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Older Adults: The “Panini Sandwich” Generation

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Abstract

There are various reasons underlying why older adults find themselves in the role of a caregiver to their adult child, ranging from having a child born with a developmental disability, to having a child who suffers from a long term disability to having an adult child who has been diagnosed with a psychological disorder to raising one’s grandchildren in the absence of their adult children. The caregiving literature focuses almost entirely on care provided to the older adult, rather than by the older adult. Unlike the breadth of literature on these adult children or spouse caregivers, there is a dearth of literature about this cohort and the impact that care provision has on their mental health and well-being. This may be largely due to the lack of a framework for identifying and focusing on the needs of this cohort of caregivers. The only framework to date has focused on the bi-directionality of care when the adult child is at the center of care provision. As older adult caregivers age, they are pressed between their own

physical and emotional aging needs and providing care to their adult children. The conceptualization of caregivers in this cohort as the Panini Sandwich Generation provides the needed lens by which mental health professionals can begin to explore and address the emotional and psychological needs and experiences of older adult caregivers.

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