

The Relationship Between the Sandwich Generation and Early Childhood Moral Development

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to empirically examine the relationship between the role of the sandwich generation and the moral development of early childhood at RA Tunas Cendekia Glenmore. The sandwich generation refers to a group of individuals who experience dual financial and emotional responsibilities, as they are required to care for their aging parents while simultaneously raising children who remain dependent on them. This dual-role strain frequently triggers psychological stress, which has the potential to reduce parental warmth and consistency in parenting practices, thereby influencing children's moral development. Employing a quantitative correlational research design, data were collected from a purposive sample of 60 parents at RA Tunas Cendekia using purposive sampling techniques. Data collection instruments consisted of closed-ended questionnaires based on a Likert scale, and the data were analyzed using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. Statistical analysis yielded a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.43, indicating a moderate or moderately strong correlation

(0.40–0.70) based on Sugiyono's interpretation criteria. These statistical findings demonstrate a significant relationship between the level of parental dual-role strain within sandwich-generation families and the moral development of early childhood. The study concludes that interventions in the form of effective parenting strategies and strong social support systems are essential for sandwich-generation families to maintain the quality of children's moral development during the golden age.

Introduction

The socio-economic dynamics of the modern era require individuals to demonstrate exceptional resilience in coping with various life pressures. One increasingly prevalent social phenomenon in Indonesia is the emergence of the sandwich generation. This term refers to adults who are caught between dual responsibilities, namely fulfilling the financial and emotional needs of their aging parents while simultaneously supporting their children, who remain fully dependent on them. According to projections released by Statistics Indonesia (BPS), the proportion of the productive-age population facing intergenerational dependency continues to increase each year, resulting in compounded physical, psychological, emotional, and financial burdens. Reports from Investopedia further indicate that this prolonged dual burden generates acute emotional stress, economic pressure, and time constraints, all of which systematically undermine individual well-being and the quality of family relationships.

The psychological and economic pressures experienced by parents in sandwich-generation families can significantly affect the quality of parenting practices implemented within the household. Previous literature has established that economic hardship directly contributes to increased parental psychological stress, which subsequently reduces parental warmth, sensitivity, and consistency in child-rearing. The consequences of these pressures are evident in young children's behavioral and emotional development, including increased anxiety, aggressive behavior, poor discipline, and diminished empathy. Early childhood, commonly recognized as the golden age from birth to six years, represents a critical developmental period during which approximately 80% of the adult brain structure is formed. Consequently, external stimulation provided during this stage serves as the primary foundation for cognitive, emotional, social, and, most importantly, moral development. The urgency of moral development is also emphasized in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. However, moral development is not achieved merely through verbal instruction; rather, it requires exemplary behavior, consistent habituation of prosocial conduct, and constructive social interactions within the family environment.

Although parental stress has been extensively examined in previous studies, a critical empirical gap remains within the field of early childhood education regarding how the intersection of multigenerational caregiving responsibilities in sandwich-generation

families specifically constrains parents' capacity to nurture children's moral development. Previous studies have explored various dimensions of child development but have not addressed the intersection between sandwich-generation family dynamics and early childhood moral development.

For instance, Azizah et al. (2024) focused on children's creativity development models, while Akbar (2020) examined instructional structures in early childhood learning. Likewise, Purwanto (2011) proposed general approaches to character education; however, these approaches were developed under the assumption of stable conventional family structures. Therefore, the principal research gap lies in understanding how role overload, resulting from simultaneous financial and emotional burdens in sandwich-generation families, reduces parents' emotional availability in fostering children's moral development. Parents experiencing such pressures are more likely to demonstrate inconsistent parenting practices, thereby hindering the internalization of character values during this crucial developmental stage. Accordingly, this study seeks to systematically address this gap by examining the relationship between sandwich-generation pressures and early childhood moral development, focusing on three primary dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.

This study employed a quantitative research method using a correlational approach to examine whether a relationship exists between the independent variable (the role strain of the sandwich

generation) and the dependent variable (early childhood moral development). The research was conducted over a two-month period, from March to April 2026, at RA Tunas Cendekia, located in Glenmore District, Banyuwangi Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The study population comprised all parents or guardians of students officially enrolled at RA Tunas Cendekia. Using a non-probability purposive sampling technique, a sample of 60 parents meeting the characteristics of the sandwich generation—individuals simultaneously responsible for raising young children while caring for elderly parents—was selected.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative method with a correlational approach to examine whether a relationship exists between the independent variable (the role of sandwich generation strain) and the dependent variable (early childhood moral development). The research was conducted over a two-month period, from March 2026 to April 2026, at RA Tunas Cendekia, located in Glenmore District, Banyuwangi Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The study population comprised all parents or guardians of students who were actively enrolled at RA Tunas Cendekia. Using a non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, a sample of 60 parents who met the characteristics of the sandwich generation was selected. These participants were individuals who simultaneously bore the responsibility of raising young children while also caring for their

elderly parents.

