-quarter of the women are unaware of the social services in their communities or do not consider their community a potential source of support.
9. Many sandwich-generation women continue to support their adult children financially and emotionally at the same time they begin to assume caretaking responsibilities for their elderly parents.



## Research Insights, cont.

10. Sandwich-generation women whose parents are divorced or have strained relationships demonstrated even more concern and anxiety about taking care of their parents.
11. The SGW's primary financial concerns are 1) retirement, 2) college tuition, and 3) medical expenses (actual and anticipated), though roughly half indicate they are financially well-prepared for the future and don't worry much.
12. The majority of women are most proud of their children and their contributions to their families when they consider their life's accomplishments thus far.
13. A significant number of SGW are "optimistic" or "hopeful" about the future, though their outlooks vary widely overall. Many also say they are uncertain or worried about the future, but most say they are comfortable with this uncertainty. A significant number are most looking forward to watching their children grow up and begin their own families.



# Research Findings

The Daily Experiences of Sandwich Generation Women



# Qualitative Research Methodology

- o The following questions were asked of survey participants every day and were intended to serve as a daily check to learn about their everyday experiences.

1. Which of the following emoticons below best describes how you feel right now?



2. Why do you feel that way?
3. Rate your day overall on a scale of 1 to 10, where one means the “worst day possible” and 10 means the “best day possible.”
4. What could have made today a better day for you?
5. Today, what is the one thing you really could have used help with?
6. Did you laugh today? If so, what about?
7. Did you cry today? If so, what about?
8. The best thing about today was. . .

# Which of the Following Emoticons Best Describes How You Feel Right Now?



32.4%	24.6%	12.9%	9.5%	1.5%	5.6%	13.4%
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Percentage of responses across all 10 days

A plurality of the women chose the smiling emoticon to describe how they felt each day. The number of responses for each emotion did not fluctuate significantly day-to-day.

## In their own words:

“Today was a holiday and the kids were home from school and the weather was beautiful, so we spent most of the day outside having fun!” – California

“My son was accepted to the National Honor Society!!!! I’m very excited, proud and happy for him.” –New York

“I’m tired because I was awake a lot last night with the baby and because my husband went out and didn’t get home until 1:00.” – Illinois

“Work is very frustrating today . . . and the dog is sick.”  
– Illinois



## Rate Your Day Overall

Each day the SGW were asked to rate their day on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means the “worst day possible” and 10 means the “best day possible.” Overall, the survey group proved to be a relatively optimistic one as the women chose the higher numbers much more frequently than they did lower ones.

Findings from the two-week journaling period:

- o During the two-week period SGW, on average, rated their day between a “6” or “7” (mean =6.54, S.D. = 1.91).
  - The daily mean ratings for the group ranged from a low of 4.5 to a high of 8.6.
  - Six participants had an average rating of “6” or less.
  - Ten participants had an average between “6” and “7.”
  - Twenty participants had an average rating between “7” and “8.”
  - The remaining five participants had an average rating between “8” and “9.”
- o Few participants selected numbers on the ends of the spectrum.
  - Depending on the day, between 0 and 4 participants selected a “10” to describe her day.
  - Only one participant selected a “1” when rating her day over the 10-day period.

# What Could Have Made Today a Better Day for You?

Reponses ranged from the relatively minor to the major, but most women said simple changes in their day would have improved it. Many SGW mentioned not having the time to accomplish tasks or wishing they had less stress in their life. Additionally, “winning the lotto” came up frequently, possibly because a number of the women, regardless of household income, mentioned feeling strained financially.

Other responses included:

- o Getting more sleep
- o Finishing a to-do list
- o Catching up on bills
- o Relief from physical ailments
- o Not having work-related problems
- o Relationship issues
- o Not having an unexpected expense

## In their own words:

“Fewer work assignments. Getting good news from my dad on the results of his tests.” – California

“I could have gotten a better night sleep and felt more energized.” – Illinois

“Today was good. It could have made it better if I won a scratch off lottery ticket so I could buy some better stuff for my children, but for now it will suffice.” – New York

# Today, What is the One Thing You Really Could Have Used Help With?

Among the women who said they could have used help, most would have liked help with routine daily tasks (e.g., housework, running errands) and taking care of the children. Some SGW replied “nothing,” but at the same time wrote about needing help with day-to-day tasks. These women may have simply accepted everything they have to do as the status quo.

Other responses included:

- o Needing emotional support
- o Relaxing
- o Finances
- o Time management
- o Situations at work

## In their own words:

“I could have used someone to talk to. I was very lonely today.” – New York

“Not much. Like most days, I would love to have a live-in nanny/housekeeper, but know that is not and will never be an option. As I think I may have entered in an earlier entry, I am realist and make things work as best I can.” – Illinois

“I could have used help if there was someone that could take my daughter to get things she needs, but since I am a single parent I am the only person she can count on . . .” – New York



## Did you Laugh Today?

Laughter was more common among participants than tears. Each day the number of SGW who stated they laughed ranged from 27 to 33 participants. The laughter typically came from interacting with others (e.g., children, friends, co-workers). Some women also laughed at themselves.

Among the women's reasons for laughing:

- o Things their children did or said
- o Joking with friends or relatives
- o Pets
- o TV, movies, or radio programs
- o Reminiscing about good times
- o Work-related issues

### In their own words:

“My children always make me laugh.”  
– New York

“My husband and I laughed as I read a funny newspaper column to him. My Mom and I laughed on the phone as we tried to remember something I said yesterday that she found helpful - neither of us could quite reconstruct it . . .” – Illinois

“Recalling our youngest son's comment to my husband who had suggested that each one of us learn a foreign language and our dear son suggested that his Dad learn English.” – California



## Did You Cry Today?

As mentioned, the sandwich-generation women did not shed many tears during the journaling period. The number who said they cried ranged from 4 to 9 participants each day. The reason for crying was not always negative but, on occasion, joyous, such as a wedding or reading a touching story.

Other reasons for crying included:

- o Death or illness in the family or the family of a friend
- o Mass/prayer
- o Fatigue, frustration, or feeling overwhelmed
- o Relationship issues
- o Work issues
- o Memories of the past
- o Story heard on TV or radio

### In their own words:

“Watching a family get reunited on TV.  
The dad had just come home from  
Iraq.” – Illinois

“My friend's father's passing.”  
– Illinois

“A woman that works for me was telling  
me a story about when her husband  
found out he had cancer five years ago,  
right before he died.” – New York

“Being tired and frustrated; my mom came over  
today to help me with my girls, and it is hard  
when she comes to try to help me.” – California

# The Best Thing About Today Was...

Responses varied among the SGW but a good number of them were about spending time with other people, often their children. Other responses were about feeling a sense of accomplishment, doing something for themselves (e.g., a haircut, lunch with friends), resolving an issue, or just being grateful for what they have (e.g., health, family).

Other examples of responses included:

- o Gorgeous weather and being able to spend time outdoors
- o Spending the day with my mother-in-law
- o Having everything go smoothly at work
- o Catching up with a friend during a morning run
- o Not taking out my frustrations on loved ones
- o That my family is healthy
- o Teaching my four-year-old how to ride a bike
- o Feeling productive
- o That there were no crises
- o Not having to travel far to get to work

### In their own words:

“Having that long-standing billing statement finally resolved.”  
– California

“I learned some new things about my work that will help me be a better employee. It will help me get closer to the goal that my boss has for me.”  
– Illinois

“Getting to sit down and have lunch with a friend.” – New York



## Summary Findings

1. It appears that the SGW, as a whole, were not overly happy or unhappy with their lives during the two-week period. Having the project near the Thanksgiving holiday may have boosted the overall ratings, as many women said they were looking forward to the holiday.
2. On average a plurality of the women (32 percent) chose the smiling emoticon to describe themselves during the journaling period. The number of responses for each emotion did not fluctuate significantly day-to-day.
3. When things weren't going right for the women, their days could have been improved with simple changes, such as getting more sleep, ticking more off their to-do lists, and finding time to exercise.
4. Routine housework and taking care of the children were the two areas where the SGW cited needing the most help; however, many of the women wouldn't even ask for help if they needed it, partly because they would not want to burden someone else.
5. Daily laughter was far more common than daily tears among the women.
6. The best aspects of the SGW's days ranged widely, but most were simple things such as making dinner plans with a friend or their children behaving.
7. SGW are generally optimistic, possibly due to their acceptance of the status quo. Even though they report having a lot on their plates, it doesn't appear to have a significantly negative impact on their outlook toward life.



