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**WOMEN’S “INTERSECTIONAL” GENERATIONAL IDENTITY IN  
A FAMILY AND THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING**

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*Abstract*

The significance of the phenomenon of "intersecting" family identity (sandwich generation syndrome) is revealed. It is shown that the intersection of role duties associated with the simultaneous care of children and elderly parents reflects the psychological essence of this phenomenon. Its consequences for the development of the personality of women, including family burnout, are described. The conjugacy of "intersecting" family identity and components of psychological well-being is analyzed. The results of empirical studies of the features of the structure of the psychological well-being of women with overlapping family identity, the specifics of family burnout and the features of their role self-identification are presented. The such components of well-being as managing the surrounding and one's own life (the "architect of life"), the meaningfulness of goals in life are central. Self-esteem and susceptibility / immunity to new life experiences in the structure of the components of psychological well-being, are those components that are associated with its positive or negative dynamics. It is noted also, that the family burnout in women mostly represented by emotional exhaustion, which is due to the feeling of lack of personal time. It is shown that the specificity of psychological well-being and family burnout of women with "intersecting" identity is associated with their role self-identification in the family — either Guardian and Adult together, or Child itself. It is also noted that the women with a clear self-identification of themselves as a guardian, an adult in relation to both their children and parents, demonstrate higher levels of psychological well-being.

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**Keywords:** Generations in a family, 'intersectional' family identity, everyday stress, family burnout, psychological well-being of an individual, role self-identification.



## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. “Intersectional” generational identity in a family a subcultural phenomenon

In social psychology terms generations are big groups, but the issue on criteria of reference to one or another generation remains topical. Mentality being a sophisticated system which constitutive factor is axiological combination of its constituents (meanings, implications and values, social attitudes, peculiar features of interaction, etc.) (Pischik, 2019) is considered to be one of the key characteristics of such belonging in psychology. However, in the family context mentality cannot be viewed as a single feature. As the research shows belonging to a family generation is determined by reciprocal (‘parent – child’, ‘grandparent – grandchild’, ‘ancestor – descendant’) and functional (related to financial support of family members, performance of educational function, creation of family subculture and implementation of social support function in a family) family roles (Saporovskaya, 2014).

From the perspective of such approach generation group of *Children* in a family is of great interest, and this group is quite heterogeneous. It includes not only children, teenagers and youth that are financially and psychologically dependent (meaning the incompleteness of separation process). Adults also belong to the generation of *Children* in relation to their living parents. Thereat in relation to their own children they belong to *Parents* generation (Saporovskaya, 2014).

Being ‘squeezed’ between multiple responsibilities related on the one hand to taking care of elderly parents losing their independence and on the other hand to their own children who still need care and control reflects the essence of ‘intersectionality’ of generations in a family. From the perspective of the identity intersectionality theory this life situation gives a person a unique experience defining the choice between efficiency (generativity) and inertia. Efficiency as a progressive line of person’s development (A. Maslow, D. Ziegler, L. Hjelle, E. Erikson) and a process of individual identity implies also person’s professional success and care about the *Other* which is a prerequisite of their personal growth and self-fulfillment.

Biographic situation associated with intersectional generational identity or in other words belonging to ‘sandwich generation’ (*sandwich generation* syndrome) coincide with the age between 45 and 65 years which is a period of major changes in family relations system (primarily in relation to children and parents). These changes are of stress character and require maximum actualization of person’s resource potential, but hereby they catalyze the process of personal development and growth. Under the conditions of intersectional family identity a person faces the necessity to find an answer to the question, ‘*Who am I more – a Parent or a Child? Which role is more significant for me?*’ In case if the role of a *Child* in relation to parents becomes priority then relations in the couple suffer. As our respondents indicate relations with a spouse become more estranged and confrontational, and critically small amount of time is left for their own children. If the role of *Partner* and *Parent* dominates then psychologically hard feeling of guilt towards parents inevitably arises. Thus, it is possible to state that intersectional identity in a family is connected to inner role conflict and its possible destructive consequences.

In Russian society ‘*sandwich generation*’ syndrome is particularly tough due to deficiency of institutional support for the balance of roles and responsibilities which the society also imposes on a person, and the person imposes on himself/herself.

