

Unveiling the Diversity: Exploring the Multi-Generational Sandwich Generation in Latin America

Lía Carnes Borrajo, *El Colegio de México*

Ana Fidelia Aparicio Trejo, *El Colegio de México*

Extended abstract

The concept of the sandwich generation has been employed to comprehend the challenges and responsibilities confronting middle-aged adults who, positioned between two generations, must concurrently address the requirements of caring for both children and elderly family members (Miller, 1981; DeRigne & Ferrante, 2012). Academic literature on this topic underscores that the caregiving demands in such households stem from shifts in fertility rates, life expectancy, and the average age at first childbirth. These shifts are characteristic of industrialized societies, fostering the coexistence and overlap of three or four generations.

While there isn't a single universally accepted definition for the sandwich generation, it is generally characterized as a demographic group, predominantly comprising women between the ages of 40 and 60, who are active in the labor market and face the dual responsibilities of caring for their children while also tending to the caregiving needs of their elderly parents. Research focused on this phenomenon has delved into the consequences of these multifaceted caregiving roles on the physical and mental well-being of women in the sandwich generation, as well as their time allocation and the gender disparities in these responsibilities (Chassin et al, 2010; DeRigne & Ferrante, 2012).

Demographically, the prevalence of this phenomenon has been examined as a result of the ongoing demographic transition, with microsimulation techniques employed to comprehend both global trends and regional variations (de Lima, Tomás & Queiroz, 2015; Alburez-Gutierrez, Mason & Zagheni, 2021).

Recent studies, particularly those conducted by Alburez-Gutierrez et al. (2021), underscore the necessity for a more in-depth examination of the sandwich generation in Global South countries. These studies highlight several key considerations. Firstly, it is observed that most research on this topic is rooted in demographic trends in high-income countries with more robust welfare systems. However, this might not accurately represent the challenges faced in Global South nations. Secondly, while global projections indicate a reduction in the number of individuals falling into the sandwich generation category in the coming decades, regional disparities suggest that this decrease may not be as pronounced in some Global South countries, and in certain cases, there might even be an increase. Lastly, it is salient that grandparents are gaining significance within these caregiving configurations. This is due to their increasing involvement in the care of young children and the longer life expectancy, which results in them providing care to their own parents while simultaneously living with their grandchildren.

The demographic transition in Latin America exhibits distinct features compared to high-income countries, characterized by a delayed yet more rapid progression, along with the persistence of early fertility (Rosero-Bixby, 2011; Miró, 2003). Furthermore, family and

residential structures in the region display unique characteristics, including a higher prevalence of intergenerational co-residence (Rosero-Bixby, 2011) and a greater degree of diversity and complexity in family systems (Cienfuegos, 2014; Arriagada, 2017). These factors contribute to the presence of diverse multi-generational living arrangements within Latin American households. Moreover, the region is marked by significant heterogeneity, both between different countries and within them among various social groups.

This complexity gives rise to intricate multi-generational caregiving arrangements that call for a more expansive conceptualization of the sandwich generation. To achieve this, it is imperative to consider various facets of Latin American family and residential dynamics that have thus far received limited attention in international discussions on the sandwich generation, despite being recognized in broader demographic literature.

These aspects encompass the implications of increased life expectancy, where grandparents find themselves concurrently caring for both their grandchildren and their own parents. Nevertheless, further research is warranted to comprehend how early fertility, a distinctive trait of Latin America, leads to relatively young grandparents, who may face prolonged periods of simultaneous caregiving. Moreover, there remains a knowledge gap regarding how early fertility, including teenage pregnancies, results in the coexistence of young children, adolescents, young adults, and older individuals within the same family or household. This situation places teenagers – not only adults – in situations where they must navigate caregiving responsibilities for their own children or younger siblings while residing with grandparents or great-grandparents.

Considering these circumstances, it becomes essential to explore a wider spectrum of age groups, kinship relationships, and residential configurations, which could result in a significantly more diverse array of sandwich households. It is crucial to acknowledge that, in contrast to the Global North, Latin America is characterized by less developed care and social welfare systems, influenced by deeply ingrained gender stereotypes that disproportionately burden women with caregiving responsibilities (Aguirre et al, 2014; Batthyány, 2015). We contend that by recognizing these specific factors, we can introduce additional dimensions to the current understanding of global trends in the sandwich generation phenomenon.

Hence, our objective is to delineate the diversity inherent in sandwich households and the intricate multi-generational arrangements and caregiving exchanges prevalent in Latin America. To accomplish this, we examine data from time-use surveys conducted in three Latin American countries: Colombia, Mexico, and Uruguay. These surveys offer a valuable opportunity to identify the multifaceted configurations of the sandwich phenomenon within the region. This approach circumvents the common restriction of the concept to specific age groups, kinship relationships, or household types that may be more typical of demographic patterns in the Global North. The selected Latin American countries are chosen to represent at least a portion of the diversity found within the region.

