

Examining unpaid care work of women in the sandwich generation:

Pathways towards social protection and wellbeing

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Drawing from feminist standpoint epistemology and Kabeer's Social Relations Approach, this research is anchored on three critical points. First, it claims that women are authentic sources of knowledge that aid in the understanding of society. Second, it asserts that, as owners of their narratives, women in the sandwich generation bring along with them abundant and solid resources that contain both their dominant and subordinated views and persona in providing unpaid care. Lastly, it treats women's experiences not only as instruments for understanding how society operates but more importantly as dynamic vehicles for reorganizing and changing society's structure and workings. The situation of seven low-income urban women in the sandwich generation shows a major confluence of class, gender, age, and other identities. In terms of current policies, the single-determinant approach focusing only on one aspect of social protection has largely ignored individual differences and other identities thus limiting our understanding of how the world of women in the sandwich generation revolves and functions around their triple roles.

Keywords: Unpaid care work, sandwich generation, social protection, women's well-being, intersectionality, feminist epistemology

Unpaid care work as a gender issue

According to the United Nations Development Program (2019), women's heavy burden of unpaid care work is one of the most glaring structural barriers to women's economic empowerment. In both rural and urban areas, women's use of their time for unpaid care prohibits them from regularly contributing economically to their household, partaking in political, social, and community matters, and attending to personal care and leisure (Karimli et al., 2016).

Unpaid care is largely unappreciated and undervalued because it is generally found within the ordinariness of daily living of women and girls, and translated in routine household chores such as cooking, cleaning, doing

the laundry, and taking care of children, older adults, and sick members of the family (Antonopoulos, 2009; Faith & Blackden, 2009; Folbre, 1995; ILO, 1999; Karimli et al., 2016; Ofreneo, 2005).

Time and energy are requisites in accomplishing unpaid care work. Across the globe, 76.2 % of the total hours of unpaid care work is rendered by women. This is three times more than the time spent by men on domestic work. In Asia and the Pacific, the figure reaches 80 % (ILO, 2018). The McKinsey Global Institute (2015) approximated, using conservative measures, that “unpaid work being undertaken by women today amounts to as much as \$10 trillion of output per year, roughly equivalent to 13 percent of global GDP” (p.2).

While unpaid care has economic value, it is not included in the System of National Accounts (ActionAid, 2016; ADB, 2015; Chopra, 2014; Eyben, 2013; Ferrant, Pesando & Nowacka, 2014). According to Antonopoulos (2009), women have been providing a “systematic transfer of hidden subsidies to the rest of the economy that go unrecognized, imposing a systematic time-tax on women throughout their life cycle” (p.2). Hence, unpaid care is considered abusive of women.

While unpaid care is willingly and freely performed by mothers, wives, sisters, grandmothers, and aunts, it bears noting that not all of them belong to multi-generation households where they simultaneously look after the needs and wellbeing of the younger and the older generations. Situated in the middle of two generations, such women are known as the “sandwich generation,” a term which had its origins in the United States (Brody, 1981; DeRigne & Ferrente, 2012; Economic Intelligence Unit, 2010; Miller, 1981). This unique familial position is found to be a product of a coalescence of several factors related to women’s increasing educational and abundant economic opportunities that result in the delay of childbearing to a later age as well as the effects of modern medical science in lengthening the life span of people. With the evolving participation of women in the public sphere and as they strive to balance their familial and occupational responsibilities, childcare and eldercare have increasingly become legitimate personal and workplace concerns (DeRigne & Ferrente, 2012; EIU, 2010; Pierret, 2006), and have been regarded as critical public issues (Marks, 1998).

The dominant discourse about the sandwich generation in the last four decades has centered on middle class women in the formal economy from the Global North. The debate surrounding the participation of women in the labor force and its links to care work spurred specific public

and private policy formulations in the form of care services, subsidies to avail of paid care workers and other basic services, as well as labor market interventions such as maternity protection, parental leaves, and setting a prescribed period of time for paid work (EIU, 2010; Jankowski, 2011; Wagner, 2003).

Invisibility of care work

Like in other parts of the world, unpaid care in the Philippines is largely done by women and girls, and subsumed in their daily routine. With the assumption that unpaid care and domestic work will always be freely available in Filipino homes and communities, it has remained unaccounted for in policymaking and program formulations. Take for example Republic Act 9710, “An Act Providing the Magna Carta of Women (MCW)” which lacks specific provisions on care. According to Durano (2014), despite being celebrated as a groundbreaking law that provides a comprehensive legal framework directly anchored on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Magna Carta of Women (MCW) fell short on many counts. Apart from excluding care, it failed to recognize culturally ascribed roles of women as “housewife and mother” (Durano, 2014, p.2). It also lacks provision on gender division of labor and provided less attention to personal choice and other goals that women value. As a legally binding developmental framework, it is ironic that the MCW does not provide developmental indicators necessary in determining the extent of women’s advancement. With these shortcomings, fundamental questions remain as to how the MCW would address women’s marginalization and discrimination, how directions are set in devising strategies to liberate women from domestication and subordination, and how unpaid care of Filipino women in general and women in the sandwich generation in particular will be recognized, reduced, and redistributed.

