

“Decoding Grandparent Preferences for ‘Quality Time’ with Grandchildren from a Time Diary Perspective.”

Grandparenting is frequently part of the fabric of daily family life. Among many families, grandparents regularly help their adult children raise children, met financial obligations, and maintain a home. Since the 2007 recession, grandparenting today is an even more salient feature of everyday family life than before the recession.

The benefits a family and society derives from grandparenting activities are well-documented. Grandparent-provided child care, for instance, can facilitate participation in the labor market by parents, especially mothers. This informal type of child care at low or zero cost not only aids female labor force participation, but lowers the fiscal transfers governments would need to make to support the use of formal child care arrangements among working parents if grandparent child care was unavailable or foregone.

Other studies show that grandparents can lower the cost of raising children and improve the economic well-being of their adult children’s families through other types of transfers, as well. Bequests and income transfers, long the focus of economic studies, can boost the economic well-being of adult children and their families. Alongside income transfers, in-kind *inter vivos* transfers, besides childcare, can assist families, too. For instance, grandparents sharing housing, running errands, driving grandchildren to doctors’ visits and sport and cultural events, organizing house repairs, and helping with homework, transfers time and resources to families and thereby again reduces the need for parents to use publicly-funded alternatives, which are oftentimes poor substitutes for extended family help.

Furthermore, the literature suggests that both grandparents and grandchildren benefit from quality time together. Some research indicates that there are proximate benefits from grandparenting for children, such as, enhanced cognitive, physical, and social development. In the United Kingdom, a recent report describes how grandchildren value the non-critical support, emotional advice and guidance that grandparents offer and enjoy the quality time their grandparents give them. Other research argues there are more distant benefits in adolescence and adulthood for grandchildren from grandparenting, such as, less severe depressive symptoms and higher self-esteem, especially among young adults who were raised by single parents. The aging individual gains from grandparenting, also. According to several studies, grandparenting has a strong positive affect on the well-being, longevity, and mental health of the elderly. At a deeper level, research from the United Kingdom indicates that the grandchild-grandparent relationship adds to the elderly’s *raison d’être*.

Whether or not they live with grandchildren, provide child care, or help in other ways, the grandparent role is central to the lives of most aging individuals. Like the research from the United Kingdom, many older Americans believe grandparenting as the most significant benefit of aging. According to a 2009 Pew Research Center survey, American grandparents placed a premium on time spent with their grandchildren. In fact, among older Americans in the Pew survey who were grandparents, spending time with grandchildren surpassed creating greater financial security for themselves or making extra time to pursue their hobbies and interests.

Clearly, a theme emerging from the literature on grandparents is that they prefer spending time with their grandchildren over spending time on other activities they could choose. But, knowing grandparent’s time preferences, though informative, still leaves much unknown about the actual allocation of time by grandparents to grandchildren. In other words, beyond knowing a grandparent prefers ‘quality time’ with his or her grandchild rather than spending time on anything else, the literature provides little, if any, knowledge about: (a) the number of hours that an older person allots to grandparenting; (b) how those hours for grandparenting are distributed across leisure and unpaid work activities and across the days of the week; and, (c) whether grandparenting hours in leisure and unpaid

work activities depend upon living arrangements.

To help fill part of this knowledge gap, I will use the 2006 Australian time use data to analyze time allocation among grandparents. The project will exploit these data to: (a) estimate the number of hours that an older person allocates to grandparenting; (b) show grandparenting hours spent on leisure and unpaid work activities during the standard workweek compared with the weekend; and, (c) determine if grandparenting hours in leisure and unpaid work activities depend upon whether grandparents live with grandchildren.

The information revealed from this study will expand the literature beyond a discussion about the ordering of older persons' time preferences to a deeper understanding of how their leading preference, i.e., interactions with grandchildren, is transformed into hours spent on activities with grandchildren. Specifically, this study will estimate the average weekly hours that grandparents spend with grandchildren. Then, the study will show the allocation of these hours across a range of child care activities and leisure and recreational activities. Lastly, the study will estimate the effects of joint living arrangements between grandparents and grandchildren on the numbers of hours per week reported by grandparents spent doing unpaid work activities, such as child care, and leisure activities.