

Reciprocity of Sandwich Generations and the Bonding of Emotional Relationships in Family

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the phenomenon of reciprocity in the context of the sandwich generation and its impact on the emotional bonding among family members. The research was conducted by using a qualitative phenomenological approach, which allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the sandwich generation actors. Four families with different social and cultural backgrounds were involved in this research, which was conducted in Pandean Lamper Village. The research data was obtained through in-depth interviews and observations, in which the sandwich generation actors shared their experiences in carrying out their dual role as providers. The results show that reciprocity plays a significant role in forming emotional bonds among members of the sandwich generation family. Two of the four families studied have balanced reciprocity. Meanwhile, the other two families experience an imbalance in reciprocity. In conclusion, this study confirms that balanced reciprocity in sandwich generation actors can help build strong bonds and improve overall family well-being. However, an imbalance of reciprocity can have a negative impact on emotional relationships within the family. Therefore, it is advisable to implement measures that support balanced reciprocity, such as open communication, fair division of responsibilities. Thus, the sandwich generation can create strong bonds and improve their overall quality of life.

1 Introduction

The discussion about the sandwich generation is a hot topic for discussion recently. This term refers to a situation in which individuals of productive age must not only work for themselves, but also meet the needs of the generations above and below them. The phrase "sandwich generation" was first introduced in 1981 by Dorothy Miller, a professor at the University of Kentucky and a social worker. Originally, the term was used to describe a woman between the ages of 30 and 40 who was "stuck" between the demands of a spouse, children, parents, and work. However, as demographics change, the term sandwich generation is also used to refer to men and women who face this complex situation. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2022), the term "sandwich generation" is used to refer to groups of people who have to take care of their children and parents who have entered old age.

Indebtedness to parents is believed to be the main reason why someone is willing to take care of their parents. In an anthropological perspective, this debt of gratitude is a manifestation of the concept of reciprocity, namely the attitude of giving back assistance to anyone who has provided assistance before. In the relationship between children and parents, this debt arises from the awareness that the child has been raised and taken care for before. Caring for parents who have reached old age is considered a form of reciprocity for the services parents have provided in caring for them (Darmawan, 2022:16). The system of reciprocity generally applies among people who are closely related (Swartz and Jordan, 1976: 477-478). Based on genetic factors, they have the instinct to continue offspring and protect their family members. Therefore, what is given to family members is not only based on the expectation of return and their rights, but also as a subjectively justified nature.

In 2023, after the pandemic, the sandwich generation phenomenon began to increase rapidly. This can be seen from the number of contents on social media containing the anxiety of the sandwich generation actors. They share many sad stories through platforms such as Twitter, Quora and TikTok. In addition, the increasing number of such contents is also reflected in the number of hashtags used related to the sandwich generation reaching 11 million (Dwitya Putra, 2022:9).

Hence, I will explore the research on reciprocity that occurs among sandwich generation actors. Although reciprocity has been extensively researched in the context of tradition, there seems to be no research that

explains how modern reciprocity occurs among generations of sandwiches. Therefore, it is important to examine reciprocity in the generation of Gen Z sandwiches, specifically in Pandean Lamper Village, Semarang, Central Java.

1.1 The Concept of Ideal Family

An ideal family is the one that has a healthy, harmonious and happy relationship among family members. It can also be interpreted as a family that is able to provide sufficient love and attention to each family member, as well as teach good moral and ethical values (Bittman, 2020: 18). The concept of an ideal family varies depending on culture, religion, and the social environment of the community where the family lives. Factors that influence the formation of an ideal family include good and open communication between family members, loyalty and mutual respect between husband and wife, as well as trust and closeness between parents and children.

According to Forsyth and Adams (2017: 34), the ideal family is a family that has a good level of health and well-being. The ideal family can also be seen in terms of the quality of relationships among family members, where each family member feels valued, recognized and loved. The ideal family is also a family that has the ability to deal with and solve problems well and provide support and assistance to one another.

1.2 Children as Investment

The term of "children as an investment" sounds controversial and can lead to various interpretations. Basically, children are investments that have invaluable long-term value. In this context, investment refers to the sacrifices and efforts made by parents in shaping and guiding children to become independent individuals, to have noble character, and to contribute positively to society in the future. (Sunarti, 2020: 5).