## Summary Findings, Cont.

In the 2006 quantitative research study conducted with SGW, we learned that SGW are not as happy as the others in the population. In this qualitative part of the research study, it was important to learn about the reasons why.

For each online journaling project participant, a total happiness score was computed using a summary of their daily rating across the 10-day period. Though a small sample of SGW participated in this project, it is possible to compare the average total happiness scores across different demographic characteristics to determine if there were patterns in responses. For example, are SGW who live in more affluent households happier than those who live in less affluent ones? Are those who live in households with children less happy than those with children out of the house, etc.? What, if anything, do education level, race, marital status or age of children bring to bear on a SGW's overall happiness?

Interestingly, we found no statistically significant differences in total happiness over the study period by any of the demographic characteristics measured. Certainly it is more difficult to show differences with a smaller sample size, and that may account for this finding. But we would propose that this finding may be repeated in larger-scale studies as well. Why do we think this is the case?

Our hypothesis is that SGW in our study are more alike than they are different. It doesn't seem to matter if they live in Illinois or California, are married or separated. The very fact that they are of a certain age group, have online access, share the characteristics of being both an active mother and a daughter who feels in some way responsible for her parents' care, means that the women have similar experiences, frustrations, joys and a particular outlook on life shaped by these circumstances.



# Research Findings

Reflections on Who Sandwich Generation Women Are





# Qualitative Research Methodology

After answering questions about their day, SGW were asked to reflect about one of the themes listed below. At the outset, participants were asked to review the SGW definition and asked to answer the questions through this SGW lens.

The themes are listed in the order participants were to answer them.

1. Reflections on who you are
2. Reflections on being a parent
3. Reflections on being a daughter to an aging parent
4. Managing negative emotions
5. Your support systems
6. Reflections on being a caregiver
7. Reflections on your relationships with others
8. Financial outlook
9. Reflections on your health
10. Outlook toward the future



## Reflections on Who You Are

Sandwich-generation women describe themselves as parents who are busy, often juggling multiple home and work responsibilities. A great number of them feel responsible for not only their children (and if they are married, their husbands), but also their aging parents. Despite these challenges, SGW are striving to achieve or maintain optimism about their lives. These women cherish time spent with family and friends, and the moments they can steal for simple activities, such as shopping, reading a book, or enjoying a glass of wine.

Questions asked included:

1. I would describe myself as . . .
2. In my free time I . . .
3. My favorite memory is . . .
4. I feel happiest when . . .
5. I get angry when . . .
6. I feel empowered when . . .
7. If I had an hour to myself I would . . .
8. The person I admire most is . . . because . . .
9. Please share anything else you would like to about yourself.



## Reflections on Who You Are

- Sandwich-generation women use a wide range of adjectives to describe themselves, including “controlling,” “energetic,” and “misunderstood.”
- Their free-time activities range from vacationing with friends or family to simply walking the dog or exercising.
- The women are happiest when they and their families are healthy, they are spending quality time with their families, accomplishing their day’s goals, and when they have time to exercise.
- Sandwich-generation women are most upset when they disagree with their spouses, their kids misbehave, they feel alone as a parent or underappreciated/taken advantage of by their families.
- Nearly half of the SGW named their mother or father as the person they admire the most. In large part this was due to the adversity they have overcome in their lives, and/or for having a positive outlook about life. Other most-admired people were spouses and friends.
- Cherished memories often included time spent with family as a child and times spent with their own children.



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Identity

We asked the SGW to describe themselves in an effort to see whether themes would emerge surrounding identity. Among the findings:

- o The group largely thinks first of their role as a mother, with nearly every participant mentioning this as salient to who they are.
- o The majority of SGW who were married also described themselves as a wife, suggesting that this is also an important part of who they are as a person.
- o About one in four SGW described themselves as a “daughter” who is providing support to aging parents.
  - One of the participants, a single mother, wrote about a parent living with her and her children half of the year, and with her brother the other half.
  - Another described herself as being financially responsible for her parents' care and living expenses.
- o Working sandwich-generation women also see their identities as encompassing their work life, in particular, working hard at what they do and being conscientious at work as well as at home.
- o A number of them described themselves as “sensitive” to others' feelings, caring for others (e.g., children, spouse, parents, friends) and putting themselves last.



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

I would describe myself as...

“The primary caretaker of the household. As a single mom of two teenage children, I am still quite involved in raising them. I also run the household and care for my dad who lives with me part of the year (he lives my brother for the other half of the year).” – Illinois

“A mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother who is active in all those titles.” – New York

“A working wife and mother with ailing parents. I am trying hard to give my parents what they need while maintaining a harmonious home life.” – California

“Hazel the maid who takes care of her 11-year-old-going-on-30 daughter and 75-year-old-going-on-15 mother.” – Illinois

“A working mother and wife who tries to take care of everyone and everything on my own.” – New York

“[I’m] a mother first, a grandmother next, a daughter next, and a friend last. These are my current priorities (most days). This does not mean that I always give my children just what they want or that they are not occasionally playing second fiddle to a friend, but my children are my first priority. I care deeply about my parents, but they don’t need me so much right now . . . when that changes my priorities may also.”  
– California



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

In my free time I . . .

“Oh, boy . . . I grocery shop! What free time? I guess maybe exercise.” – Illinois

“Like to read books and travel. Travel can be a 30-minute trip to nearby Little Saigon for a bowl of hot beef soup, although traveling to Vietnam would be a lot nicer.” – California

My favorite memory is. . .

“When I was a little girl going to Radio City with my family to see the Christmas show and lights. It would be cold, but was always so exciting to see.” – New York

“Now, since my father has passed, are memories that involve him. I also love the memories I have of giving birth to my children and funny things they have said or done in their lives so far.” – Illinois

“Sitting around the kitchen table at my parents' home with all my sisters and my mother, just talking and laughing together.” – California

I feel happiest when. . .

“We are a whole family again. When both sons are home from college, my younger son and I have prepared a delicious meal, and we are all gathered around the table eating and talking about everything from culinary classes to picking stocks.” – California

“I go to bed at night knowing everyone is fed well, warm, and snuggled in bed.” – Illinois



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

I get angry when. . .

“I get no help from my husband and children around the house.” – New York

“I feel like I can't control a situation and I worry that something will happen to someone that I love as a result.” – California

I feel empowered when. . .

“I'm patient and non-judgmental and present.” – Illinois

“I learn.” – California

If I had an hour to myself I would. . .


“Curl up with a good book, take a nice long shower or bath, or just take a nap.” – California

“Nap or lay in bed and read the Sunday paper uninterrupted.” – Illinois

The person I admire most is. . .

“My mother because she went from a stay-at-home mom to single mom who strived to become the top dog in a large corporation, and did it all, including providing a home for me without the help of others, including my own father.” – California

“My friend Deb . . . she has had a tough childhood as well as a tough time as an adult. Yet she is the most caring, loving, kind, and decent person I have ever known.” – New York



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

Additional thoughts on who they are. . .

