

The background of the slide is a collage of images. On the left, there is a green vertical bar. The main background shows a woman in a pharmacy aisle, a man in a white cap, and a close-up of hands. A dark blue horizontal bar is positioned above the title.

MEET THE
SANDWICH
GENERATION.

“The Sandwich Generation”: Challenges of Caring for Parents, Children, and Yourself

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“The Sandwich Generation”



- The term describing a generation of people who care for their aging parents while supporting their own children
- Merriam-Webster officially added the term to its dictionary in July 2006
- Tend to be in the 40 to 65 years of age group, BUT.....

Generation, or Situation?

A SITUATION
NOT A
GENERATION.

"Life is mostly sweet (the jelly).
And I'm the peanut butter trying to hold everything
together with my family and my
father's multiple health problems.
To try to keep all of us as healthy as possible,
we stick to the wheat bread :)"

-DENEEN R. 44

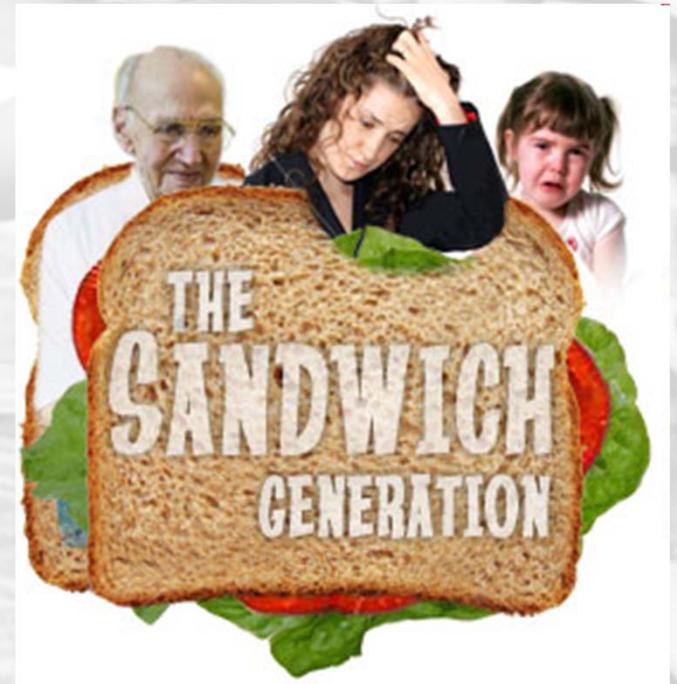
“The Sandwich Situation”: Gender Differences



- 75% of caregivers for older adults are women
- Typical sandwich-situation ‘member’ = working female caring for both aging parents and children
- Type of assistance provided
 - Men → financial support
 - Women → emotional support and daily tasks

Outline

- Challenges (and joys) of midlife
- Truth or myth? (i.e., what does the research show?)
- A real life example
- Tips and tools
 - Caring for your parents
 - Caring for your children
 - Caring for yourself



Challenges (and joys) of Midlife



- Psychological
 - A *transition*, not a crisis (for most)
 - Questioning the past and facing the future (“generativity”)
 - Increasing positive emotions
 - More likely to accept who you are and feel more in charge of situations and responsibilities
- Physical
 - Increasing body fat, high blood pressure, increasing cholesterol

“The Sandwich Situation”: Truth or Myth?

- Brody (1981): “women in the middle”
- Theme of caregiving research
- But is it real??
- Debate:
 - (1) Is there really a high incidence and prevalence of this demographic?
 - (2) Are these multiple roles necessarily stressful, and/or could they be satisfying?



Demographic Trends



- People live longer (more midlife adults have surviving parents)
- People delay marriage and having children
- Declines in fertility (fewer caregivers available)
- More adult children are choosing to live at home during college years
- Proportion of midlife women in the workforce has increased