Despite theoretical advances and policy advocacy on care work, efforts have not really created a dent as policymakers continue to demonstrate a lack of understanding of the inextricable relationship of care work—both paid and unpaid—to economic development and wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities. Likewise, the lack of technical know-how in dealing with issues of the care economy has resulted in the invisibility of care in every stage and every level of development programs (Chopra, Kelbert, & Iyer, 2013).

Amidst the rich literature that highlights the challenges of and the solutions undertaken for women in the sandwich generation in the West

and other countries in Asia, the phenomenon remains unexplored in the Philippines (Tongson, 2018). The lack of a local term and the absence of data or information about it in leading government agencies such as the Philippine Commission on Women, the Philippine Statistics Authority, and the Philippine Commission on Population are indicative of the invisibility of this unique familial position.

With the mixture of factors including the twin effects of high birth rate and low mortality rate, and Filipino families being closely knit and primarily responsible for the biological maintenance and provision of emotional security, and kinship loyalties (Chan, 1992; Medina, 2001), the presence of women in the sandwich generation will most likely have a steady presence. In a patriarchal society where socially-imposed gender relations have become ingrained, the issues surrounding unpaid care have the potential of being ignored.

“Being sandwiched” (EIU, 2010) provide an incomplete description of women in the sandwich generation. For most urban poor women in the informal economy, mere access to current social services and benefits seems inadequate to ease their caring burdens. Tongson (2018) cited the complexities of their situation in relation to poverty, deprivation, violence against women (VAW), and intersectionality, which are largely absent in Western studies on the sandwich generation.

While the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) in 2011 recognized that “women face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination such as women in poverty, women with disabilities, indigenous and Muslim women, women living in geographically inaccessible areas, and lesbian, bisexual and transgender women” (p. 164), it is silent about the wellbeing of and social protection for women in the sandwich generation.

The Social Development Committee of the NEDA defines social protection as:

policies and programs that seek to reduce poverty and vulnerability to risks and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalized by promoting and protecting livelihood and employment, protecting against hazards and sudden loss of income, and improving people’s capacity to manage risks. (SDC Resolution No.1, 2007)

On the other hand, wellbeing integrates various aspects of daily living—social, physical, emotional, and economic—resulting in affirmative outcomes expressed in how people think and feel about themselves and their lives. With this premise, understanding wellbeing is hinged on the recognition of its experiential dimensions translated into good living conditions, good relationship qualities, realization of their potentials, and overall satisfaction with life (Anand, 2016; Devereux & McGregor, 2014). Earlier, McGregor and Summer (2010) argued that the aspiration to attain wellbeing is anchored on the recognition that wellbeing is related to our understanding of poverty as multi-dimensional. Hence, the attainment of wellbeing must take into consideration complementary achievements in terms of material, relational, and subjective dimensions.

Unpaid care is both an issue of women and a development concern. The sandwich generation must be understood and analyzed in the context of the under-fulfillment of women's rights, lack of social protection, and the impacts of gender division of labor on their wellbeing (Tongson, 2018).

Urban poverty and women in the sandwich generation

All of these make the call more urgent to recognize the needs and interests of women in the sandwich generation especially those living in urban areas where economic, social, political, and institutional gaps and disparities are more visible compared to rural areas. As poverty takes an urban character, the urban poor especially women suffer heavily from structural poverty, which makes them more vulnerable to uneven economic and social development processes, marginalization, abuses and violence (Mathur, 2014; Brillantes, 1993; Holmes & Jones, 2013; Tacoli, 2012). In reality, many Filipino women do not have the resources and influence to access quality social services and social protection for themselves and their families (Holmes & Jones, 2013; Ofreneo, 2005; Tongson, 2018).

This article highlights the women's stories found in the author's earlier dissertation. It tackles how the unique position of women in the sandwich generation in the National Capital Region (NCR) has contributed to or restricted their growth and potential as women. It also recognizes that unpaid care work of Filipino women in the sandwich generation is exacerbated by insufficient social protection and inadequate social services. As one of the initial attempts to understand the consequences of unpaid care performed by low-income urban women in sandwich generation households, the study endeavors to conceptually reframe their issues using gender and development perspectives.

Framing gender inequalities

Kabeer's Social Relations Approach (SRA) aims to analyze gender inequalities in relation to the allocation of resources, responsibilities, and power as well as the relationships between people, their relationships to resources and activities, and how they are negotiated and altered through the four key institutional sites—state, market, community, and family or kinship (Kabeer, 1994; Kabeer & Subramanian, 1996).