“I feel that I'm in a difficult period of my life now. My kids are older and don't appear to want my love and attention, which I'm so used to giving. My parents have too much time on their hands and think that I do too. My husband doesn't really understand my menopause. I have a nice job for a great company, but it's not a career. My friend is dying of cancer and I am suffering from anxiety. I've learned to be thankful every day for my health and my family, laugh and smile.” – New York

“You need help . . . someone to hand [the children] off to sometimes. I have them 24/7 except when they're at school, and it's too much sometimes.” – California

“I recently moved and feel completely out of control trying to organize my family's life. This has been a much more stressful event than I ever imagined. On the other hand, I love our new house and town more than I imagined I would.” – New York



# Research Findings

Reflections on Being a Parent





## Reflections on Being a Parent

While SGW find a lot of joy in parenthood (and especially marvel at watching their kids grow into adults), they feel tremendous pressure as they strive to raise respectful, honest, and kind children. The biggest help they could use is with fundamental parenting tasks and responsibilities: juggling schedules, imposing discipline, keeping up with chores, and helping with homework.

Questions asked were:

1. The best thing about being a parent is . . .
2. The hardest thing about being a parent is . . .
3. The most important thing I taught my child/children is . . .
4. I never thought my child/children . . .
5. If only my child/children would . . .
6. As a parent, I need the most help with . . .
7. Please share any additional thoughts on being a parent.



## Reflections on Being a Parent

- Among the best things about being a parent, the SGW say, are watching their children grow into adults, their kids' unconditional love, realizing their capacity to give love as parents, learning about themselves as parents, and seeing their kids happy.
- Among the hardest things about being a parent are saying “no,” showing disapproval, the uncertainty over whether they're making the right decisions, imposing discipline, and enduring the “know-it-all” teenage years.
- Among the most important values the SGW are teaching their children are compassion, respect, and honesty.



## Reflections on Being a Parent

- Responses varied to the “if only my child/children...” question. Very few of the responses had to do with wanting their child to do something that would benefit them. Rather, most SGW wished for their children to be successful, to feel good about themselves, etc.
- Responses cited by more than one SGW included wanting their child to:
  - Listen to advice
  - Be more successful in general/in school
  - Have more self-confidence/fewer emotional issues
  - Enjoy being a kid
  - Live closer
  - Pitch in around the house
- Several SGW wrote about the difficulty of accepting that their children are growing up and setting boundaries for them.
  - A couple of them mentioned needing help “being patient” with their children.



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

The best thing about being a parent is . . .

“Watching my children become their own ‘person.’ I can't stop wondering about their differences. I love the fact that all of life's possibilities are still open to them.” – New York

“Watching my kids go from helpless infants to headstrong, loving, funny kids. I love the fact that my six-year-old girl is strong-willed. For a woman, it is an awesome trait. I also love that my two-year-old boy **LOVES** his mommy!” – California

The hardest thing about being a parent is . . .

“Having to be satisfied with getting a text message instead of a phone call.” – California

“Letting them go and understanding that they have their own personalities. No matter how much you want the best for them, they are the ones who ultimately make the choice to go one way or the other. You can only provide guidance and love, and hope for the best.” – Illinois

As a parent I need the most help with . . .

“Figuring out how to establish a reasonably friendly relationship with my teenage daughter (12.5 years). She has pulled away from me so much over the last year and sometimes seems to hate me. Before this last year she was generally obedient, loving, and nice.” – California

“The children, and learning how to work with them when I'm alone. They are 3 and 4.5 years old. Some days it's so exhausting I feel like I need to split in two, and have more hands . . .” – California



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

The most important thing I taught my child/children is . . .

“To value themselves and other people, to love life, to be kind, to laugh.” – Illinois

“To be sympathetic to all people and to have compassion.” – California

I never thought my child/children . . .

“Enjoy serious movies, understand importance of spirituality, be 6.2, 210 lbs at age 14, playing tackle football for the best team in the league.” – California

“Feel so stressed at such a young age. The pressure is unbelievable between school and activities and family obligations. What do you say no to?” – New York

Additional thoughts on being a parent. . .

“My famous line [about being a parent] is that there are days I wouldn't trade in for anything and then there are days I would trade in for a cold Budweiser. Just kidding. I don't know how something can be so rewarding and so demanding at the same time. If I knew in the end it would all be all right, I think it would be easier. But I find myself always second-guessing myself.” – New York

“It is the most frustrating and wonderful job I have ever had.” – Illinois



# Research Findings

Reflections on Being a Daughter to an Aging Parent





# Reflections on Being a Daughter to an Aging Parent

Caring for their aging parents is a difficult job for SGW. They feel a range of emotions from frustration to joy to guilt as they try to balance their needs with those of their parents, many of whom are in the midst of mental and/or physical decline. Besides their own parents, many of these women are helping with their aging parents-in-law.

Questions asked were:

1. I knew my parents were aging when . . .
2. The best thing about being a daughter to an aging parent is . . .
3. The hardest thing about being a daughter to an aging parent is . . .
4. As my parents age, I will need the most help with . . .
5. I am afraid of . . .
6. I am looking forward to . . .
7. Please share any additional thoughts on being a daughter to an aging parent.



# Reflections on Being a Daughter to an Aging Parent

- Most SGW knew their parent was aging because of a change in their health status (e.g. decline in their parents' hearing or eye sight, complaints of aches and pains, or severe incidents such as heart attacks or strokes). Others noticed their parents slowing down or feeling fatigued, unable to handle day-to-day tasks. In addition, a handful of SGW mentioned their parents' appearance changing: graying hair, aging skin, etc.
  - Interestingly, only two SGW stated their parents brought up the aging issue by telling them about their estate plans and/or their move into a retirement community.
- Among the best things about being a daughter to an aging parent, the women say, are the opportunities to “give back,” learn from their parents, experience the evolution of the relationship from parent-child to friendship, and watch their kids bond with their parents.
- Among the hardest things about being a daughter to an aging parent are juggling their parents' mental, emotional, physical, and financial needs with their own; helping them with everyday activities such as eating and dressing; and listening to their complaints.
  - Two SGW expressed concern about not receiving enough help from brothers and becoming (because of their gender) the primary caregiver to their parents. Another, who is an only child, felt an additional burden by not having siblings to share caregiving responsibilities.
  - A greater emotional toll was emphasized in entries by women whose parents had pressing health issues.



## Reflections on Being a Daughter to an Aging Parent

- There appears to be an even split about what SGW will need the most help with as their parents age. For some, it is emotionally and mentally preparing for their parents' death. For others, it is the actual act of taking care of their parents--that is, coordinating care, making long-term plans, and paying for care.
  - As their parents age, the SGW say they will need the most help with simply accepting their new role as caretaker.
  - Another group is most concerned about how one parent will survive when their spouse dies.
- Many SGW are afraid of not being able to handle taking care of their parents as responsibilities increase and their parents become more dependent on them.
  - Others are afraid about the relationship they have with their parents ending and/or not being able to foster a generational relationship (grandparent role).
- When asked what they are looking forward to, most SGW stated they wanted to enjoy any remaining time they (and their children) had with their parents.
  - One SGW said she was looking forward to when her parents moved into a retirement community, because taking care of their house is currently too much of a burden.



