
IN THE MIDDLE: A REPORT ON MULTICULTURAL BOOMERS COPING WITH FAMILY AND AGING ISSUES

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With the aim of learning more about the “sandwiched” boomer family, this **AARP**-sponsored survey reports that most in this generation are coping *quite well* with the pressures of caring for their parents and children. However, some are beginning to feel the “squeeze” of family demands. Most pressed are those who have “direct responsibility” for elder care.

The “sandwiched” generation, as defined by **In the Middle**, includes boomers age 45 to 55 who have children at home and parents who are still living. This report is based on the results of a national survey of 2,352 sandwich generation boomers, conducted during March 2001. To provide a rich portrait of the experiences of this generation, the AARP multicultural survey included oversamples of African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans. Findings from this research include:

Who They Are

- The sandwich generation includes about half of all aging boomers. About one in five of them (22%) identify themselves as caregivers for their parents.
- Three-fourths of the sandwich generation is **white**. Nine percent is **Hispanic**. **African Americans** make up about 11 percent of the generation and **Asian Americans** about 4 percent.
- **African American**, **Hispanic**, and **Asian Americans** – especially **Hispanics** (32%) and **Asian Americans** (28%) – are more likely to report feeling “squeezed” by family demands than are **white** boomers (16%).
- Eight out of ten aging boomers stay in close touch with parents. However, fewer say they’ve taken on heavier demands of elder care such as housework (45%), driving (46%), shopping (44%), talking to doctors (36%), handling paperwork or bills (33%), hiring nurses and aides (17%), or helping with intimate care (12%). More than one in four (27%) say they contribute financially to help pay expenses.

Family Ties

- **African American** boomers are the most likely in the generation to have lost both their parents. About one in four have children age 21 or older living at home. Nearly one in ten have grandchildren living with them, compared with 4% of whites.
- Roughly one in five **Hispanics** and more than one in three **Asian Americans** have parents who live outside the United States. As with **whites**, nearly half of **Hispanic** boomers are now sandwiched between parents and children.

- **White** extended families are more geographically dispersed than are the families of **African Americans** or **Hispanics**. They are also less likely to feel caught in a squeeze between generations. Only a fraction of white boomers have parents who live outside the United States.
- Two in five **Asian American** boomers (39%) have children under the age of 21 still living at home with them.

Attitudes of Filial Obligation

- **Asian American** boomers are the most likely to feel guilty about not doing enough for their parents (72%), followed by **Hispanics** (65%) and **African Americans** (54%). **Whites** are the least apt to feel guilty (44%).
- Three-fourths of **Asian American** boomers say children in their families should care for their elders. **Whites** are the least inclined to want their children to take care of them in their old age (19%).
- **Men** and **poorer people** are the most apt of the boom generation to feel they should do more for their elders.

Caregiving

- **Women**, across all ethnic groups, talk to doctors, arrange for aides, or help with personal care more often than males.
- Two of five **Asian American** boomers (42%) in the sandwich generation provide elder care or help parents financially. In addition, they are the most likely to assume a heavy caregiving role.
- About a third of **African Americans** in the sandwich generation provide care for their parents.
- **White** boomers are the least likely of their generation to provide elder care. About one in five of them provide financial support or other care.
- One in three (34%) **Hispanics** in the sandwich generation takes care of elders. Like **Asian Americans**, they are more likely to have roles as heavy caregivers. One in five **Hispanic** boomers (21%) helps their parents with highly personal care such as bathing, and nearly half of them contribute financial support.

Stress

- As a whole, one in five sandwiched caregiving families say they feel some stress in their family life. Two thirds are coping just fine.
- In the last year, more than one in four (28%) baby boomers suffered a loss due to the death of a loved one.
- One in five African Americans (19%) feel stress from being “family sandwiched.” About one in three **Asian American** and **Hispanic** baby boomers report caregiver-related stress.
- Immigrant baby boomers and those with annual household incomes under \$30,000 most frequently feel “sandwiched.”

- **White** boomers are less likely to feel caught in a squeeze between generations. Among white boomers, stress is most prevalent among women and those with less education.

Coping

- Two in five members of the sandwich generation (43%) say that doctors have been helpful to them. About one in five have sought help from community organizations.
- Most working caregivers' employers allow elder care leave. In the past five years, two in five (43%) boomers have taken time off from their jobs, and about one in five (17%) have reduced hours worked.
- Very few (13%) of the sandwiched generation have hired someone to help with care, such as an aide or nurse.
- Just like other minorities, **African American** caregivers of the sandwich generation don't hesitate to get family help when they need it. The family bonds are strong. **African Americans** also are the most likely to say doctors (50%), governmental agencies (23%), and social workers (19%) have helped them.
- About two in five (44%) **Asian American** boomers have taken time off work in the past five years to help care for family members. More than one in two (54%) talk with doctors on their parents' behalf.
- Churches have been important resources as well. Two in five caregiving boomers have received some form of help from their church or synagogue.

Source: Belden Russonello & Stewart and Research/Strategy/Management. *In the Middle: A Report on Multicultural Boomers Coping with Family and Aging Issues. A National Survey Conducted for AARP.* Washington, DC: AARP, July 2001.