Gender, class, race, and ethnicity are within the realm of social relations. They do not operate on their own “but are products of ways in which institutions are organized and reconstituted over time” (Kabeer & Subramanian, 1996, p. 25). While institutions influence and reinforce each other, social relations are not permanent as changes in a key institution can bring about modifications in the control over resources and positions. Kabeer (1994) noted that examining a particular institution would reveal the contours and processes of gender and class inequalities shaped by the interplay of the five interrelated dimensions (rules, resources, activities, people, and power) present in each institution. These dimensions are critical elements in the analysis of gender and class disparities.

Guided by the SRA, the study hopes to obtain a richer understanding of how social differences and inequalities in roles, responsibilities, claims, and power are produced and reproduced in multi-generation households exposing gendered beliefs about unpaid care of women in the sandwich generation as well as their particular vulnerabilities and sufferings that limit their choices and freedom. Working from an appreciation of the complexity of unequal social relations, SRA's analysis looks beyond the household or family level. By bringing in the community, the market, and the state, the study captures the complexity of gender-power relations, the gendered nature of institutions, and the interaction between policies and practices related to unpaid care at different institutional sites.

Understanding the plight of women in the sandwich generation also requires unveiling where gender, class, age, and other identities overlap in their everyday life. This also demands unmasking where various sources of power and exclusion originate and intersect. Including intersectionality in the framework of the study on women in the sandwich generation “highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 124). As a critical feminist tool for uncovering the invisible in women's diverse experiences, intersectionality is a lens through which unpaid care

of women in the sandwich generation could be thoroughly examined.

Combining SRA with intersectionality provides a perspective that views unpaid care primarily in terms of gender inequality and social control of women in the sandwich generation. Within the dominant institutional arrangements, social power creates the stereotypical images of women as care providers. By using SRA and intersectionality, the study argues for the need to restructure the fragmented view of Philippine society towards unpaid care of women in the sandwich generation. Based on their specific and unique situation and needs, more responsive policies and programs can be crafted to ensure adequate social protection and the attainment of wellbeing of women in the sandwich generation.

Research Methodology

The study is guided by the principles of feminist standpoint epistemology, which claims that those who are immersed in the situation have the epistemic privilege to talk about their multiple realities and contribute to knowledge generation (Brooks, 2014; Guerrero, 2002; Harding, 1987). By documenting the experiences of low-income urban women in the sandwich generation, the hidden layers of their unrecognized issues begin to unfold. Feminist standpoint epistemology provides spaces for grounded knowledge generation that can spur heightened consciousness and empowered women (Barrameda, 2012; Brooks, 2014; Guerrero, 2002; Verceles, 2014).

For the case studies, seven low-income women in the sandwich generation were included—ages 30 to 59 years old, residing in Quezon City, and with a monthly family income of PhP 31, 650.00 and below (as suggested by Albert, Gaspar, & Raymundo, 2015). To provide diverse perspectives in terms of gender and class, the study looked into the experiences of a Person With Disability (PWD), a member of the LGBTQ sector, and a solo parent. All participants in the case study were interviewed in person according to the time and venue they had specified.

Quezon City was deemed to be a fertile ground to conduct the seven case studies. With 2.94 million residents, it has the largest population among the 16 Highly Urbanized Cities in the National Capital Region. Five of the most populous barangays in the NCR are found here (PSA, 2016). While it is considered one of the richest cities in the country in terms of income with the comforts of modern living and posh subdivisions, many barangays in the city are considered the poorest of the poor by the National Anti-Poverty Commission.

Feminist Ethics

As a feminist research, the study adhered to the non-hierarchical relationship between the participants and the researcher, who remained sensitive to their needs and cues. The participants knew that they could ask questions and withdraw their participation in the research. Their written permission was obtained for a series of recorded interviews. While their names have been changed in order to protect their identities, the actual circumstances, places, and events adhere to the truthfulness of their lived realities.

Case write-ups (in Filipino) were shown to each participant during story validation. As the owners of the story, they were free to edit or revise the write-up as appropriate. Even after the data collection was completed, contact through text messages and occasional home visits was maintained.

Research findings

1. Profile of the women-participants

All of the women who participated in the study are residents of Quezon City. Three participants (Betty, Malen, and Melba) have secure tenure of housing, three are informal settlers (Melinda, Emily, and Athena), and Daisy is renting. As the primary providers, Emily and Daisy consider themselves household heads. The rest regard their husbands as household heads because of the notion that it is a man's role.

Three participants are in their mid-50s, two are in their mid-40s, one is in her late 40s, and one is in her early 30s. The mean age is 46 years.

Betty, Malen, and Daisy are married. Emily is widowed, Melba is separated, and Melinda is a common-law wife. Betty is the only PWD among the participants. Athena, the only single among them, and the only LGBT. Athena, Emily, and Melba are solo parents.

