

Grandparental norms and values towards the family: How are they related to grandparental engagement in care for their grandchildren?

Barbara Fulda

Due to their longer life expectancy, many older adults are now alive while their grandchildren are growing up and therefore able to become involved in their care and supervision.

The hypothesis of declining intra-familial support in the context of social and economic change

Meanwhile some researchers have assessed declining intra-familial support. Given the expansion of public childcare facilities in recent years as well as social and economic change, the question arises if changes in norms and values towards the family play a role for intra-familial help. For example grandparental role models have changed considerably, while parental need for childcare provided by the state or the family, e.g. grandparents, has increased. How do parents' and grandparents' normative views towards the family relate to the extent and the way grandparents care for their grandchildren?

Individual norms and how they relate to grandchild care provided or accepted

The extent to which grandparents get involved in child care has been suggested to be driven primarily by the availability of grandparents as well as by the needs of parents and their children and by the quality of intergenerational ties (Hank and Buber, 2009). Those are very important factors. However here, I concentrate on parents' and grandparents' normative values and how they relate to grandparents support in childcare. Does the content and extent of childcare provided by grandparents relate to their attitudes toward the family? Another question concerns the role of parent's attitudes: Does the extent of childcare also correlate with parent's attitudes towards intergenerational solidarity? Normative conflicts could also affect parents and grandparents relationship.

Research Question: How do parents and grandparents normative values relate to the extent of grandparents support in their grandchild's care?

The case of western Germany

Childcare provided by family members is particularly important in the western German context with its low average number of daycare facilities (Hank and Kreyenfeld, 2003). Demand still massively outweighs the available number of places in daycare facilities (41.7% vs. 32.5%; Federal Statistical Office, 2014). Therefore, childcare provided by family members plays a central role.

How do grandparents normative values relate to the frequency of them taking care of their grandchildren?

To assess the conditions of support grandparents provide to their children and grandchildren, I combine exploratory analyses with the test of basic hypotheses by multinomial regression.

Hypothesis 1: If grandparents share conservative family values, the log odds of them taking care of their grandchild increase.

If grandparents adhere to a conservative view of the family, they are likely to be more willing to provide intrafamilial care thereby increasing the likelihood of grandparental supervision (Dykstra et al., 2006).

However, parent's preferences also play a role in grandparent involvement. If parents adhere to conservative values, they are likely to prefer taking care of their child themselves. As I furthermore take into consideration that parents and grandparents normative values are interdependent, this leaves us with the following fourfold table (see table). Here I assume that when grandparents and parents normative views conflict, grandparents are either less likely to provide support and/or parents are less likely to accept their help.

Hypothesis 2: If parents and grandparents normative views conflict, the log odds of grandparents taking care are lower.

Finally, I assume that if parents and grandparents share egalitarian familial values, they will both prefer extra-familial care over grandparents support.

Hypothesis 3: If parents and grandparents share egalitarian family values, the log odds of grandparents taking care are lower.

Interdependencies of parents and grandparents normative values (simplified)

	Conservative	Egalitarian
Conservative	+	-
Egalitarian	-	-

Data and method

Analyses are based on data from the first five waves of the German Family Panel (pairfam), release 5.0 (Nauck et al., 2014). I constructed a dyadic multi-actor dataset by merging anchor data from waves 1, 2, 4, and 5 and parent data from wave 5. Thereby, I can take a look at interaction effects between parental and grandparental attitudes. The dataset contains 594 dyads. The respondents all belong to the native population of western Germany. The 264 male and 330 female respondents have at least one child.¹ I performed the following steps of analysis:

- Imputation of missing values in R by help of the package "Amelia", due to a high non-response rate among grandparents (~30%).
- Exploratory factor analysis shows that some of grandparents' and parents' normative values correlate highly. I therefore selected those variables for my regression which load most strongly and represent similar variables.
- Besides calculating descriptive statistics I conduct a multinomial logistic regression. The dependent variable consists of seven categories indicating whether grandparents took care of their grandchild on a daily basis (reference level), several times a week, once a week, 1 to 3 times a month, several times a year, less often or never during the past 12 months.

Empirical findings on the relation between attitudes and grandparental caregiving

Although parents are in need of support...