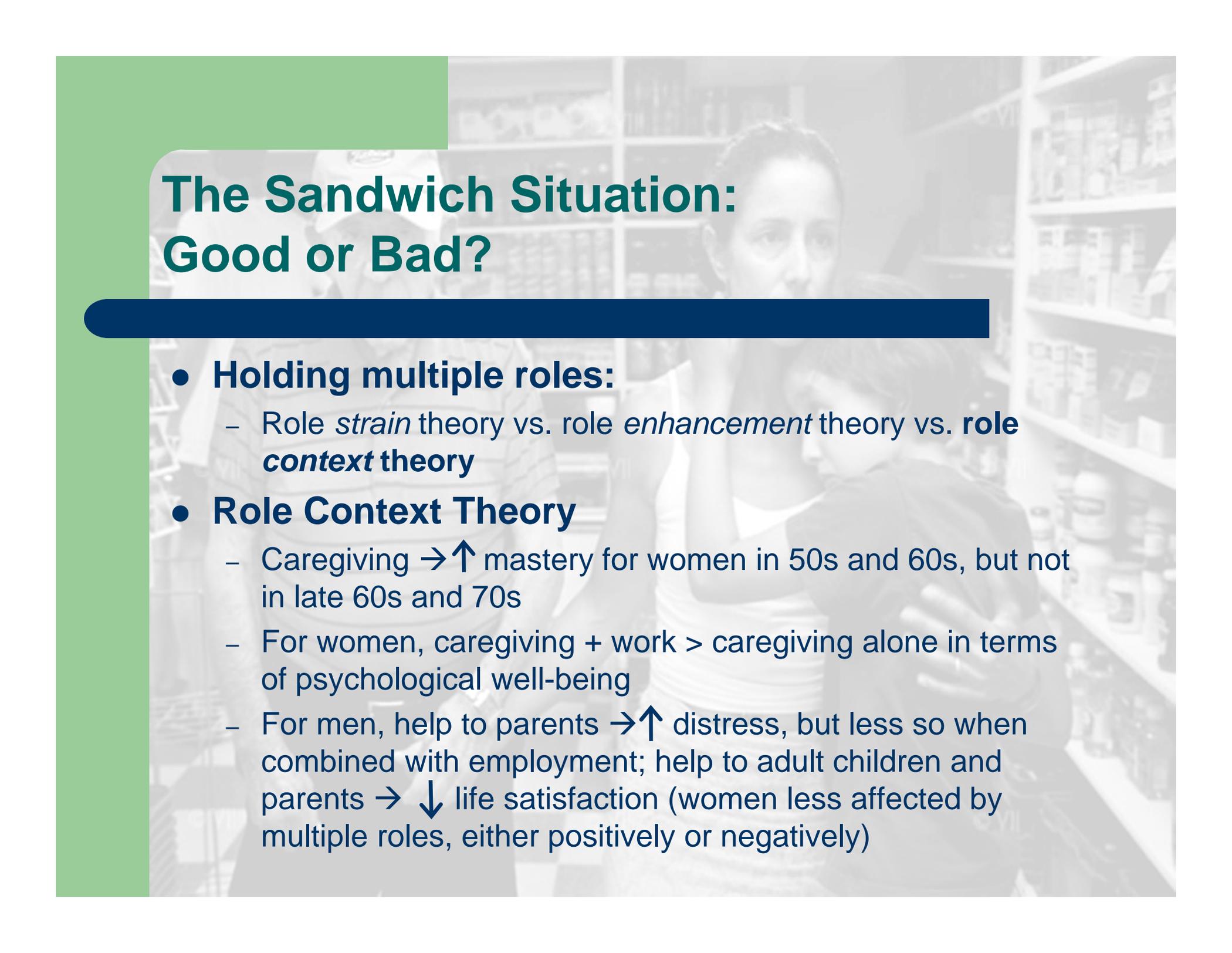
The Sandwich Situation: Actual Prevalence/Incidence?



- 44% of married individuals aged 35 to 44 both live with children and have at least one parent in fair to poor health (Marks, 1998)
- 33.9 million Americans (16%) provide care for an older family member
- Parent care + dependent child + working = 8% of American women and men (Rosenthal et al., 1996)

The Sandwich Situation: Actual Prevalence/Incidence?

- A *New York Times* article from 2008 reported that there are 20 million Americans (mostly women) who are juggling responsibilities for their own children and their aging parents at the same time
 - 53% of those women reported feeling forced to choose (at least once a week) between being there for their children or being there for their ailing parents
- Pew Research Center: 1 out of 8 Americans aged 40 to 60 are raising a child and caring for a parent
- Although the majority of adults are *not* “sandwiched,” it will likely become increasingly prevalent given current demographic trends



The Sandwich Situation: Good or Bad?

- **Holding multiple roles:**
 - Role *strain* theory vs. role *enhancement* theory vs. **role context theory**
- **Role Context Theory**
 - Caregiving → ↑ mastery for women in 50s and 60s, but not in late 60s and 70s
 - For women, caregiving + work > caregiving alone in terms of psychological well-being
 - For men, help to parents → ↑ distress, but less so when combined with employment; help to adult children and parents → ↓ life satisfaction (women less affected by multiple roles, either positively or negatively)

The Sandwich Situation: Good or Bad?

- In sum, psychological health effects (negative or positive) are small
- Caring for parents, in particular, can be an unexpected, unpredictable, and frustrating stressor → it is a nonnormative, unanticipated demand
- If the sandwich situation is viewed increasingly as 'normative,' coping strategies may be positively influenced...
 - e.g., having a strong sense of support and care from community, using acceptance strategies, focusing on positive outcomes
- **BUT...**recent research shows that there may be negative health effects (Chassin et al., 2010)

A woman in a pharmacy aisle, looking thoughtful, with shelves of medicine in the background. The image is faded and serves as a background for the text.