Betty, Melba, and Daisy have college degrees while Melinda and Malen are high school graduates. Emily and Athena have reached second year college and third year high school, respectively. The mean number of years for their schooling is 12 years.

2. Hearing the Voices of Women: Experiences with Unpaid Care

The discourse on unpaid care of women in the sandwich generation must be informed of the women's own narratives. Care work entails specific

skills and knowledge, mostly done by women in different settings and stages of daily living. Often, care work remains unrecognized and uncontested. This is especially true among women in the sandwich generation. For the study participants, their particular vulnerabilities as care providers became the focus of inquiry.

Patriarchal structure and the traditional mold

The burden of unpaid care work falls squarely on these women's shoulders for the sheer belief that it is the natural and the biological function of women to become the primary providers of care for their families. Statements like "we are women," "it is really for women," and "for women only" provide evidence to this claim. Malen's statements, "men do not have the patience for caring duties" and Betty's account, "your husband will only take a bath and get dressed," are clear indications of the hierarchical structure where men cannot do more around the house. This same belief convinced them that nobody except them could take the responsibility of looking after the older persons in the family.

Except for Athena, who is single, all of the participants followed the traditional mold of moving into their husbands' or partners' homes when they decided to start a family. Take a look at Betty's sharing.

My husband is an only child. When we got married, we stayed at my in-laws' house for eight years... We did not have a choice... When Mother died, Father no longer had another family. You see, when your husband is an only child, you have to go with him. There is no choice even if you do not want to. - Case 5 – Betty

Growing up in the midst of sexual stereotyping is very much evident in the answers of the participants. For example, Emily explained that her son's negative attitude towards household chores was acquired from seeing his late father not doing them. Washing his own clothes and occasionally taking his sister with disability to school are the only tasks he is willing to do. As the only male in the family, he is not required to have his share of cleaning, cooking meals, and washing the dishes as these are believed to be for his sisters only. With Emily's tolerance and different treatment for her son, her daughters have also completely accepted that their only brother is spared from household chores simply because he is a male, "*lalaki kasi*."

The same scenario and beliefs are also present in Melinda's household, where men are free to do whatever pleases them, like playing

basketball and hanging around with friends at any time of the day. Their primary and only responsibility for the family is to earn a living that entitles them to spending a longer time for recreation. Her family prepared Melinda for her future role as wife and mother by teaching her all the household chores. She shared:

Girls are taught how to cook and wash clothes, and clean the house. What a shame it would be if you go and live in another house and you do not know how to do household chores. You need to learn how to clean, cook so that you would not be ashamed. For example, you get married. What a shame if your husband would be the one to do the laundry, do the household chores. You are the woman. You have to take care of the house. – Case 1 - Melinda

While Malen agrees that some men have the ability and are willing to render care work, she believes that women are more forbearing because it is natural for them to do so. She explained:

It is because we are women. Come to think of it, men can also do what we do...but they lack the patience. They cannot be patient. Even if I were tired, I would still do what needs to be done. – Case 3 - Malen

Because of the preconceived notions regarding how girls and boys should behave, Athena's family resented that she did not conform with the heteronormative culture. To keep away from her lesbian friends in high school, whom her family considered a bad influence, she stopped schooling. She grew up hearing that lesbians and gays are sinners and will be punished with eternal damnation. Belonging to a closely-knit family and with much coaxing from her mother, sister, and religious advisers, Athena denounced being a lesbian. Then she started dating a man who became the father of her daughter. Despite calling her "*disgrasyada*" (a derogatory term assigned to unmarried pregnant women), her family considered her pregnancy a blessing in disguise necessary for her reformation. To consummate her transformation and to ensure that she would be a "true woman" and a good mother, her family kept her at home and assigned her to take care of their sickly elderly parents and to take care of her only daughter full time. The link between her religion and sexuality became more apparent when she shared, "if I belonged to another religion or sect, perhaps I would still be a lesbian." Despite wearing a heterosexual front, she admitted that she is still attracted to women with angelic faces.

24 hours daily: the intensity of familial and employment responsibilities

The narratives of women in the sandwich generation provide temporal accounts of when and how they perform economic activity and domestic work on a daily basis, showing how they bear intense familial and employment responsibilities. Compared to other members of the family, an analysis of their typical day reveals how they disproportionately bear the burden of unpaid care work. While both male and female children and older adults perform household chores, the data show that daughters and other female family members are given the bigger share of responsibilities at home. Husbands or male partners render very limited unpaid care work and usually only those that they like to do during their free time. While the males have their share of domestic work while the women are away, the responsibility immediately falls back on the latter once they arrive at home.

During weekdays and depending on whether they have full day employment or part time employment, the women spend almost the whole day running their households and earning a living. While all of them are able to sleep for an average of six hours a day, they have only a small fraction of time for grooming, eating, and recreating or relaxing. During weekends, they devote the whole day to doing the laundry, general house cleaning, and ironing clothes and marketing.