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

## I knew my parents were aging when...

“They seem to have more doctor appointments than a social life.” – New York

“I saw my mom with grey hair, more wrinkles, and looking very tired, complaining of body pain. My dad had to have a bypass surgery.” – California

## The best thing about being a daughter to an aging parent is . . .

“You can give back to them. It is truly the ‘Circle of Life’ and it is our turn to take care of them the way they have taken care of us their whole lives.” – Illinois

“You seem to be able to enjoy their company more because the parenting evolves into a relationship of treasured friendship.” – California

“Learning what worked for them, and their experiences, and incorporating that into my life.” – New York

“Well, there's not much good in seeing your only 2 parents in the world get older and watch them age. Literally seeing their faces change. It could make me cry if I think about it enough. BUT, on the upside, I can now take care of them. They worked their asses off their whole lives getting their 3 daughters to where we are today, so now its their turn to be taken care of. Their house is paid for, I am paying their car payment and their health insurance and prescriptions, my other sister pays for their cell phones, etc. They have no bills to worry about and that is what I want for them. I want them to finally have nothing to worry about.” - Illinois



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

## **The hardest thing about being a daughter to an aging parent is. . .**

“Diminishment and loss, gradual or sudden is hard. Watching my parents lose abilities, physical strength, and independence is hard. Dealing with the nursing facility at the retirement home, where my Dad lived for the last 18 months of his life, was hard. Having other people set the rules, provide the meals, and treat my Dad like a ‘patient’ was hard . . .” – Illinois

“Trying to figure out the best way to be helpful without giving up my own life. What do I do next? Where is there help that I can use?” – New York

“Seeing her not be able to do things she used to do and seeing her negative traits become more pronounced.”  
– California

“When you have to change their diaper and bathe them.” – Illinois

## **As my parent/parents age, I will need the most help with. . .**

“Keeping up with paying for their needs. I have so many things to pay for it's overwhelming!” – Illinois

“Myself accepting that roles between us changed from them taking care of me to me taking care of them.”  
– California

“I probably will need the most help if one parent dies. I cannot have either of my parents be alone.” – New York



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

## I am afraid of. . .

“Losing them. It is going to be difficult when that day comes. It makes me scared to think of the day when I will not be there for my own children.” – New York

“My parents not being with us to see the girls grow and have families of their own.” – California

## I am looking forward to. . .

“Having them spend as much time as possible with our new baby Henry. I want them to enjoy their first and only grandchild for as long as they can.” – Illinois

“Perhaps her being around to see my daughters grow up more.” – Irvine

## Additional thoughts. . .

“I believe that a daughter will always be there. I feel that it is my duty as a daughter to be there for them. I don't mind it, but sometimes it becomes difficult because the older they get they become a little more demanding. I think it's wonderful my children have grandparents here for them. Many children do not. They will have great memories that they will cherish forever.” – New York

“It is tough, because I have another sibling. But I feel like it is my responsibility to take care of her.” – Illinois

“Sometimes it can be difficult being a daughter to an aging parent, but most of the time it's pretty good.” – California



# Research Findings

Reflections on Managing Negative Emotions





# Reflections on Managing Negative Emotions

The stress of keeping up with everyday life, and the added pressures of caring for their children and parents, cause SGW to feel depressed, frustrated, or otherwise negative some days. On the upside, simple activities such as exercise, reading, and talking with a friend are effective mood-lifters.

Questions asked were:

1. I get stressed when. . .
2. I relax by. . .
3. I am most concerned about. . .
4. I feel depressed when. . .
5. What gets me out of a funk is. . .
6. As my parents age, I worry most about. . .
7. Please share any additional thoughts on managing negative emotions.



# Reflections on Managing Negative Emotions

- Among the most stressful aspects of their lives, the SGW say, are keeping up with the bills and not having the time to accomplish everything they need to do around the house. Other responses included:
  - Communicating with or caring for their parents
  - Being taken advantage of
  - Uncertainty at work
  - Their children's misbehavior
- Sandwich-generation women's biggest concerns surround finances (e.g., being able to make ends meet, paying for college, and the economy), caring for an aging parent and/or seeing an increased role in caring for their parents in the future, and health—either their own or a family member's.
- Some of the SGW relax by spending time with others, although most relax by spending some quiet time alone, engaging in activities they enjoy at home, including:
  - Reading
  - Taking a bath
  - Drinking a glass of wine



# Reflections on Managing Negative Emotions

- As their parents age, the women worry most about being able to meet their parents' numerous and varied needs, and about losing them when they die.
  - A handful of SGW are concerned about the financial strain of caring for an aging parent, while an equal number know that someone (either the woman herself or the parent) will likely have to move once the parent is not able to care for himself or herself.
  - Several mentioned an uncertain future depending upon their realization that their parents' health status could change, the difficulty coordinating their parents' care, and knowing whether their parents are taking care of themselves.
  - A couple of SGW talked about more acutely realizing their own mortality as they watch their parents age.
- Only a handful of SGW report they are “never” or “rarely” depressed. The remaining majority, report they get depressed when:
  - They are not feeling appreciated
  - They are alone for a period of time
  - When they think of someone they miss, or a difficult time in their life
  - When they are feeling overwhelmed
- The women say they “get out of a funk” by talking and laughing with friends or their sisters, dining out, shopping, enjoying a social activity, having a drink, getting out of the house for a while, or spending time with their children.



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

## I get stressed when. . .

“My daughter is talking back and arguing. I get stressed when things don't go well at work. I work for an airline and it can be very stressful when the weather doesn't cooperate.” – California

“I feel like I have a lot on my plate—having to juggle too many things at once, such as coordinating the schedules for me and the kids, keeping the house neat and organized, making sure my daughter is up to date with her homework—just life.” – Illinois

## I relax by. . .

“Having a glass of wine. Might not exactly be the correct way by some people, but I love to enjoy a glass of wine. I sip it and enjoy every little sip.” – Illinois

“Getting in comfortable pajamas, a cup of hot chocolate, and a great book.” – New York

## I am most concerned about. . .

“Juggling everything. I am going back to a full-time job in 3 months and my husband is going to be Mr. Mom. I am dreading being away from the baby. I'm also worried about how tired I'm going to be and how I will manage everything.” – Illinois

“I am most concerned about staying fit and healthy so I can be here for my parents and daughter.” – California



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

As my parent/parents age, I worry most about. . .

“Not having my mom anymore. My father died many years ago and the thought of still being young and losing my mom scares the crap out of me. My mom is my best friend.” – California

“Being able to take care of them and provide for them. Finding the time to be there for them, plus the mind-set and patience. It's very sad watching someone age. You feel so bad for them.” – New York

I feel depressed when. . .

“I think about how focused everyone is on material possessions. I get caught up in it, too. I want my children to be aware of this, but I don't want them to always feel different, too.” – New York

“I think I haven't been the friend, sister, mother, wife, neighbor that I know I am capable of being.” – Illinois

What gets me out of a funk is. . .

“Good friends, eating, running.” – Illinois

“Talking to my friends or my sisters and sometimes my mother. They always help me to see the bigger picture.” – California



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

Additional thoughts on managing negative emotions. . .

“I do my best to be positive daily, but situations arise that put me in a negative mood. I try to contain my anger or negativity and switch it to positivity by being humble and grateful for all the things I have in my life!” – California

“I find that the best way to handle negative emotions is to exercise. Take a walk and try to work out the problem in your head, or talk to a good friend and don't be afraid to ask for advice.” – New York

“Stress can be a good thing, but too much stress gets overwhelming. When I feel overwhelmed, I get short-tempered. Sometimes I take it out on those close to me. I know I shouldn't, but they cut me the most slack. It is important to regenerate. I try, but sometimes it seems like it takes too much time.” – Illinois



# Research Findings

Reflections on Support Systems





## Reflections on Support Systems

Sandwich-generation women primarily rely on friends and family for help, but a significant number do not ask for help or do so reluctantly for various reasons: they do not think they need help, they do not want to be a burden or perceived as incapable, they are not used to requesting help, or there is no one to ask. About one-quarter of the women are unaware of the social services in their communities or do not consider their community a potential source of support.

Questions asked were:

1. My personal “therapy” is . . .
2. I feel supported when. . .
3. When I need help I. . .
4. If I don’t seek help or support it is because. . .
5. In my community, support and resources available to me include. . .
6. When I need help with my aging parents I turn to. . .
7. Please share any additional thoughts on support systems available to you.



## Reflections on Support Systems

- About half of SGW say talking things out with a close friend or family member is their “personal therapy,” while about the same number find it therapeutic to spend time alone. When alone, sandwich-generation women may:
  - Exercise
  - Relax
  - Pray
  - Engage in positive self-talk
- For help in supporting their parents, the women cite three main sources: family and friends, their or their parents’ doctors, or, in a few cases, counselors.
- They say they feel most supported when family members help without being asked, their spouses truly listen, and family and friends listen without passing judgment.
  - In addition, SGW feel supported when their husbands and other family members agree with their perspectives, and tell them that they love and support them.