Primary data were collected through the administration of a structured closed-ended questionnaire, supported by non-participant observation and the collection of school administrative documents. The questionnaire items were measured using a four-point Likert scale (Very Often, Often, Rarely, and Never) to capture respondents' perceptions regarding financial burden, emotional–psychological burden, and caregiving time constraints. Meanwhile, the instrument for assessing early childhood moral development was developed by adapting Elliot Turiel's Social Domain Theory and Lickona's Triadic Model of Morality. The instrument measured three domains of moral development—moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral behavior—through 22 behavioral indicators observed in children's behavior at both school and home.

Before hypothesis testing, all collected data were converted into numerical values and tabulated. The data were subsequently subjected to prerequisite assumption tests, including the normality test and the linearity test. The research hypothesis was then tested using the Pearson Product–Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) to determine the direction and strength of the linear relationship between the variables. Statistical significance was evaluated using the conventional alpha level of $p < 0.05$.

Result and Discussions

Statistical analysis in this study was conducted to determine the degree of linear relationship between the sandwich generation role strain (X) and early childhood moral development (Y). The analysis

began by calculating the total questionnaire scores from 60 parent respondents, producing cumulative variance values and cross-products between variables. Based on statistical computations using the covariance matrix and standard deviations derived from the empirical data, the Pearson correlation coefficient was found to be $r = 0.43$, with $p < 0.05$. According to Sugiyono's classification criteria, a correlation coefficient ranging from 0.40 to 0.599 indicates a moderate or fairly strong relationship between the variables under investigation. The final correlation matrix and descriptive statistical values are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Result of Two Variable

Variabel	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sandwich Generation	Early Childhood Moral Development
Sandwich Generation	152.25	13.79	1	2
Early Childhood Moral Development	351,00	25.44	0,43*	1

Note: N = 60. Statistical significance was tested at $p < 0.05$

The empirical findings confirm that the role strain experienced by the sandwich generation has a moderate and statistically significant relationship with early childhood moral development. The Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.43$ indicates that variations in financial pressure, emotional exhaustion, and caregiving time constraints within sandwich-generation families are directly associated with children's

ability to internalize moral values and behavioral norms. When parents experience role overload in simultaneously supporting multiple generations, their capacity to maintain a supportive and nurturing family environment tends to decline. This condition subsequently influences children's developmental outcomes, particularly in the moral domain, including empathy, emotional regulation, and adherence to prosocial rules.

These findings are consistent with William J. Goode's Role Strain Theory, which posits that limitations in individuals' structural resources reduce their ability to fulfill multiple simultaneous role expectations, ultimately leading to psychological exhaustion. Within the context of sandwich-generation families, this psychological fatigue manifests as diminished parental responsiveness and inconsistency in disciplinary practices, which may hinder children's moral reasoning and character formation. These results are further supported by the study conducted by Noviani et al. (2025), which found that economic pressure and excessive dual caregiving responsibilities systematically reduce family subjective well-being while increasing domestic stress. Similarly, Son et al. (2021) demonstrated that elevated levels of household stress decrease parental emotional warmth and consistency—both of which are essential for fostering children's empathy and honesty from an early age. Therefore, balanced family management and the availability of a strong social support system are crucial factors in ensuring that children's moral development is not adversely affected by parental role strain.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the existence of a moderate and statistically significant relationship between sandwich-generation role strain and early childhood moral development at RA Tunas Cendekia Glenmore, as evidenced by the Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.43$. The dual burdens associated with financial pressure, emotional exhaustion, and caregiving time constraints directly influence the stability of the home environment, which serves as the primary setting in which children internalize character values during the golden age of development. High levels of parental role strain may reduce parenting consistency and emotional warmth, both of which are fundamental to fostering moral values such as empathy, justice, and self-discipline in young children.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that early childhood education institutions develop parenting programs and specialized counseling services designed to assist sandwich-generation parents in managing stress and effectively balancing caregiving responsibilities. Furthermore, social institutions and local governments are encouraged to consider implementing social support policies aimed at reducing the economic and psychological burdens experienced by sandwich-generation families. Such initiatives are expected to help preserve and optimize the moral character development of future generations.

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