For those with full-day employment, Emily, Malen, Betty, Melba, and Daisy devote between eight to 12 hours to productive work during weekdays.

Emily works from Monday to Saturday as a cashier in a small eatery, which serves affordable and hot meals where she is paid Php 6,000.00. On the other hand, Malen, is a stay-out domestic worker in an exclusive village and takes her day off every Thursday and Sunday. Both women receive 13th month pay every December. However, Emily is not provided with social security and PhilHealth. While Malen's employer pays her monthly contribution to the Social Security System, the amount is lower than what is required.

Betty is a government employee with a permanent position, who supervises PWDs in disinfecting plane headsets for a large airline company. She works from Monday to Saturday and often goes home late to meet the deadline. Meanwhile, Daisy works as an administrative staff with a permanent position at the Human Resource and Development Section of a huge government office and earns PhP 18,000.00. In contrast, Malen is a government employee categorized as "Job Order" with no chances of being

given a permanent position. While Betty and Daisy receive all the benefits specified in the law, Malen does not have any.

Even at work, these women never stopped attending to their multi-generation households. Betty purchased two units of wireless landline so she could check on her visually-impaired stepfather-in-law, or he could call her up whenever he needs something. Malen and Melba are able to take their children to their respective workplaces if no one else is available to care for them at home, but they are concerned about how the children's presence would affect their daily output. Daisy, on the other hand, goes home for lunch to check on her mother.

As women who have part-time employment, Melinda and Athena spend around nine hours a day for reproductive work. In terms of productive work, Melinda, a laundrywoman, spends four and a half hours every Tuesday only for work for which she receives Php 500.00. Meanwhile, Athena spends four and half hours, seven days a week to take care of her neighbor's three dogs. She earns PHP250.00 a week for her services. They do not receive any social security, health insurance or any other benefits from their employers. The two women allot around six and a half to eight hours a day for sleeping and one hour each for recreation and self-care.

Behind these women's use of time, their accounts of unpaid care divulged their ability to perform several tasks simultaneously like cooking and cleaning the house, doing the laundry while waiting for the water container to be filled, supervising both the older and the younger generations, and providing instructions to school-aged children while getting dressed for work, among others.

3. Compounding burdens and sufferings as contributors to vulnerabilities

All these women in the sandwich generation who participated in the study reported experiencing a host of interrelated burdens and sufferings brought on by their exhausting daily schedules, thus wearing them out. While it is necessary to identify the physical, emotional, mental, and financial challenges they face, it is equally important to recognize that each burden contributes to other burdens.

Living on a measly income

With an average family size of six and low salaries, the participants are constantly subjected to financial difficulties. With the exception of Betty

and Daisy, the participants have insecure employment thus forcing them to accept low-paying jobs that have pushed them further into poverty, abuse, and exploitation. The low regard of Athena's employer for her services of feeding his pets and cleaning their filthy cages is an indication of her miserable and desperate status. Meanwhile, Melba complained that age discrimination is commonly practiced in the private sector. In her mid-40s, she did not have much choice but to accept a job offer with no chances for permanency and with a no-work-no-pay policy. These women have very little or no benefits and privileges, such as sick and vacation leaves with pay, social security, health insurance, and retirement package from their employers. Seeing the importance of preparing for old age, Melba shoulders her monthly social security and PhilHealth contributions, while Betty pays for a funeral plan monthly.

Although members of their families contribute to the weekly budget, not all of them give consistently because work is irregular and most of them are affected by the End of Contract Policy or "endo." Except for Betty whose husband has regular employment, these women are always burdened about where to get money or the need to skip meals or tighten their belts even more.

Considered the poorest among the seven participants, it is not difficult to see that the incomes of Melinda, Athena, and Emily are not enough for their daily needs. Subjected to constant economic hardships due to low academic achievement, these three women repeatedly mentioned issues about food, "I have experienced not having food for lunch. I think I do not get fat because I am attending to many things, I feed them, I am also looking after a child." Meanwhile, Athena shared, "It's okay for me to skip meals for as long as my daughter has something to eat."

With their unsecured employment, they lack access to affordable housing loans and formal lending thereby aggravating their abject condition. Athena's and Emily's desires of putting up their own businesses such as a small variety store or a *carinderia* through a loan will be difficult due to their irregular employment status.

Physical burden from beginning to end

With a host of tasks to accomplish during the day, the participants experienced physical sufferings such as changes in appetite and stomachache, dizziness, lack of sleep, muscle tension and pain, and shortness of breath or difficulty breathing. To quote:

Sometimes, I have no appetite because I am tired. –Case 4- Athena

There are some days when I'm already too tired and I suddenly stand up, I feel dizzy. – Case 1 Melinda

I want to sleep, but I have to look after them, especially when my father is in the province. I have to look after my mother, plus my children. – Case 6- Melba

Sometimes my body aches. When this happens, I take a rest even for just a day. Relax. When I have already taken my medicines for muscle pain, it goes away. – Case 3- Malen

All participants reported that doing the laundry is the most tedious task because it requires several steps to accomplish. Cooking is the most mentally demanding because it needs constant thinking about what the family should eat on a daily basis. It becomes more burdensome when the budget for marketing is very limited.