## Reflections on Support Systems

- A significant number of SGW say it is difficult for them to ask for help. Often this inability to request help causes them to feel upset or angry. Those who do seek help often turn to their husbands or friends first.
  - Several women report that they will exhaust all “self-help” possibilities before turning to others for assistance.
  - A couple of women utilize “professionals” or a “therapist” to process a variety of issues.
- Many SGW report that they do not ask for help because:
  - They don’t want to be a burden on anyone else.
  - Because they like their independence/prefer to do things on their own.
  - They are not comfortable asking for help.
- Those women who have found support in their communities cite various resources, such as religious institutions, libraries, physicians, therapists, community centers, and colleges.



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

My personal therapy is . . .

“Taking a long shower, reading a magazine, going for a long run/walk, having a glass of wine with a friend (or two).” – Illinois

“Talking to my good friend to vent and to get advice. Researching information about my feelings or just reflecting on my feelings alone and trying to sort things out.” – New York

I feel supported when . . .

“Others simply acknowledge in little ways what I do. Also, when I don't have to ask for every little thing to be done. I detest feeling like a dictator. When everyone chips in I don't seem to get resentful.” – New York

“My husband listens to me and makes special arrangements to help me during challenging days, or takes time off to spend time with me.” – California

When I need help with my aging parents I turn to. . .

“I will turn to my brothers first, if it's something we can take care of long distance (all 6 children live 1,000 or more miles from my parents). If it was a temporary, short-term help situation I would communicate with church leaders in their area for help. Otherwise, it will be up to me (with my brothers' help) to go to them and care for them.” – California

“A friend who is going through a similar thing and can understand exactly what I am talking about.”  
– New York



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

When I need help I . . .

“This is a hard area for me. Usually I do it myself and then get angry. I am trying to learn to ask for help before the boiling point. I seem to have an easier time asking my friends for help instead of my family.” – New York

“Call one of my running buddies (friends that I have met in Narcotics Anonymous ) or my sponsor or my family. I have quite a bit of support. I also have a therapist and a psychiatrist.” – New York

If I don't seek help or support it is because I . . .

“I know I can do it myself.” – California

“I haven't figured out what is troubling me, or at least have not figured out how to express it well enough to ask for help. I have learned over the years that I tend to be much more willing to offer help than to ask for help. I have gotten better about that in the past 15 years, but it has required acknowledgment of my tendency to retreat and remember that it is not ultimately helpful.” – Illinois

In my community, support and resources available to me include . . .

“Hmmm, I don't know. I guess the police. I don't count on my community for support.” – Illinois

“Community senior services, church, community college classes, doctor's office, assisted-living facility.”  
– California



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

Additional thoughts on support systems. . .

“What’s a support system?! It seems to be ‘just me,’ but as I stated before, that’s fine.” – New York

“I feel very fortunate to have many support systems available to me. I belong to a church where family is priority number one. I also have four wonderful sisters to help as well. I also have a husband who is very supportive. And I have so many wonderful friends that are always a great support to me. I can't imagine how different life would be without just one of my support systems.” – California

“I have a strong network of family and friends who are always willing to help if I ask. I don't often do that, though. I don't want to be a burden to anyone.” – Illinois



# Research Findings

Reflections on Being a Caregiver





## Reflections on Being a Caregiver

Many SGW are not only caring for elderly parents, they are continuing to support their children financially and emotionally into adulthood. Thus, as their parents age, many of these women are still very much involved in their grown children's lives. Many of the women say they are fulfilled by their caretaker role to their parents and children of all ages and generally think they can handle the challenges.

Questions asked were:

1. I help take care of my parents by. . .
2. I help take care of my child/children by . . .
3. The thing I like most about taking care of others is. . .
4. The thing I like least about taking care of others is. . .
5. One thing I didn't expect caring for my aging parents was. . .
6. Please share any additional thoughts on being a caregiver.



## Reflections on Being a Caregiver

- Among the SGW's favorite things about being a caretaker are the feeling of being needed, receiving appreciation/love from those they support, and knowing they are making a difference in the lives of loved ones.
- Among SGW's least favorite things about being a caretaker are not having enough time to take good care of themselves, feeling as if they are being taken for granted/not being appreciated, and doing things for others that they could readily do for themselves.
- The primary ways the women care for their elderly parents are by providing emotional support/talking with them frequently; taking them to doctor appointments; managing their healthcare/helping them navigate the healthcare system; paying their bills; and helping them with routine domestic tasks, such as grocery shopping and cleaning.
  - Whether the SGW lives in close proximity appeared to affect how much day-to-day assistance they provide their parents. As the physical distance increased between the SGW and the aging parent, the SGW took on a more emotionally supportive role, such as counseling them and providing support via the phone.



## Reflections on Being a Caregiver

- They are very involved in their child/children's lives. They provide emotional support in addition to typical parent responsibilities (e.g., cooking dinner, driving them, being actively involved in their education).
  - For those who had children over 18, the support they provided varied slightly; however, many still provided financial support to adult children.
  - The children of one participant were mentally disabled and she provided more day-to-day care.
- Among the women's biggest surprises about caring for their parents are how expensive it can be and the rapidity of their parents' mental and/or physical decline.
  - Positively, some say they find the experience "fascinating" or "natural."
  - Others say they are amazed at how quickly their parent(s) have aged. They also say it can be frustrating and emotionally draining caring for them while neglecting themselves. It is also difficult for them to see their parent(s) so unhappy adjusting to the aging process and unwilling to ask for assistance.



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

I help take care of my parents by. . .

“Giving my mother money or paying some of her bills. Emotionally and spiritually supporting her by telephone conversations and discussions, and in prayer.” – New York

“Since I live over 3 hours away from my parents, most of the help I give is support by way of phone calls.”

– Illinois

“... driving them to doctor's appointments, the market or anywhere my dad cannot manage to drive anymore, planning and taking them to social outings, calling the pharmacist for their new prescriptions and refills, cleaning their room and bathroom, coloring my mom's hair, taking my mom's blood pressure, looking for new products to relieve constipation or products they need to make life easier ... – California

“Always being there when she needs me and trying to find extra ‘special’ time to spend with her.” – Illinois

I help take care of my child/children by. . .

“Providing support and allowing my daughter to make mistakes and learn from them. We also financially help her by allowing her to live with us (even though she is 29). She doesn't make very much money and can't afford to move out on her own.” – California

“Making sure they are healthy, happy, and well-fed. I also make sure that my kids always know how much they are loved and that I think they are the best people in the world!” – Illinois



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

The thing I like most about taking care of others is. . .

“I enjoy [seeing] the smile on their face. It helps make their day a little brighter. I feel useful.”  
– New York

“The love that I get in return. I have learned that to really get to know someone and to love someone is to serve them.” – California

The thing I like least about taking care of others is. . .

“It has, for the time being, stalled my plans for retirement. Extra funds that would normally be available for vacations, home changes, and reducing work hours is being used to support kids and parents.” – Illinois

“Feeling like everyone else comes first and I come last.” – Illinois



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

One thing I didn't expect caring for my aging parents was. . .

“How frustrating it can be. Sometimes I feel like caring for my newborn infant and my parents are not that different. They both are stubborn and don't listen. My mother drives me crazy because she is getting needier and she suffers from anxiety . . . My father still pushes himself and works too hard even though he is at retirement age.” – Illinois

“I guess I always knew that they would be in denial about their situation.” – New York

“That in some cases they will not be able to make sound decisions.” – California

“What a fascinating experience I am finding it to be. And it makes me want to be more like them, too.”  
– Illinois

“...was that she is starting to lose her short-term memory. She is always repeating herself . She is also becoming more dependent on me for day-to-day things.” – New York

Additional thoughts. . .

“It hasn't been too difficult yet for me to care after my parents as they do not need assistance with activities of daily living yet, like bathing. They have each other to look after and they have each other for companionship.

