

## *Vulnerability, Resistant Assets, and Reciprocal Exchange*

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### ABSTRACT

This article will explore how the theory of vulnerability and the theory of reciprocal exchange can be utilized to form the basis for a solution to the caregiving dilemma of the sandwich generation. Most state laws and public policy provide that the private family is both the nurturer of the very young and the safety net for the very old. While there is some assistance from the government in terms of daycare and healthcare, the majority of mid-life parents struggle with the financial and time costs associated with daily care of young children, as well as long-term care of elderly relatives. Notwithstanding parental duties and filial laws, caregiving among family members is altruistic, based on notions of cooperation and reciprocity. This article will argue that the common dependent care interests of young children and senior citizens can be conflated to create a unified approach for family caregiving in the United States. New trends in housing, such as homesharing and multi-family homes, as well as intergenerational day care centers for children and the elderly can provide the foundation for this unified approach.

This article further explores the question of whether altruism defeats efforts to expand public government support for families. It is vital to examine the role of the state within the family care framework. This article introduces the concept of ‘resistant’ assets. Resistant assets are those structures or social constructs used by the state to reinforce the status quo or resist change that would positively address vulnerability. For purposes of this article, they are usually laws or public policies that support the normative family construct, and can include social mores that rely upon racial and gender stereotypes associated with caregiving. Resistant assets can work in concert with families’ resilience to life’s unfortunate circumstances to negate state responsibility for vulnerability. This article analyzes whether altruistic caregiving is a resistant asset of the state, and if so, what would justify additional state support of both child and elder care for poor and middle-class families. Finally, this article concludes that the successful amalgamation of the two theories of vulnerability and reciprocal exchange will require a deconstruction of certain resistant assets of the state to achieve a unified approach to intergenerational caregiving going forward into the twenty-first century.