1.3 Recent Economic Perspective

Today's economy cannot be separated from the culture that shapes it. Culture has a strong influence on how people perceive the value, production, distribution and exchange of goods and services in markets. Therefore, in understanding today's economy holistically, the discipline of anthropology can make a significant contribution. Cultural anthropology, which is a main branch of anthropology, can provide insight into the influence of culture in shaping the economy. For example, the theory of "cultural economics" put forward by Clifford Geertz explaining how values, symbols, and meanings in culture can affect economic behavior.

Geertz emphasizes that economics is not only about cold market transactions, but also involves cultural aspects such as beliefs, symbolism and rituals.

1.4 Types of Reciprocity

Reciprocity is a pattern of socio-economic exchange in which individuals give and receive goods or services due to social obligations. Commonly known types of reciprocity include general reciprocity, negative reciprocity, and balanced reciprocity.

General reciprocity is a form of reciprocity in which individuals give something without expecting to receive something specific and within a limited time. Giving in general reciprocity is not limited by time or type of goods or services provided. In a social context, general reciprocity can occur in the form of social support or friendship among individuals or groups who help each other without having a specific goal or purpose. According to Gouldner (1960:26), general reciprocity can arise as a result of unexpected or expected long-term social relations, and can provide important social benefits for all parties involved.

Negative reciprocity is a form of reciprocity in which individuals give something in the hope of receiving something more valuable or specific within a limited time. The act of giving in negative reciprocity often occurs between individuals who have no social ties or groups that compete in an economic context. In the economic context, negative reciprocity often occurs in the form of unfair buying and selling transactions, such as offering low prices or defective goods. According to Sahlins (1972:33), negative reciprocity often occurs in social contexts that are hostile or that maintain differences in social status between individuals or groups.

Balanced reciprocity is a form of reciprocity in which individuals give something in the hope of receiving something commensurate within a limited time. Giving in balanced reciprocity often occurs in the form of exchange of goods or services between individuals or groups who have strong social ties. In an economic context, balanced reciprocity often occurs in the form of fair trade among individuals or groups that have a balanced or equivalent exchange rate. According to Polanyi (1957:27), balanced reciprocity often occurs in social contexts that are collective or that place social interests above individual or group interests.

2 Result and Discussion

2.1 Balanced General Reciprocity

In this reciprocity, individuals or groups provide goods or services to other individuals or groups without specifying a time limit for returning them. In an exchange, each party believes that they will give the other, and believes that the goods or services provided will be reciprocated somehow. It is like a mother giving material and love to her child. The act of giving is sincere and it does not ask for anything in return, but both parties are bound by moral awareness that kindness will be rewarded with kindness, as said by the informant, Ibu Sri:

"Well, as a mother who has been pregnant for 9 months, of course I want my child to have the kindness to take care of me when I grow older. It's not solely about asking for favor in return, but the desire to be with my child until death comes."

The act of expressing kindness to parents does not have to be a direct act giving to parents. Children are devoted to their mothers by sending their younger siblings to school or providing assistance to their mother's siblings. As was done by the informant Widya who paid for his younger siblings to be able to stay in school.

"If, for example, I follow my ego to continue my study to a higher degree, then...who would help financing my younger brother? Moreover, in the past, the one who could make a living were me and my mother. And my mother has also warned me to help my younger siblings."

In general reciprocity, there are no laws that strictly control someone to give or return something. Only morality controls and encourages individuals to accept general reciprocity as a truth that cannot be violated. Violations may be judged as an act of hypocrisy, sin, disobedience, cheating, dishonesty, immorality and so on. These violations can then be subject to moral pressure from the "society" or "groups" in the form of swearing, verbal warnings, or gossip that can degrade the social status of the community or group. Legal sanctions do not apply in this reciprocity. Unless the reciprocity is proportional reciprocity, the sanction in certain communities can be in the form of legal sanctions using customary law. This is similar to the opinion of the informant, Kamila:

"When I got my salary for the first time, I was reprimanded by my aunt. I didn't realize that I had to help pay for electricity and water. I

gave my mother some money, so I thought it was enough. Apparently, I still have to make more contribution"

Society has known this system, because without this system social life and human survival as biological and social beings cannot be realized. Since birth humans have been dependent on other people, such as his mother. Humans need friends to share their feelings in solving problems and enjoying happiness.