I expect that it would get a lot more difficult when one of them passes on and the other will need more emotional support. As they have always provided me with all kinds of support I've ever needed growing up, into adulthood and into motherhood, it's now my turn to try and reciprocate.” – California

“Sometimes I wish I had someone to take care of me!” – New York



# Research Findings

Reflections on Relationships with Others





## Reflections on Relationships with Others

The SGW deeply value their relationships with their spouses, parents, and children. The relationship with one parent or both, the SGW indicate, is the one that is most complicated for them, with about half characterizing the relationship as positive and the rest citing strain or distance. Overwhelmingly, the women describe their relationships with their children in positive terms.

Questions asked were:

1. The relationship I value the most is . . .because . . .
2. I wish I were closer to. . . because . . .
3. I would describe my relationship with my parents as . . .
4. I would describe my relationship with my child/children as. . .
5. As I grow older, my relationships. . .
6. Please share any additional thoughts on your relationships with others.



# Reflections on Relationships with Others

- In discussing the relationship they value most, the majority of women put their husbands first because of the lives they've built together. The second top answer is children, followed by parents, friends, siblings, and in-laws.
  - All but five women who are married mentioned their husbands specifically.
  - The reasons for their selections were very similar. Many SGW selected a relationship where the other was someone who would always be there for them, was non-judgmental, their sounding board and who they derived strength from. Others mentioned characteristics they admired in the person, such as being patient or thoughtful.
- When asked whom SGW wished they had a closer relationship with, almost all mentioned an immediate family member such as a parent, child or sibling; parents, either mother or father, were most frequently mentioned. Other individuals mentioned included friends, in-laws, and non-immediate family members (e.g., a cousin, aunt, and ex-husband).
  - For most SGW, the relationship became distant because of geographical distance or because of a past argument or strain in the relationship.



# Reflections on Relationships with Others

- Nearly all SGW acknowledge relationships are not stagnant and will change as they grow older. Most of the women say their relationships will become stronger and more meaningful because they are more selective about the relationships they cultivate. A handful of SGW say their relationships are growing more distant because of their focus on immediate family obligations.
  - SGW appear more comfortable with who they are and thus are more discriminating with those they become close with. They understand the qualities they value in friendships and don't have the time to expend on negative or undesirable relationships.
- For the most part, SGW have positive relationships with their children. Words such as loving, caring, and nurturing were used to describe these relationships. In addition, SGW admired their children and were proud of the individuals they were becoming.
  - A handful of SGW spoke of their relationship as challenging. This was often due to the the teenage years or the many demands the children place on them. All of these women hoped that they would be close to their child/children later in life.
  - A few SGW described how their relationships with their children had evolved from a negative experience to something that they really valued.



## Reflections on Relationships with Others

- o The majority of SGW described their relationship with at least one parent in a positive way. When describing the relationship, SGW mentioned talking with their parents frequently and used adjectives such as a “caring” and “loving.”
  - For SGW who have strained relationships with their parents, they described a personality conflict that could not be overcome. Additionally, two SGW stated their parents are divorced and treated each other terribly, which led to the tension-filled relationship they have with them.



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

The relationship I value most is. . .

“I value my relationship with my husband the most. We have been through good times and bad but have been able to work through everything and stay together. I feel great joy in the accomplishment of never giving up. We took our vows to heart.” – California

“The one I have with my mother. I learn from her to this day and I now help her with things that SHE has trouble with. The shoe is on the other foot now and I give her advice and help her like she has always done for me.” – Illinois

I wish I were closer to. . .

“My aging in-laws, because they are lovely, lovely people, but for some reason I can not bring myself to get too comfortable/close with them even after almost 10 years of being part of their family.” – Illinois

“My brother, because I am 10 years older and always was the boss. I was out of the house already while he was growing up. We have a relationship, but I wish it was closer.” – New York



## Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

I would describe my relationship with my parents as . . .

“A blessing. I see people who fight with their families and I can't imagine that being us. They both have done SO MUCH for me growing up, even throughout my 20s, so they mean the world to me and now it's my turn to do all I can for them.” – New York

“Strained. My mom had a stroke and my father can be a jerk.” – Illinois

“Better than it was before I had children. It seems that now we have more in common.” – California.

“Great with my mother because we've become more like friends, but a little distant with my father because I don't see him much.” – New York

“Strained. I love both of them, but I don't feel as close to either one of them as I would like to be. I see them often, but sometimes I don't feel like it's a very loving relationship. My mother likes to bring up a lot of issues from the past and dwell on it and that is irritating to me.” – California

I would describe my relationship with my child/children as . . .

“More like a friendship. They always joke around with me. I sometimes have to be reminding them I am their mom and they should be more respectful.” – Illinois

“Very nurturing and loving. My daughter is so smart and driven just like me. We are very close and talk about everything.” – California



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

As I grow older my relationships. . .

“Change; some grow stronger and some grow weaker. I find myself not having the energy to waste on relationships that I feel are negative. I find it easier just to walk away sometimes.” – New York

“Get stronger and deeper with the people that I love and care about the most. Those relationships that require too much work I tend to try for a while, but I have learned to not waste my time with them. I do not have that much time and life is short, so I have learned to focus on those relationships that make me a better person.” – California

Additional thoughts. . .

“This has been a record year in that I have been reunited with so many old friends that represent my past and remind me of who I used to be, the authentic me. I no longer plan to tolerate any crap from anyone because the time is slipping away; I want to only spend my time with people that stimulate and comfort ME.” – New York

“I don't tend to make close friends easily and don't have time to maintain relationships. I wish I had more time to do that.” – Illinois



# Research Findings

Financial Outlook





## Outlook Toward Finances

SGW shared two main views about money: that they had enough and were not worried (or were less worried) about their financial future, or that they did not have enough money and were very concerned about it. Whether the household income was higher or lower did not appear to affect SGW's relationship with money or concern about their financial future. For some, it seemed as though their expectations and spending habits affected their relationship with money more than anything else. Regardless, SGW's primary financial concerns are retirement, college tuition, and medical expenses (actual and anticipated).

Questions asked were:

1. I would describe my relationship with money as. . .
2. If I had a \$1,000 windfall I would . . .
3. To plan for my financial future I. . .
4. My biggest financial concern is . . .
5. In thinking about the financial cost of caring for my aging parents, I. . .
6. Please share any additional thoughts on your financial outlook.



## Outlook Toward Finances

- SGW who reported a positive relationship with money appear to have more realistic expectations of money and often stated they budget their income and try to be frugal and/or look for deals. Those with negative views tended to say there was never enough, their spending habits were out of control, and they buy what they want.
  - There did not appear to be a relationship between the SGW income level and how they viewed money. Those whose household income was \$90K or more were split evenly as to whether they had a positive or negative relationship with money. Not surprisingly, those with incomes under \$90K tended to be slightly more negative about their relationship with money.
- To plan for the future, many women say they are focused on saving for retirement; nearly half are primarily saving using a 401(k) plan but are also planning through IRAs, investments, and stock options. A few have met with, or are considering meeting with, a financial advisor. Several women say they cannot afford to plan for the future because they are living paycheck-to-paycheck. Some plan to improve their financial position by going back to school, seeking a higher-paying job, working more, or being frugal.
  - For those who have saved for retirement, about a quarter are not intimately involved in the process, allowing their husbands to take primary control over investments and financial planning.
  - Only two women mentioned saving for their children's education. That said, it seems to be weighing heavily on some, as when asked about their biggest financial concern, tuition costs came up frequently.



## Outlook Toward Finances

- o When asked about their biggest financial concern, most SGW are worried about not having enough. As stated earlier, they are concerned about retiring, saving for future expenses, such as college tuition and medical expenses. A few are concerned about changes in the economy (e.g., stock market crash, increases in gas prices) and being laid off from their jobs.
  