## **1.2. Psychological well-being and emotional burnout in a family**

It is worth noting that functional roles related to care are still greatly feminized and such life challenges as a rule are accepted by middle-aged women, it is them who carry the main load of direct care of children and elderly relatives. Under this influence and with insufficient efficiency of coping behavior resources are depleted and negative emotions accumulate. Impossibility of their catharsis causes development of chronic stress, family burnout, decrease of psychological well-being factors. We determine emotional burnout. It is worth noting that functional roles related to care are still greatly feminized and such life challenges as a rule are accepted by middle-aged women, it is them who carry the main load of direct care of children and elderly relatives. Under this influence and with insufficient efficiency of coping behavior resources are depleted and negative emotions accumulate. Impossibility of their catharsis causes development of chronic stress, family burnout, decrease of psychological well-being factors. We determine emotional burnout in a family as a state of physical, emotional and cognitive exhaustion due to high stress loads and appearing in the area of interpersonal relations and joint activity in a family (Saporovskaya & Krylova, 2018a). The connection between emotional burnout in a family and psychological well-being of a personality is obvious for us.

This research studies psychological well-being as *an integrative system quality of a personality achieved by means of proper functioning at all vital levels: biological, individual and psychological, social, spiritual*. Well-being is not an emotional experience but an objective possession of certain psychological traits which allow an individual to function more successfully than without them (Ryff, 1996).

## **2. Problem Statement**

In spite of different phenomenology determination of emotional burnout in a family and psychological well-being bears resemblance. There are data proving that both phenomena to a greater degree are determined by subjective factors than objective ones since the influence of the latter is always mediated by implications that are unique for a personality. As well as family burnout the psychological well-being is determined by presence and quality of social relations. For a woman, in the first place, it is family relations (with a spouse, children, parents). Personal traits also have influence. Thus, for instance, extraversion and emotional stability are strong correlates and predictors of happiness, they are connected with self-acceptance, conscientiousness is related to self-acceptance and control over environment as well as with comprehension of life, and openness to experience – with personal growth.

## **3. Research Questions**

The main topical issue of this research is – what are the specific features of psychological well-being and family burnout among women with ‘intersectional’ family identity?

Another important question is – what is the situational context for women’s family burnout? What are the peculiarities of role self-identification of women with ‘intersectional’ family identity?

## 4. Purpose of the Study

To describe the structure of psychological well-being of women with intersectional family identity. To determine what is the nucleus of this structure and which components define positive and negative dynamics of women's psychological well-being.

To study peculiarities of family burnout among women. To describe situational context of emotional burnout, depersonalization, and reduction of personal achievements.

To study specific character of role self-identification of women with 'intersectional' identity in a family.

The main *hypothesis* is that the specific character of psychological well-being and family burnout among women with intersectional identity is connected with their role self-identification in a family.

## 5. Research Methods

### 5.1. Methodological complex:

- "The scale of psychological well-being" by Ryff (localization by Shevelenkova & Fesenko, 2005);
- "Emotional burnout in a family" a modified method of emotional burnout by Maslach and Jackson (localization by Vodopyanova & Starchenkova, 2017);
- Phenomenological interview "Who am I in my family";
- Mathematical statistics methods.

### 5.2. Participants

Sampling was done among 194 women (with average age (M) of 47 years old). Based on preliminary sampling results 80 (41%) women demonstrated signs of emotional burnout. All women are married and have children and take an active part in their parents' lives.

The study was conducted in 2016-2018. All the participants gave their consent to participate in the study.

## 6. Findings

At the first stage (M.E. Voronina, O.B. Podobina, M.V. Saporovskaya) structural organization of psychological well-being components (*Positive Interacting; Autonomy; Environment Management; Personal Growth; Goals in Life; Self-Acceptance; Self-Esteem; Readiness for New Experience*) of women with 'intersectional' family identity (Voronina, 2018) was analyzed.

It was discovered that significance of trust-based relations with others and care of others' well-being, empathy, affection, and compromises in relationship (*Positive Interacting* scale  $r=0.18$  with  $p=0.03$ ) increases over time. In the period of medium adulthood the role of close relationship (first of all, family) in a woman's life increases, these relations take a special meaning, they become an indicator of her success / lack of success. Thereat the feeling of control over her own life, competence in managing her environment, ability to create conditions to satisfy her personal needs and achieve goals (*Environment Management* scale) increase. Significance of interacting and the feeling of control over her own life are connected with the feeling of purposefulness, comprehension of past and present lives (*Goals in Life* scale  $r=0.37$  with  $p=0.01$ ;

$r=0.29$  with  $p=0.01$ ). However these variables have a negative relation to *Autonomy* ( $r=-0.24$  with  $p=0.02$ ) and *Personal Growth* ( $r=-0.33$  with  $p=0.01$ ) scales. This means that focus on positive interacting, feeling of environment control and management, comprehension of life combine with woman's feeling of deficiency of personal growth and self-fulfillment, everyday life monotony as well as with dependence on others' opinion and appraisal, limitation of independence.