Among the participants, Melinda, Emily, and Athena are the only ones who wash their clothes by hand, which threatens their wellbeing. As Melinda narrated:

We don't have a washing machine; I just use my hands to wash our clothes. A washing machine would only add to our electricity bills. I spend four hours scrubbing the clothes. Plus, water has to be fetched. When I am tired, I have a hard time breathing. When I am doing a lot of things, I forget to eat. I just want to finish the chores right away.
Case 1 – Melinda

Rendering unpaid care work and engaging in economic activities can put the women in the sandwich generation at a disadvantage, as an outcome of a lack of infrastructure, facilities, and equipment at various levels. With the absence of household appliances or the inability to pay for the things that make them work like electricity and water, Melinda, Emily, and Athena consume a lot of time in doing chores manually, resulting in their having less time for attending to personal needs and interests.

Being informal settlers, Emily and Athena do not have a metered water source that provides them with easily accessible, clean, and affordable water. “Nakiki-hose” or using a neighbor’s water hose is their way of collecting water daily. To have some form of control, the meter owners specify only a certain period during the day when their faucets would be turned on and intentionally lower the water pressure. Hence, Athena

spends three hours daily filling up one huge drum and two five-liter bottles for drinking at a cost of PhP250.00 a week. Emily pays PhP500.00 a month for access to her neighbor's irregular and illegal water service. In the long run, this manner of collecting water strains their budget and endangers their health as the water hose tends to get dirty or may have holes where harmful organisms could enter.

Mental health concerns

All the participants are not only confronted with economic and physical burdens. They constantly experience mental burdens, which are largely hidden and unrecognized. Their narratives revealed that they constantly take note of every single thing that their families and employment require, "I should not forget anything," "At night, I think what I need to do the following day," and "I am thinking of a lot of things." Melba uses her lunch break to plan the weekly menu and write her market list, or ensure that her children are not bothering her co-workers when they are in her office. Even in the middle of a meeting and work-related activities, Betty excuses herself to regularly check on her visually impaired stepfather-in-law using her personal wireless landline. Malen has to lead her family in doing household chores, otherwise nothing will be accomplished. Daisy has to create a mental map of everything she has to do in order to meet her office deadlines. Emily has to think of what to cook for dinner while riding the jeepney on her way home.

Because of their insufficient income, all participants reported being stressed about money matters. Melinda, Emily, Athena, and Daisy are the ones most affected by financial concerns, which literally gives them a headache. Daisy said, "I have headaches looking for money." Melinda shared: "Perhaps, if this happened to another family, they would go nuts thinking about where to get their next meal. If I would not do anything, we will not be able to eat." These women have to scour for money even from loan sharks to meet the most basic needs of their huge extended family.

As a mother of two daughters with disability, Emily agonizes tremendously over the future of her children. Thinking about who will take care of them in the future causes her mental stress.

Extreme and mixed emotions

Apart from mental burdens, the reality of life within the families of these women is often a paradoxical mixture of love, compassion, and

support fused with hostility, domination, and to some extent cruelty and abuse. The narratives of Melinda, Emily, Athena, Betty, and Daisy provided glimpses of their love-hate relationships in the family. Emily and Betty experience emotional anguish whenever their children and their in-laws clash because of seemingly irreconcilable needs and interests. Caught in the middle of two conflicting views, they are obligated to mediate and sometimes take sides.

It pains Athena knowing that she is not her parents' favorite because of her sexual orientation. She noted that this is manifested when the responsibility of taking care of her sister's son by another man was given to her, so that her sister could marry and start a new family. This placed her in the sandwich generation even before her own daughter was born. But when she gave birth, no one among her relatives helped her in caring for her daughter so that she could find a job.

Emily's accounts contain mentions of harsh treatment by her late partner's relatives, especially her mother-in-law who lives with her. This became more obvious with her partner's passing that resulted in her becoming more vulnerable to verbal and psychological abuse. Her status as a solo parent and a widow forced her to make choices that have an enduring impact on her wellbeing. Saddled with enormous mental, economic, emotional, and physical burdens to support her mother-in-law and two children with disability, and the pressure of dealing with her partner's relatives, she lamented how overextended and unappreciated she is. Overwhelmed with emotions, she sometimes cries as a form of release.