The proposed analysis relies on available statistical data concerning time use in the three respective countries. In Colombia, the National Time Use Survey (ENUT) was carried out in 2020-2021, encompassing the entire nation and offering representation of both urban centers and remote rural areas. The survey sampled 49,519 households, conducting interviews with individuals aged 10 and older, with a reference period set as the previous day. In Mexico, the

National Time Use Survey (ENUT) from 2019 covered the entire country, providing a breakdown of rural-urban areas and regions. This survey was directed at the population aged 12 and older, with a sample size comprising 26,631 households and 71,404 individuals. The reference period for this survey was set as the week preceding the interview. In Uruguay, the Time Use and Unpaid Work Survey (EUT) was conducted between 2021 and 2022 in localities with 50,000 inhabitants or more. The reference period for this survey was the day before the interview, and it involved a sample of 2,986 households and 6,121 individuals aged 15 and older.

All three surveys employ a consistent set of activities as their data collection instrument. This enables the recording of time, measured in hours and minutes, dedicated to unpaid caregiving for both children and elderly individuals who require assistance.

To characterize the sandwich generation in the three chosen Latin American countries, a descriptive analysis based on the time-use reports will be undertaken. This analysis adheres to a comprehensive definition of the sandwich concept, signifying that an individual is concurrently providing care for individuals from different generations. This definition does not impose restrictions based on the caregiver's age, the kinship relationships, or the age of the care recipients.

The demographic characterization of individuals involved in multi-generational caregiving will involve the construction of a fictional cohort in each country. This approach will enable the examination of variations by gender, age, and other pertinent demographic variables of the caregivers. Furthermore, we will develop a typology of sandwich individuals that links these demographic traits to family or co-residential arrangements. To make meaningful cross-country comparisons, we will consider differences in the demographic transition process, family systems, and the social organization of care within each country.

We anticipate discovering a spectrum of profiles among individuals engaged in multi-generational caregiving. This diversity will lend support to the notion that a more nuanced understanding of the concept of the sandwich generation is required within the Latin American context. Our main hypothesis suggests that multi-generational caregiving predominantly involves women, but they span various age groups, extending beyond middle-aged women aged 40 to 60. Additionally, caregiving is not solely confined to their children and parents or in-laws; instead, it exhibits a wider range of kinship relationships. Furthermore, we propose that there is variability in the residential arrangements of sandwich individuals, with extended households where at least three generations co-reside being the prevailing arrangement.

We believe that the variations in the predominant types of the sandwich generation across the studied countries will be closely linked to the timing of each country's demographic transition and the distinctive patterns in the most common residential arrangements in each case.

Bibliographic references

- Aguirre, R., Batthyány, K., Genta, N., & Perrotta, V. (2014). Los cuidados en la agenda de investigación y en las políticas públicas en Uruguay. *Íconos: Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, (50), 43-60.
- Alburez-Gutierrez, D., Mason, C., & Zagheni, E. (2021). The “sandwich generation” revisited: Global demographic drivers of care time demands. *Population and Development Review*, 47(4), 997-1023.
- Arriagada, I. (2017). Familias y hogares en América Latina. En J. Nájera, B. García, & E. Pacheco (Eds.), *Hogares y trabajadores en México en el siglo XXI* (pp. 25-70). El Colegio de México.
- Batthyány, K. (2015). Las políticas y el cuidado en América Latina: una mirada a las experiencias regionales.
- Chassin, L., Macy, J. T., Seo, D. C., Presson, C. C., & Sherman, S. J. (2010). The association between membership in the sandwich generation and health behaviors: A longitudinal study. *Journal of applied developmental psychology*, 31(1), 38-46.
- Cienfuegos, J. (2014). Tendencias familiares en América Latina: diferencias y entrelazamientos. *Notas de Población*, 99, 11-37.
- de Lima, E. E. C., Tomás, M. C., & Queiroz, B. L. (2015). The sandwich generation in Brazil: demographic determinants and implications. *Revista Latinoamericana de Población*, 9(16), 59-73.
- DeRigne, L., & Ferrante, S. (2012). The sandwich generation: A review of the literature. *Florida Public Health Review*, 9(1), 12.
- Miller, D. A. (1981). The ‘sandwich’ generation: Adult children of the aging. *Social Work*, 26(5), 419-423.
- Miró, C. (2003). Transición demográfica y envejecimiento demográfico. *Papeles de Población*, 35, 9-28.
- Rosero-Bixby, L. (2011). Generational Transfers and Population Aging in Latin America. *Population and Development Review*, 37, 143-157.