Thus in case of lack of personal autonomy, personal growth and self-fulfillment the positive interacting, feeling of environment control and goals in life are the nuclear components of a middle-aged woman's psychological well-being. However their congruence with various peripheral components produces different effects in the picture of psychological well-being of women with 'intersectional' family identity. Combination of nuclear components with low figures of self-acceptance, negative self-esteem, life dissatisfaction, underestimation of her own resilience and ability to learn new skills (*Self-Acceptance* and *Effect Balance* scales with  $p<0.05$ ); as well as lack of visible life prospects which could have enough appeal for a woman (*Comprehension of Life* scale with  $p<0.05$ ); lack of realistic perception of various life aspects, fear of new experience (*Human as an Open System* scale with  $p<0.05$ ) are connected with underachievement of general psychological well-being. However the combination of nuclear components with self-acceptance, satisfaction of life, openness to new experience, on the contrary, is associated with high figures of general psychological well-being.

Thus, self-esteem and susceptibility to new life experience in the structure of psychological well-being components represent the constituents that are associated with its positive or negative dynamics.

During the next phase of analysis (Yu.S. Krylova, M.V. Saporovskaya) we studied features and situational context of family burnout among women with 'intersectional' family identity.

Women's family burnout is majorly represented by emotional burnout (90%). It can be characterized by high and medium levels (66%). *Medium level* of burnout is demonstrated by local features, mainly, by emotional and physical fatigue. A woman is aware of her state, can relax and recover her resources. *High level* of burnout is demonstrated by 24% of respondents. It is characterized by regular and long-lasting features: continuous fatigue, languor, sleeping disorders, low emotional background, angst, and loss of life purposes.

*Depersonalization* (66% of samples) is represented by high and medium levels. *Medium level* (47%) of this feature is characterized by gradual decrease of significance of family contacts – with husband, children, parents. *High level* (19%) of this feature bears evidence to deformations of relationship with family members, negativism manifestation, irritation, and antipathy towards them.

*Reduction of achievements* is characterized by decrease of self-efficacy (*medium level* 45%). High level demonstrated by 24% of the respondents shows an obvious decrease of personal achievements' significance, lower self-esteem and personal motivation.

Situational context of family burnout has been studied by means of author's standardized interview "Difficulties of family life".

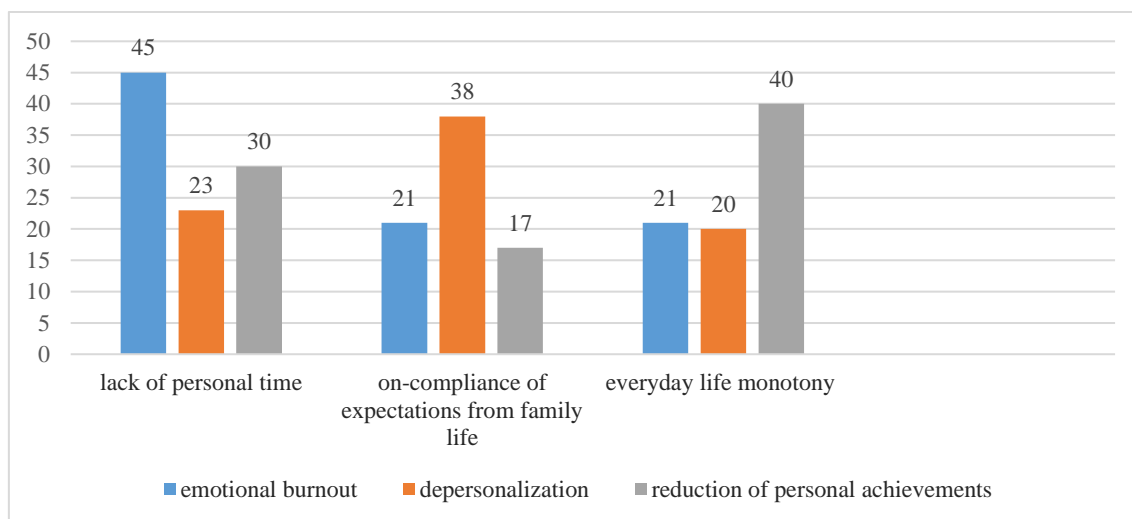
Each test person underwent a standardized interview "Difficulties of family life", and the answers were recorded. We consolidated units of analysis into categories by means of content analysis and arrived at the following results.