The lived experiences of women in the sandwich generation show that caring for multi-generation households creates an immense impact on their wellbeing as they undergo a myriad of sufferings, which are magnified by a lack of infrastructure, facilities, and equipment at various levels of society. In the community and in the workplace, the absence of day care centers for children and older adults has restricted the mobility of these women to a great extent. Athena, for example, has not been able to participate in the labor market because of her caring responsibilities to her parents and only daughter. She has to rely financially on her older sister and, hence, accepted the offer as a caretaker of dogs. As a result, she is compelled to follow her sister's every wish and request, and endure her family's verbal abuse and innuendos about gays and lesbians. In the case of Emily, the lack of facilities and insufficient state support for PWDs and their families have caused her two daughters to often skip classes, thus increasing their vulnerability to abuse and exploitation.

These women's narratives indicated their resourcefulness, forbearance, and resiliency. Behind their heroic acts of caring for their families and communities, they tend to forego things that they need or want for themselves as they always think that other things are more important, so their own wants can be shelved for future reference. In the process of sorting out what is more important or less important, they forget their personal interests and needs.

While caring for family members is good, it is necessary that women in the sandwich generation recognize that they too need care and attention.

Analysis: Gendered perspectives of unpaid care

Gendered vulnerability is an outcome of deeply ingrained patterns of sexual inequality and discrimination (Connelly et al, 2000; Kabeer, 1994; Reeves & Baden, 2000). An analysis of the ways institutions govern and interact informs why women in the sandwich generation experience oppression and discrimination at all levels—household, community, market, and the state. SRA posits that institutions are not ideologically neutral, nor are they separate from each other. While the movement in one institutional setting results in a domino effect, other institutional contexts may reflect different gender policies. These are shaped by the extent to which they accept and respond to gender issues. Hence, it is necessary to understand that women's subordinated status is largely shaped by a social system in which their position is defined primarily by the family as an institution that promotes private enterprise and protects private property. As a result, the means and organization of production in society has changed dramatically. The rise of patriarchy and male dominance within the family and the reorganization of the community and the market into an unequal and hierarchical division of labor have weakened the position of women in both private and public spheres. Consequently, the state follows the separation of men and women (Eviota, 1995; Guerrero, 1999).

Intersectionality also facilitates the understanding of why women in general and women in the sandwich generation in particular have become vulnerable to poverty, sufferings, abuse, and discrimination. Cultural patterns are not only interrelated but are bound together and influenced by intersectional systems of society (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008).

Taking into consideration the identity markers that women in the sandwich generation possess—such as being a household head, a solo

parent, an LGBT, a PWD, or a widow—provides the lens for examining how identities are related to each other. The type of employment, tenure of housing, educational attainment, and socio-economic status are also regarded as contributing to their vulnerabilities and sufferings.

Poor women like Melinda, Emily, and Athena, who are also informal settlers and engaged in insecure jobs, have experiences of unpaid care work that is different from women like Betty and Daisy who are in permanent government employment with privileges and benefits.

Betty's narratives as a PWD, Athena's as a lesbian and being in the informal economy, and Emily's, Athena's, and Melba's as solo parents provided visibility not only of their marginalized status but the multiple positions they carry in everyday life, as well as the power relations in the long and arduous road towards their recognition as unique sectors of society.

The discourse of unpaid care in multi-generation households offers a discernable loci of gender, class, age, and geographical location. The union among several loci is responsible for their burdens and sufferings as well as their particular vulnerabilities that characterized their lives and how they render unpaid care (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). Taking into consideration their intersectional identities put forward that Betty is not only a PWD but a low-income PWD urban woman in the sandwich generation. In the same manner, Athena is a low-income urban LGBT and a solo parent in the sandwich generation while Daisy is a low-income urban woman in the generation in the formal economy. Understanding intersectionality among women in the sandwich generation underscores that their particular vulnerabilities are not accidental or secondary. Hence, their situations are too dissimilar to be condensed into a single point of view.

Being a PWD, a solo parent, *kasambahay*, or other identities, the diverse voices of women in the sandwich generation must be considered. Their unique familial position in an extended family highlights that they are a distinct group of women. They are different from other women of the same intersectional identities simply because they directly deal simultaneously with the older and the younger generations with distinct needs and interest. With this scenario, these women become even more vulnerable to abuse in a sense that they carry a heavier burden by providing unpaid care twice compared to other women. It bears noting that while many women belong to extended families like they do, they are not considered primary caregivers of the older and the younger generations. In the same breath,

while many women provide unpaid care they are not considered women in the sandwich generation. According to Chopra, Kelbert, and Iyer (2013), women who are providing unpaid care are more vulnerable to poverty and hunger, which emphasizes their deplorable status in the family and in society. The poorest women in this study constantly skip meals in their desire to put the interests of their families before themselves. In the case of Athena and Melinda, poverty has permeated every inch of their being.

The confluence of their identities acts as a harmonizing approach towards social protection and wellbeing of women in the sandwich generation. However, their state of affairs will remain bleak if their plight and concerns remain absent in care work discourse in the Philippines. The union of these identities dictates how the network of relationships among families, individuals, and institutions are fashioned (Kabeer, 1994; Kabeer & Subramanian, 1996). This particular intersection results in an overarching pattern responsible for the construction of their social realities experienced in multiple and overlapping locations (Crenshaw, 1989), which were not present in earlier studies about women in the sandwich generation in industrialized nations (Tongson, 2018).

