

Report Finds 'Sandwich Generation' Women Supporting Elderly Parents, Children and Grandchildren

New report by The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing highlights contributions of women with living parents and dependent children.

DUBLIN, November 13th, 2013 – One third of women aged 50-69 in Ireland today are in the 'sandwich generation' with the majority providing care to both elderly parents and dependent children, according to a new report from [The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing](#) (TILDA) led by Trinity College Dublin. The report provides insight into the important contribution of this group of women to supporting two generations - their living parents and younger dependent children – and finds that this has an impact on their physical and mental health.

The report has found that the sandwich generation are providing a range of financial and non-financial support to elderly parents, dependent and non-dependent children and grandchildren. In fact, 58% of sandwich generation women give help to their parents and 83% give help to their children. One third look after grandchildren. Almost half of this group are providing this range of care and support while also in employment.

The population structure in Ireland has changed with people living longer and delayed fertility leading to more women remaining in the work-force. This change indicates that the sandwich generation will become more relevant and more women will be caring for dependent children and elderly parents while also playing a more active role in the work-force.

Furthermore the global recession may impact on the ability of both elderly parents and younger adult children to financially support themselves, thus the sandwich generation may be increasingly called upon to support both generations, both financially and with their time.

The type and levels of support being provided by this generation of women includes:

- Half of all sandwich generation women provide substantial time support to their parents. One-third provide support towards basic and personal care such as dressing, eating and bathing (activities of daily living) for an average of 21 hours per week and more than half give household help with chores, transportation and shopping (instrumental activities of daily living).
- One-third of the sandwich generation women provide practical household help including shopping and household chores to their non-resident adult children for an average of 12 hours per month.
- One-third of sandwich generation women look after their grandchildren for an average of 34 hours per month.
- Nine per cent of sandwich generation women provide financial support to their parents, with the average amount being €2,000 in the last two years. Two-thirds provide financial support to their children, at an average of €3,000 in the last two years. More than three-quarters of women (79%) who were financially supporting their parents were

also financially supporting their children. Additionally 71% also gave other non-financial care to their parents, one-third to their children and one-quarter looked after grandchildren.

The research suggests that the impact of providing intergenerational support on women's health varies by the type of support given. Providing financial support to children is associated with improved self-rated health among the sandwich generation women, but providing financial support to parents is associated with increased depression among this group. Providing practical household support for children is also associated with increased depression.

Commenting on the relationship between financial giving to parents and increased depression, the lead author of the report Dr Christine McGarrigle, Epidemiology Research Fellow with [TILDA](#) said: "The impact of financial giving on mental health could be the result of a number of different factors. We found that women who gave financial help to their parents were twice as likely to also provide personal care, like dressing, bathing and feeding their parents. Thus the depression experienced by these women may reflect both the financial strain and the stress of informal caring for parents. Alternatively depression could be associated with the reduction in savings as a result of the need to provide financial support to parents, and subsequent worry among the sandwich generation women about their ability to provide for themselves and both their parents and children in the future."

Professor Rose Anne Kenny, Professor of Geriatric Medicine at the [School of Medicine](#), Trinity College Dublin and Principal Investigator to [TILDA](#) concluded: "A key challenge facing public health in Ireland will be the burgeoning ageing population and the increasing demands on the middle generation for both financial and informal care which may lead to an increasing negative impact on health. The provision of advice and support for sandwich generation women on how to plan, financially, and otherwise, for dual caring in the future may offset some of these negative effects on health."

The full report can be accessed here: <http://www.tcd.ie/tilda/publications/reports>

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For media queries please contact:

Yolanda Kennedy, Press Officer for the Faculty of Health Sciences, Trinity College Dublin at yokenned@tcd.ie or tel: +353 896 3551

Dr Christine McGarrigle, Epidemiology Research Fellow, The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), Trinity College Dublin at christine.mcgarrigle@tcd.ie or tel: 01 896 4067