Women with signs of burnout noted *lack of time for themselves, routine, monotony, misunderstanding with husbands, and physical fatigue* as an everyday stress.

Women with high figures of depersonalization are characterized by stress related to discrepancies in family life expectations. Women do not feel assistance and support on the part of their spouses and children. Problems in marital and parent-child relations, as well as relations with aging parents are clearly observed, these relations cause ambivalent feelings – pity and irritation.

Women with high level of personal achievements' reduction also indicate the significance of interpersonal misunderstanding and physical fatigue. However *Routine* and *Everyday Monotony* are added to these situations.

Thus, emotional burnout is related to the lack of personal time, depersonalization is associated with discrepancies in family life expectations, and reduction of personal achievements – with everyday life monotony (Saporovskaya & Krylova, 2018b) (Fig.1).



**Figure 01.** Situational context of women's burnout in a family

During the next step we studied connection of emotional burnout signs and components of psychological well-being. Direct strong correlation between *Depersonalization* and *Environment Management* ( $r=0.52$  with  $p=0.001$ ) scales turned out to be a highly interesting observation. Having strength, power and possibility to control surrounding people, control over her activities, possibilities to satisfy personal needs and achieve her goals a women gradually loses interest, depreciates social contacts, and treats others (partner, parents, children, relatives, friends) with negative prejudice which causes tension and development of interpersonal conflict. Thus, strong subjective control takes away important life resources, i.e. social resources, which turns a woman into a subject to stress to a greater extent. Another significant result is the interrelation ( $r=-0.49$  with  $p=0.001$ ) between negative assessment of performing her marital and parent functions, decrease of her own achievements' significance (*Reduction of Personal Achievements* scale) and susceptibility to new experience (*Human as an Open System* scale). This means that readiness for new things, variety, leaving the 'comfort zone', independence, and naturalness are connected with experiencing the significance of her achievements and their high assessment which is woman's most important personal resource.

An important research stage background related to childhood is positive have a stronger bond with their parents and are in general satisfied with current relations with them. Women identify themselves in a family as a person who takes care of other family members and bears responsibility for their well-being. Thereat an important reason for care is the feeling of duty, gratitude and love.

Women with negative and ambivalent memories about their childhood identify themselves as a person who needs care and approval on the part of family members. In their interview they point out to high anxiety, fear of parents' death. They feel irritation from the fact that parents require attention, do not help and, on the contrary, make woman's life more complicated and intense.

According to the analysis results of semi-standardized interview "Who am I in my family" women who identify themselves as *Children* in relation to elderly parents (focus on offenses coming from childhood, unhappy memories, still expecting help from parents) have high figures on *Reduction of Personal Achievements* scale (with  $p=0.02$ ) and low values on *Openness to New Experience* scale (with  $p=0.003$ ) which indicates difficulties of their self-fulfillment and self-determination. Women with clear self-identification of themselves as *Guardian, Adult* towards both their children and their parents show higher figures of psychological well-being (with  $p=0.01$ ). These results denote the necessity of further study of mechanisms regulating direction of personal changes connected with intersectional family identity.

Was the study of specific features of role self-identification among women with 'intersectional' identity in a family.

Emotional background related to childhood memories is of high importance here, it can be positive, negative, ambivalent. It appeared that women whose emotional

## 7. Conclusion

'Intersectionality' in a family ('sandwich' generation syndrome) is a relatively new social phenomenon determined by objective and subjective factors. On the one hand it is related to the increase of elderly generation's life expectancy, as well as with the increase of average marriage age and age for having children among younger generation.

Women's employment, career building, time stress, necessity to combine care of minor children and aged parents aggravate everyday loads which could cause family burnout, decrease of factors of their psychological well-being.

However such its components as positive self-esteem and readiness for new experience (generally) when combined with clear role identification towards elderly parents as being their *Guardian* are related to positive dynamics of woman's well-being and promote efficient coping with hardship.

These results denote the necessity of further study of mechanisms regulating direction of personal changes connected with intersectional family identity not only among women, but also among men.

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