The lack of a local term, and the apparent surprise or amusement of many individuals, including the participants in this study upon hearing the term sandwich generation for the first time, is indicative of its invisibility in many ways. This also explains that while the initiative toward gender justice and gender equality has attained unprecedented gains for the Philippines in the last decade through favorable and programmatic policy initiatives (Economic Forum, 2016) and the passing of the Magna Carta of Women, the existence of women in the sandwich generation and their valuable contributions have not reached even the consciousness and imagination of many policymakers and development workers. The low regard for these women's unpaid care has resulted in them being denied access to social services and sufficient social protection, which in turn contributed to their lack of representation and participation in various community activities.

In examining the barriers to wellbeing and social protection of women in the sandwich generation, it is crucial to dig below the surface of culturally ascribed roles to identify their fundamental cultural assumptions about caring and lay bare women's strategic gender interests (Kabeer, 1994). By doing so, patterns are revealed indicating not only practical gender needs within the context of caring in poor urban extended families but also strategic gender interests necessary to empower women in the sandwich generation.

Claiming social protection and attaining wellbeing are about demanding adequate care for ALL family members at different stages of the human development from prenatal to old age, and for women in the sandwich generation not to be exploited when providing care. The links of wellbeing and social protection have been well documented as a focus of how development could possibly affect of people more positively. There are various ways to design policies and programs in order for care to be recognized, reduced, and equitably distributed making governments accountable for their implementation (Anand, 2016; Devereux & McGregor, 2014; Eyben, 2013; Karimli, et al, 2016; UNRISD, 2016).

Advocacy efforts must focus on men and women, boys and girls, young and older family members for them to contribute to equitable caring responsibilities in the family and in the community. Social protection and other public and private sector interventions must be coordinated not only towards entitlements such as direct transfers of material resources, safety nets, and social security through national level social insurance and social assistance programs, but also towards a gender transformative approach that curbs suffering and abuse for all women in the sandwich generation. By legitimizing these claims, the acknowledgment of the relationship of these women with the state, market, and others in their communities accentuates the profound aspiration of attaining wellbeing and advancing their rights (Devereux & McGregor, 2014; UN General Assembly, 2009; UNRISD, 2016).

More specifically, recognizing the situation of women in the sandwich generation—as a major junction of class, gender, age, and other identities is related to the adoption the SDGs, the Philippine Government is even more bound to putting in place *“social protection systems and measures for all, including floor, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable”* (SDG 1.3). It must follow the prescribed social security guarantees under the Social Protection Floor Recommendation, 2012 of the ILO, also known as R202. In the East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific, ILO Member States agreed to work on *“nationally defined social protection floor”* for all residents and to create *“higher levels of social security benefits”* (ILO, 2013, p. 17). These are necessary steps in stemming the tide and reversing the longstanding exclusion and invisibility of women in the sandwich and increase their and their households’ ability to combat lifecycle risks especially those brought about by economic, political, and natural disasters.

Recommendations

While the study contributes to the initial understanding of women in the sandwich generation, how far this is specific to other parts of the country is ambiguous. With the small sample size of seven women, further studies should be organized that employ more participants in other urban areas as well as in rural areas with focus on their needs and interest and time- use. Men in the sandwich generation and being in the sandwich generation on the basis of SOGIESC await future research. Likewise, the search for an appropriate local term for the sandwich generation should be conducted.

Efforts should be geared towards the inclusion of unpaid care work of women in the sandwich generation in the System of National Accounts. Finding ways on how to determine its economic value of caring simultaneously for the older and the younger generation is the first step with the end in view of efficiently delivering the most basic social services and a suitable social protection program and facilities for them and their families as claiming social protection and attaining wellbeing are about demanding adequate care for family members at different stages of the life cycle.

Development of legislative and development frameworks and strategies covering women in the sandwich generation should move towards democratizing unpaid care work at all levels of society—household, community, market, and the state. Crafting and implementing social protection policies and programs for them requires sustained and organized multi-sectoral partnerships bringing in the voices of women in the sandwich generation, development workers, feminists, demographers, human rights advocates, and primary government counterparts (both national and local), employers, and civil society, to ensure a comprehensive and participatory policy making, and program planning, implantation, monitoring, and evaluation.

These recommendations will be possible with the articulation of financing strategies necessary for a wide range of social protection schemes for women in the sandwich generation. A deliberate effort to channel public spending at the local and national levels should be done.

Notes:

The original Filipino narratives were translated into English for better presentation. This article is based on the author's dissertation entitled *Potentials and Possibilities for Caring about Caring: The Voices of Low-Income Urban Women in the Sandwich Generation*, for the degree on Doctor of Social Development, College of Social

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