The Sandwich Situation: Good or Bad?

- The not-so-good feelings of being in the sandwich...
 - Guilt, resentment, fear and anxiety, anger and frustration, confusion/**ambivalence**, depression/sadness
 - Torn between love and resentment, between duty to parents and duty to spouses and children, between wanting to do the right thing and not wanting to change their lives
- The good feelings of being in the sandwich...
 - Honor, respect, pride/joy, love
- The wide range of emotions is common when caring for an aging parent and being “sandwiched”

A “real life” example...

- "The Sandwich Generation"



Tips and Tools: Caring for your Parents



- Maladaptive functioning in adult relationship likely stems from maladaptive functioning in earlier relationship...
 - Forgiveness must be conscious effort (self-awareness, personal therapy, active reflection)
- Role reversal → emotional turmoil
 - Disappointment, anger, guilt
 - Anxiety over parents' mortality and worry about their own mortality

Tips and Tools: Caring for your Parents



- Making decision about care location
 - Put them in the drivers' seat
 - Let them parent you
 - Bring in the experts
- If hiring a professional provider, *get references, and contact them!*
- If you don't have money to pay for professional help, and don't feel comfortable asking friends, **turn to volunteers**
 - Churches, senior centers, 4H clubs, HS community service organizations, colleges that train nurses and social workers (like Adelphi!)
 - Let volunteers sort mail, go grocery shopping, do laundry, pay social visits, help them at mealtime, drive them to appointments

Tips and Tools: Caring for your Parents



- Be *proactive*
- Try to involve parent in day-to-day household tasks/chores, even if very simple
 - Wiping off table after dinner
 - “supervising” the children
- Scheduled/spontaneous activities with grandchildren
- “Special moment” each day, separate from children

Tips and Tools: Caring for your Parents



- If parent is in an assisted-living center or nursing home, get to know other adult children with family members there
- Use online tools to get help with healthcare issues
 - e.g., Web MD offers a “Ask the Dr. Checklist”
- Take advantage of assistive technology
 - If insurance company says ‘no,’ ask doctor to write a letter

Tips and Tools: Legal Intervention



- Legal intervention may become necessary when parents can no longer handle their own financial and practical affairs
- Mentally competent parents (capable of making decisions and understanding consequences)
 - Bank account held jointly with adult child
 - Living trust or trust account with automatic inheritance
 - Power of attorney
- Declaration of legal incompetence
 - Guardian controls ward's property and *person*
 - Adults should specify in advance (i.e., in a will) the person they want to act as guardian in case of becoming mentally incompetent

Tips and Tools: Caring for your Parents with Dementia



- Dementia: development of multiple cognitive deficits including memory impairment
 - 12+ illnesses with similar symptoms but different causes (Alzheimer's most common)
 - Rate doubles every 5 years after age 75, with 8.5% of people ages 85 to 89 affected; mild dementia affects almost 30% after age 90
- Researchers have found that a person who provides care for someone with dementia is twice as likely to suffer from depression as a person providing care for someone without dementia

Caregiver
Burden

Tips and Tools: Caring for your Parents

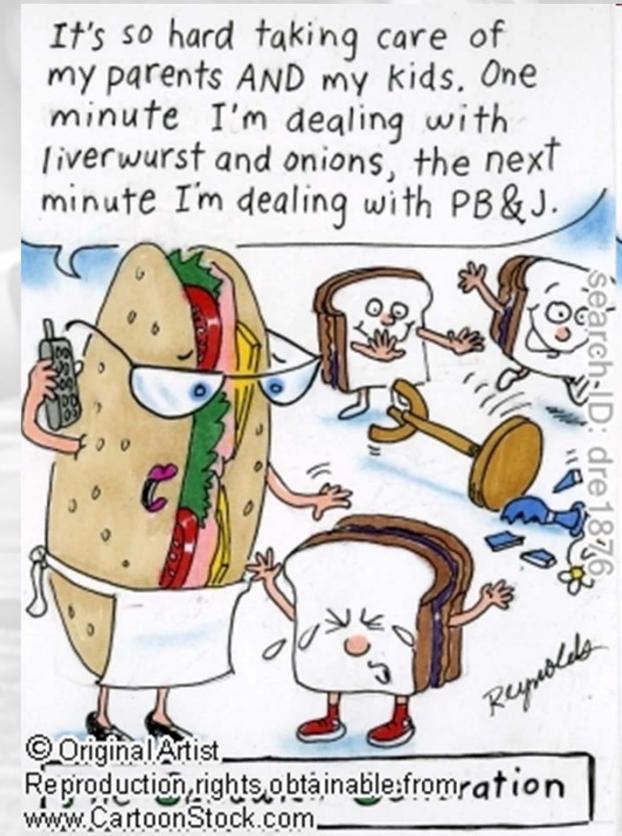


- To cope with impending loss:
 - Stay in the moment
 - Manage your own fears about death and dying (counseling?)
 - Manage your own feelings about the past
 - Express your love often, if you can
 - Remember to say what needs to be said now
 - Be with your parent where he/she is
 - Celebrate small things
 - Reminisce
 - Find joy