- o In discussing the financial cost of caring for their elderly parents, the SGW generally fall into one of two camps: those worried about the cost and those who say their parents will not need any or much of their financial support.
  - Those who are not worried believe that their parents are financially prepared for any medical or caregiving expenses that occur as they age.
  - The SGWs' household income level did not appear to have an impact on whether our population of sandwich-generation women would be worried or not worried about future caregiving expenses.
  
- o When SGW were asked what they would do if they unexpectedly received \$1,000, a plurality said they would either pay bills or spend it on themselves for something they needed. A few would split the money into save/spend, pay bills/save, or pay bills/spend ratios, and only a handful mentioned saving the lump sum.
  - Those who made less than \$90k and/or had reported negative relationships with money tended to state they would use the windfall to pay bills.



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

I would describe my relationship toward money as. . .

“Pretty responsible. I have learned to be very frugal with money and have managed to save some and be debt free for the last 3 years or so.” – California

“[My relationship toward money is] a mixture of fantasy about what it would be like to have lots of money . . . and a lack of concern about our real situation. We have always had modest salaries. . . But we also have a very simple lifestyle and our budget works for us. I know that the future could be pretty bare-bones, but it will take care of itself.” – Illinois

If I had a \$1,000 windfall I would. . .

“Hah, it'd go before I even could say one-thousand! I guess I would Christmas shop and pay a few bills.” – Illinois

“Put it towards my cruise in March.” – New York



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

To plan for my financial future I . . .

“Am not able to plan for a future right now living on a fixed income, because my money is spent each month paying bills.” – New York

“Save money in a 401(k) and right now I have most of my money in a money-market account. I am planning on meeting with a financial advisor soon to figure out a good plan for my future.” – California

My biggest financial concern is . . .

“Having enough money to put my daughter through school and take care of my parents at the same time.” – Illinois

“My biggest financial concern [is to] be able to be self-sufficient and not be a burden to my only daughter, so I try to keep myself healthy so that I can be able to work even after retirement age.” – Illinois



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

In thinking about the financial cost of caring for my aging parents, I . . .

“For some reason I don't stress about this as much. They currently have a home and when the time comes it can be sold to help with their care. If they are to live with us, I don't see it as a huge financial burden. They will have some money and still have their own insurance. I guess we are lucky that way . . .” – New York

“Pray that they do not get seriously ill where major hospitalization would be necessary. They have some savings but I don't know how long it will last should they need major hospitalization and care. I will look into government assistance, like Medi-Cal, to see if they qualify. Should their funds run out and government aid is not available or not enough, my brother and I will have to shoulder the cost of their care.” – California

“I get extremely overwhelmed. I don't know how I'm gonna do it. I know it costs so much money and I don't know where it will come from, really.” – Illinois

“I believe that all of our parents, along with my grandmother and uncle have money to take care of themselves in the golden years. My grandmother, uncle and father do not like to spend any money. My mother concerns me the most because she doesn't own a house.” – New York

Additional thoughts. . .

“I'm beginning to realize that I have to start thinking about my financial future and I have been looking at my options. I cannot end up like my parents; I do not want to have to depend on my children. I love my parents dearly but they have made big mistakes by not planning for their future. I have learned a lesson for sure.” – New York

“After many years in debt in the past, I'm very happy that I've managed to get out of it and save quite a bit for the future. I just hope nothing major happens that will make me have to spend the money.” – California



# Research Findings

Reflections on Your Health





## Reflections on Your Health

Most of the SGW consider themselves to be in “good” or “pretty good” health overall, despite the fact that a number of these same women list a number of chronic health concerns they suffer from. The women say they find it difficult at times to be a caretaker and maintain their health because of their caretaker responsibilities, which often eat up their personal time and can cause physical and emotional stress.

Questions asked were:

1. I would describe my health as . . .
2. To maintain good health I . . .
3. As I get older, my health . . .
4. The thing I worry most about concerning my health is . . .
5. Caring for others affects my health by. . .
6. Please share any additional thoughts on your health.



## Outlook Toward Your Health

- Far fewer SGW describe their health as “very good” or “poor,” compared with the majority who describe their health a “good” or “pretty good.”
  - When asked to describe their own health, about one-third of the women described things they are doing currently to try and improve or maintain their health status (e.g., exercising, taking supplements, watching what they eat).
  - Several of the SGW reported that they suffer from a number of health problems (e.g., asthma, depression, some mental illness, glaucoma, arthritis, and heart burn), although more frequently they describe themselves as just needing “to lose a little weight.”
  - A handful describe themselves as suffering from mental health issues such as depression, stress, and anxiety attacks.
- The top health concerns that SGW worry about are cancer (one of the participants revealed that she has breast cancer) and other diseases that can be hereditary, such as heart disease and diabetes.
  - They also worry about slowly losing their physical and mental health, and becoming a burden on their families.
- Caring for others results in stress for about half of the SGW. About a quarter report that the care they give to others means “putting themselves last” and neglecting their own health.
  - Only two of the SGW report that caring for others improves their health by making them grateful for their good health, or making them more mindful of taking care of themselves.



## Outlook Toward Your Health

- Many SGW say their health has become more important to them as they age. They want to stay healthy to see their children grow up.
  - About one-quarter report that their health has deteriorated as they age, and about half as many say their health has improved, possibly because they have made the decision to take charge of their health by doing things such as losing weight, eating better, or seeking medical attention.
  - A couple of the women say that they live in fear that something will go wrong with their health and so take steps such as checking themselves for breast lumps daily.
  - Their awareness of illness and commitment to taking care of themselves, the SGW say, has grown as a result of watching people close to them suffer from health problems.
  
- Sandwich-generation women say they exercise regularly and eat healthy foods (or try to) “to maintain good health.”
  - For many, a lack of time for healthy behaviors (e.g., exercise, cooking) is something they struggle with.
  - Most try to walk each day for exercise, and there seems to be agreement that including more fresh fruits and vegetables in one’s diet, along with taking supplements, is helpful in achieving a healthy diet.
  - Several of the women mention laughter as a way to maintain good health, along with drinking more water and maintaining a positive outlook.



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

I would describe my health as. . .

“Being very good. Though my eating habits are not always the best, I do try to make good choices on a regular basis. I am also very diligent about maintaining a healthy and strong body by being very active and working out on a daily basis.” – Illinois

“I have a number of ailments including obesity, arthritis in my knee, and high blood pressure.” – California

To maintain good health I. . .

“Eat green vegetables, take vitamins, drink lots of water & LAUGH!” – New York

“Don't take care of myself as much as I should, but I am trying to eat better and exercise more.” – Illinois

As I get older, my health. . .

“Stays the same. I just appreciate it more! I certainly abused my body when I was younger. I binge drank and even experimented with drugs. I felt as if I were invincible. I ran a marathon in 4.5 hours and smoked the entire time I was in training. I quit smoking 3 years ago.” – Illinois

“Good, but over the last months suffering from a shoulder problem that requires therapy and is quite painful. Feeling the stress.” – California



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

The thing I worry most about concerning my own health is. . .

“Cancer and heart disease. I don't want my life ruined because of bad health. And I don't want to be a burden to my husband or kids. We live an active and very sociable life right now and we're really enjoying ourselves and each other. I don't want that to stop.” – New York

“That my company will discontinue my health insurance.” – California

Caring for others affects my own health by. . .

“It takes a toll on my health, especially when I do not get enough sleep. I find that I get sick easier and have a hard time bouncing back.” – New York

“Making it more challenging to get to the gym or go for runs in the morning. There is a lot of juggling involved.” – Illinois

Additional thoughts on their own health. . .

“I am healthy, but I should be doing more exercise. The time factor for me means either spend the time to work or exercise, and I need to work for the money to help my family. I pray that I remain healthy as long as possible, but I know that soon I will be considered a senior citizen myself.” – New York

“I think that when I take the time to care for myself through exercise and proper nutrition I eventually have more energy. It just takes perseverance to get through the first couple of weeks of adjustment, and lately it seems that I haven't been able to persevere.” – California



# Research Findings

Outlook Toward the Future





## Outlook Toward the Future

A significant number of SGW say they are “optimistic” or “hopeful” about the future, although, overall, their outlooks vary widely. Many (just over one-third) also say they are worried or uncertain about the future. Major causes of worry for the women are money and health, and not being prepared, in general. A significant number of SGW say they most look forward to watching their children grow up and beginning their own families.