Firstly, I take a look at parents need of grandparental support in childcare. Grandchildren in my sample are on average 9 years old, while fathers work on average 44 hours and mothers 25 hours. Parents therefore seem to be in need of intra- or extra-familial support in childcare.

... most grandparents only take care of their grandchildren several times a year, rarely or even never.

However, although most grandparents live quite near to their grandchildren, do not work full-time and are healthy, parents report that only about 2% of them take care of their grandchild on a daily basis. Instead, the majority takes care of their grandchildren several times a year, rarely or even never (see Figure 1). This pattern can also be observed for how often grandchildren stay overnight, how often grandparents take part in leisure activities with their grandchildren or talk with their grandchildren about their problems.

Health status, place of living or time restrictions do not seem to be the main factors influencing the frequency of grandparents support

Most grandparents seem to have the opportunity to involve in their grandchildren's care: About 33% of grandmothers live less than 10 minutes away from their grandchild's home. Only about 15% live more than 3 hours away. Most grandparents work part-time and are healthy: about 35% responded by saying that their health status is "average" and another 35% judged their health to be "good".

Do grandparents refrain from providing support due to poor relationship quality between them and parents?

Figure 2 rather shows the opposite. Most parents are satisfied with the life domain of their family.

Do normative views of parents and grandparents explain the puzzle of low frequency of intra-familial childcare?

Multinomial logistic regression

Results for the link between grandparents normative familial values and the extent of their support in grandchildren's care are mixed. Surprisingly, the log odds of agreeing fully with the conservative view that women should be more concerned about their family than about their career are lower for grandparents taking care of their grandchildren. If grandparents agree with the egalitarian statement of "Men should participate in housework to the same extent as women", the multinomial logits of grandparents taking care are lower as well, which fits with hypothesis 3.

The results of the multinomial model can be summarized as follows,

- If a parent were to increase her consent with the conservative statement "A child below 6 suffers if his mother works", the multinomial log-odds for grandparents taking care only several times a week, once a week, 1 to 3 times a month or even rarer would be expected to increase by about 0.15 unit while holding all other variables in the model constant (hypothesis 1 confirmed). This observation is also true for consent to the statement "A woman should rather care for the family not her career".
- Individual satisfaction with the relationship to parents or grandparents as well as consent with egalitarian normative statements only have very small significant influence on the frequency of grandparents providing support (effect size about 0.02, Hypothesis 3 confirmed).
- Conflicting normative views of parents and grandparents only have a small significant negative effect on the frequency of grandparents support in childcare as well (Hypothesis 2 confirmed).
- However if parents and grandparents share conservative values (interaction effect), the multinomial log-odds for the frequency of grandparents taking care decrease considerably.

Conclusions and next steps

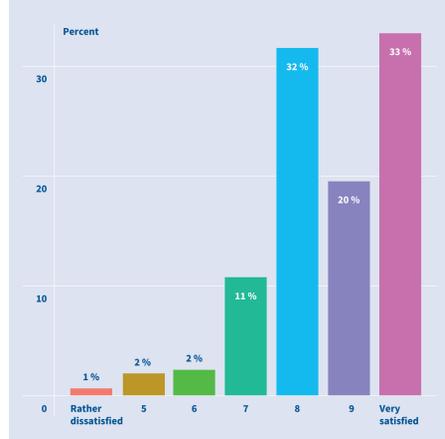
Besides grandparents opportunity to provide support and parents need to receive help, normative values are important factors influencing the extent of grandparents support in child care. Examining parents and grandparents normative views jointly gives further insight into the conditions of grandparents support in childcare.

Future studies covering other regions and cultures than studied here would significantly broaden our understanding of the role of normative values for intra-familial support in childcare. Another intriguing topic of study is the analysis of change in people's normative values over time and its consequences on intra-familial care. Finally, interdependencies of intra-familial help with extra-familial help such as public childcare are a third valuable topic of study.

Figure 1: How often do grandparents take care of their grandchild? Source: pairfam, own calculations



Figure 2: How satisfied are you with your family? Source: pairfam, own calculations



1 If a grand parent reported to have looked after grand children from more than one of his children, the pairfam dataset uses the focus-grandchild, i.e. the child for whom the greatest frequency of caregiving was reported.

References

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