Tips and Tools: Caring for Your Children



- *Talk with children and prepare them*
 - Need for support
 - Future plans and adjustment
 - Love
- Financial woes: being frugal, cutting costs, and teaching children a valuable lesson



Tips and Tools: Caring for Your Children



- Take moments out to express how much you love and value your children (“special moment” each day)
 - Sit with child at breakfast every morning (routine)
 - Say a word of praise each morning
 - Put a note in your child’s backpack
 - Have dinner consistently at the same time every night when possible
 - Help with homework (don’t nag)
 - Assign chores, *and* give praise when they are done
 - Have a consistent bedtime hour and sit with child when he/she goes to bed

Caring for your Children: Warning Signs...



- Pre-school/Elementary kids:
 - Withdrawn
 - Depressed
 - Isolated (can't get them to open up)
 - Regressive -- thumb sucking, soiling
 - Anxious -- clingy, poor sleep/eating, irritable
 - Frequent fighting/aggression/acting out



Caring for your Children: Warning Signs...

- Middle School (and beyond)
 - Sleeping poorly, nightmares
 - Depressed/withdrawn
 - AVOIDANCE (school bus, lunch room, absenteeism)
 - Anxious -- pacing, nightmares
 - Substance abuse
 - Somatic complaints: headaches, stomachaches, visits to the RN office often
 - Frequent fighting/aggression/acting out



Tips and Tools: Caring for Yourself



- **Don't be a 'martyr'**
 - Self-pity is unhelpful (negativity does not change the situation, only depletes energy)
- ***Do not do it alone; ask for help! Why?***
 - Can provide an opportunity for relief (*respite*)
 - The person who is asked will feel needed
 - Caregiver will feel less isolated
 - Recipient of help may benefit from having a “fresh” helper
- Let go of unreasonably high standards, if necessary
- Return favors (if you can) and give “thank you”s!

Tips and Tools: Good News about asking for Help

- Research shows that caregivers with adequate community support report many dimensions of personal growth!
 - More empathic, caring, understanding, patient, compassionate, closer to person they are caring for, more appreciative of own good health



Tips and Tools: Caring for Yourself



- Take respite: yearly vacation, plus weekly and daily respite
- Nurture your partner
 - Establish a routine...
 - ...but expect interruption
- Ask employer for more flexible work schedule, possibly leave provisions
 - Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993
- Counseling, online support, self-help groups

Tips and Tools: Caring for Yourself – Depression



- Caregivers are at particular risk for mild to severe depression
- Symptoms:
 - Change in eating habits (unwanted weight gain or loss) or sleep patterns (too much sleep or not enough); feeling tired all the time
 - Loss of interest in people and/or activities that once brought you pleasure
 - Becoming easily agitated or angered; feeling that nothing you do is good enough
 - Thoughts of death or suicide, or attempting suicide
 - Ongoing physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment (e.g., headaches)
- 41% of women who experience symptoms do not seek treatment for depression because they are *embarrassed* or *in denial*
- Depression deserves to be treated with the same attention afforded any other illness, such as diabetes or high blood pressure; ***it is essential to seek help***

“The Caregiver’s Creed”

(Bertini, 2011)



- I have choice.
- I will put myself first.
- I will take time for myself and my partner.
- I will establish a routine.
- I will ask for help.
- I can say yes, maybe, later, or no.
- I will pay attention to my own feelings and needs.
- I will remind myself that this is my one life to live.
- ? (personal)

Tips and Tools: Balancing Act



- Do *not* segregate dual responsibilities
- Organization is *key* (schedules and routines)
- Appreciate those who care
 - Small gifts, thank yous
- Hold family meetings
- Encourage open *communication* between children and elders
- Grandparent/grandchild activities

Summary: Five Survival Tips

- Draw strength from your faith
- Set aside time for yourself
- Seek family support
- Talk to your employer
- Get professional assistance



MEET THE
SANDWICH
GENERATION.

A faded background image of a pharmacy. On the left, a pharmacist in a white cap and striped polo shirt stands behind a counter. On the right, a woman in a white tank top and striped skirt holds a young child. The shelves behind them are filled with various medications. A green vertical bar is on the left side of the slide, and a dark blue horizontal bar is positioned below the 'Thank you!' text.

Thank you!

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Questions?