Questions asked were:

1. Success in life is determined by. . .
2. When I think about the future I am. . .
3. I am most proud of. . .
4. If only I had . . .
5. I realize that one day my child/children will be in the position of caring for me. The one thing I hope is. . .
6. Please share any additional thoughts on your outlook toward the future.



# Outlook Toward the Future

- Most of the SGW gauge success in life by the quality of their relationships with family and friends, how well they've raised their children, whether they've accomplished their goals, and how happy they are.
  - Nearly one-third of the women also mention financial success and/or career position as determinants of their success.
    - A couple of these women described how education, hard work and tenacity have allowed them to become prosperous and provide a better future for their families. Two other respondents equated professional and financial success with how the world judges them (that is, their image or status).
    - Still another perspective is that financial success structures opportunities that they, or their children, have in life.
  - A handful of the SGW talk about success in terms of their legacy, and the impact they leave on the world.
- For the more than one-third of SGW who are uncertain or worry about the future, concerns include:
  - Not having enough money to last in retirement
  - Not wanting to burden others
  - Job insecurity
  - Not knowing what their health will be like as they age
  - Whether they have prepared their children for adulthood/if their children will be happy
  - Growing old without a partner



## Outlook Toward the Future

- The vast majority of SGW say they are most proud of their children, and the contributions the women have made to their families. Other accomplishments include education, becoming stronger after divorce, being a single parent, and running a business.
- When asked “if only I had,” a majority of SGW gave a response that related to money, including “more money,” “a million dollars,” “enough money so I wouldn’t have to worry about paying bills,” and “more funds in my retirement.” Other responses include:
  - A partner to get old with/to share expenses
  - Delayed marriage
  - Got a college degree
  - More time in the day
- Only a couple of women responded that they are satisfied with things as they are, so they have no “if only’s.”
- Only one SGW talked about the burden of being a caregiver to her own parents in relationship to the question that asked about her children being in the position of caring for her some day.
  - This woman talked about the strain of caregiving, and how she wants her children to experience “the freedom” of not being burdened in caring for her.



## Outlook Toward the Future

- o In the future, when their children are in the position of caring for them, the majority of SGW say they most hope not to be a burden in any way, be it personal or financial. Other responses include:
  - Wanting to age with dignity.
  - Wishing to maintain a positive attitude so their children will want to be around them, and so they will continue to be close.
  - Hoping their children will show them patience and unconditional love.
  
- o When asked if they wished to share any additional thoughts a majority of the participants did, possibly because this was the last question in their 10-day long journaling experience. Although their responses varied, the following themes emerged:
  - As they get older wishing to die before becoming a burden to their children.
  - The importance of maintaining a positive outlook regardless of life's circumstances.
  - Wanting a happy and fulfilling life for their children, and to maintain their own health.
  - Hoping that the future is brighter than their current circumstances.
  - Worrying about finances/hoping things will turn out okay.
  - Living one's life to the fullest.



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

## Success in life is determined by. . .

“Happiness within the family. I'd consider myself successful and having done a good job when my children can live a happy and satisfying life with their wives and children. When we can have family get-togethers and truly, unequivocally enjoy being together, I would feel that all our (my husband's and mine) hard work has paid off. I can die with a smile on my wrinkled face.” – California

“Being educated and prosperous, being outspoken and having a good life, not worrying about how you are going to pay the bills, being comfortable in life, that is what success means to me.” – New York

## When I think about the future I am. . .

“Kind of worried about if I will have enough money to survive alone and not need help.” – New York

“Personally, not worried about how it will all turn out for me. But in a larger sense, I am not as confident regarding the sort of society and planet my grandchildren and their children will live in . . .” – Illinois

## I am most proud of. . .

“My children and how far I've come, and the kind of person I have become, especially since my divorce. I am a stronger, more independent woman.” – Illinois

“Where I am now. Things were very rocky for me for many years and I was able to turn that around. I wish it hadn't taken me so long, but I am here now.” – New York



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

If only I had. . .

“A little more free time for myself.” – California

“If only I had’ sounds pathetic because the list would never end. If only I had my youth back again, with the attitude I have right now these past few months, I would tell everyone to screw themselves and do what the hell I want instead of being such a damn stupid good daughter and girl. I guess I'd be the rebel I feel like being now.” – New York

I realize that one day my child/children will be in the position of caring for me. The one thing I hope is. . .

“That I am more fun and easy to be with than trouble. I hope I maintain an interest in their lives and in the wider world and continue to have a sense of humor and a kind of grace that makes me a good person to include rather than a burden.” – Illinois

“ ... the one thing is that I hope I can take care of myself for as long as possible and never never cause my kids all the grief that my parents have caused us before they even needed us. Now they are old and we just can't tolerate it any more. I hope my kids don't feel the same way later on.” – New York

“I make it as easy as possible for them to do so. I hope that I am financially secure enough to not be a burden in that sense. I also hope that I remember what it is like from the caregiver's side.” – California

“I won't be a burden to them. I'd rather die than be a burden to them.” – Illinois



# Sandwich-Generation Women's Reflections

Additional thoughts on their outlook toward the future. . .

“I look at the future with as much optimism as possible. I believe life is what we make of it. Memories are most important. I try not to let anything get me down and always look at the glass as half-full! The future consists mainly of today and tomorrow. No need to worry too far ahead when it's not here yet!”

– California

“My husband thinks I am a negative person, but in writing these journal entries over the last 2 weeks it made me realize that I am pretty positive. I think I am a worrier and suffer from anxiety, but that doesn't mean I'm negative. I have high hopes for our future and our family life together.” – Illinois

“I just hope that I won't be an ill parent. I just want to go in my sleep, be well up to that point, and not be a burden on anyone.” – New York

“I am continually hopeful for a brighter future with only good things ahead.” – Illinois

“I work hard to save and make sure that my future is taken care of. I just don't know if it is enough.”  
– California



# Opportunities for Social Workers

Lessons Learned from the Journaling Project





# Opportunities for Social Workers

This journal project reveals several opportunities for social workers to better publicly promote the wide range of services they provide. Three key insights from the project are:

1. That sandwich-generation women often do not ask for help or do so reluctantly for reasons previously discussed
2. That many sandwich-generation women do not consider community social services, such as social workers and places that employ them, a front-line source of potential support
3. That, in their roles as caregiver to their children and parents, many of these women are more in need of assistance caring for their elderly parents rather than their children (the women indicate that the stresses of raising their children is to be expected and largely something they can handle with their families)

As this project suggests, there is significant opportunity for social workers to proactively educate sandwich-generation women about the wide range of services they provide, particularly those related to general mental and spiritual well-being and aging services. Social workers should also encourage these women to seek help when they feel they might need it, even if they are not experiencing what they would consider severe personal or family problems.



## Opportunities for Social Workers, cont.

Specific opportunities to increase awareness of social workers among sandwich-generation women include:

- o Helping sandwich-generation women identify resources that will help them in their caregiver role to their parents, including coordinating care with various agencies and programs; counseling; and long-term care planning.
- o Proactively reaching out to sandwich-generation women to educate them about the range of services available from social workers, as many of these women frequently feel stressed and may not be able to immediately identify their assistance needs.
- o Promoting “mind and spirit” services provided by social workers. In particular, these women need help with stress-management, relationships, and anxiety. As the journals reveal, many sandwich-generation women try to address their “mind and spirit” needs on their own or through family and friends.
- o Promoting health and wellness services to sandwich-generation women. As the journals reveal, these women are extremely concerned about their own health and worry that it suffers due to the requirements of their caretaker responsibilities.
  - Based on journal responses, particular services of focus should be family genetics; death and dying; and healthy lifestyles.