2.2 Unbalanced General Reciprocity

Family is the main environment where individuals grow and develop. Family dynamics are very important in shaping the identity, values, and social interactions of family members. However, not all relationships in the family are perfect. One of the interaction patterns that need attention is the general unbalanced reciprocity. This reciprocity refers to patterns of unequal or adverse exchanges among family members, which can have a significant impact on relationships and overall family well-being. This is in accordance with the statement of our informant, named Widya, who said:

"In my family, my father is currently 63 years old, even though he has a job he seems unable to provide the financial support needed, so my mother and I have to work hard" (Interview 14 March 2023)"

The results of research on this system show that sandwich generation encounters a complex problem. The moral demand of the norms in which they are obliged to give or share some of their money seems to put a lot of pressure on them. Such circumstances are explained by Widya:

"Well, whether I like it or not, the fact is that I have to support my family, even though it is not my obligation to care for and provide financial support for my family...but what can I say...my family still need my help. If I only depend on my father, how my sister and mother can fulfil their daily needs. I can no longer blame the situation...what I can do is helping them." (Interview March 14, 2023)

Likewise, another informant, Suci, also tells similar story. She is the first child in the family and she has the same heavy obligations. Suci has contributed her whole life to be able to help the family. Even though she admits that she is under great pressure, she has to do it since it is natural, according to her and her mother.

"Working at the age of 18 is not easy, the pressure is diverse. I can't complain, all I know is that I get money and I have to give it to my family. My mother said that I could help as best I can. Yet, the phrase

“as best I can” may mean many things regarding the existing conditions” (Interview 14 March 2023)

Based on the various conditions described by the informants, it can be seen that the form of reciprocity appeared among sandwich generation actors in generation Z is considered as general reciprocity. Here, a person has to support family in an infinite amount of time. However, it should be realized that the current reciprocity is far from being perfect and balanced. If we look at the burden borne by each member of the informants, it can be seen that this has a significant relationship with the balance of reciprocity.

Mauss states that in general reciprocity practice, reciprocity is an important aspect. As recipients of gifts, individuals have a moral obligation to repay the giver with an equivalent amount or value, perhaps even higher. This is not only an individual responsibility, but it also reflects social norms and expectations in society. Through this reciprocal obligation, a relationship of interdependence is established between giver and receiver, which helps to maintain social solidarity and balance.

3 Conclusion

Based on the research conducted in Pandean Lamper Village, it is found that reciprocity is common in sandwich generation actors. Reciprocity refers to the mutual act of giving and receiving help or support among family members. The form of this reciprocity varies depending on the condition of the family concerned. The study finds differences in reciprocity between the two families that had more members and the other two families having a smaller number of dependents. In families with more members, reciprocity tends to be unbalanced. It could happen since the younger and healthier member of the family has to provide more support to their parents. On the other hand, in families with a smaller number of dependents, reciprocity tends to be more balanced without excessive pressure. Each family member can help one another in a more even proportion.

Reciprocity in the sandwich generation has a significant influence in forming emotional bonds among family members. By providing mutual support and assistance, family members can strengthen their emotional bonds and build a sense of interdependence. Reciprocity can also create a sense of justice and respect among family members, which in turn can increase overall family satisfaction and well-being. However, it is

important to strike a balance in the existing reciprocity, so that both parties get the same benefits. The conversation about sandwich generation also has many implications regarding the well-being of sandwich generation actors. Many of them feel they do not have a good balance in carrying out their roles.

In order to balance this reciprocity, several steps must be taken. First, it is important to open good communication among family members. By communicating openly, each family member can understand the needs, hopes and challenges faced by everyone in the family. Good communication also allows for clear agreements and mutual understanding among family members. In addition, it is important to apply clear financial constraints on the reciprocity of sandwich generation. Setting clear rules about financial contributions and spending can help prevent imbalances and conflicts that arise from different perceptions regarding financial responsibility. With clear boundaries, family members can feel more just to support one another financially.

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