

Grandparents providing child care

Briefing Paper



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Key points

- Grandparents play a prominent role in providing child care and supporting maternal employment, especially for low income families.
- Grandparents were the main child care arrangement for 35 per cent of families where the mother was working or studying when the child was nine months old, ahead of all other types of care.
- However few grandparents provide full-time care. The majority of those who provide care do so for 10 hours or less a week.
- Levels of grandparent involvement are highest for mothers who return to work before children are six months old and in single parent families. Grandparents are more likely to provide care when grandchildren are first-born, where mothers are younger and when mothers work part-time.
- Grandparents continue to have a significant role in child care arrangements when children start school, particularly during holiday periods.
- There is some evidence that children receiving informal childcare (primarily grandparents) in their first few years of life have as good or better vocabularies but do less well on numeracy and literacy tests, are more likely to be overweight and have higher levels of hyperactivity and peer difficulties. In some cases the relationship only holds for children from more advantaged homes.
- Although most grandparents enjoy caring for grandchildren, those who provide care for longer hours are less satisfied and more likely to report a negative impact on their health and wellbeing.
- After parental separation, most children continue to experience a close relationship with their maternal grandparents but relationships with paternal grandparents are weakened, and Australian data showed that nearly one in five lost contact completely.
- Closeness to grandparents, especially maternal grandparents, is associated with better grandchild adjustment. However the impact of continued contact with grandparents is likely to depend on the quality of the relationship between the grandparent and the parent with care.

Background

The Families and Early Years Analysis and Research Team at the Department for Education requested a brief review of research evidence and statistical data on grandparents providing childcare. This was carried out (over ten days) during July 2011. Initial discussions clarified that the focus should be on the provision of care while parents work/study, and also contact (i.e. the time grandparents spend with grandchildren more generally, and any trends in this). The review also addresses contact between grandparents and grandchildren after parental divorce or separation. However, information on grandparents as sole carers, when parents cannot care for their children (also known as custodial care, kinship care or 'family and friends' care) is not covered in this briefing paper.

Aims

To understand further the role of grandparents in providing child care for grandchildren and the impact on wellbeing (child and adult).

Research questions

- What type of care are grandparents providing and at what regularity, and what sort of families are providing this care?
- How many hours a week do grandparents provide childcare for their grandchildren and does this vary by family type?
- How many grandparents are the main providers of childcare for their grandchildren, and what are their characteristics?
- What is the impact of grandparent care on child and adult wellbeing?
- What is the impact of grandparent care on child attainment, cognitive development, and behaviour?
- How many grandparents have no or limited contact with their grandchildren as a result of parental separation, and what evidence is there on the impact of this on children and families?

Methods

A range of databases¹ were searched for relevant publications between 2001 and 2011, using search terms such as 'grandparent', 'grandchildren', 'care', 'childcare', 'daycare' and 'contact'. Websites of key research centres known to undertake relevant research in other countries were also searched, in particular the Australian Institute of Family Studies, as well as websites of organisations such as Grandparents Plus in the UK. Additional material was identified through reference harvesting. Data on the extent and type of grandparent care in other countries was

¹ ASSIA, ERIC, IBSS, Social Services Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, MEDLINE, Social Care Online, NFER 'On the Web', Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre database

restricted to the UK, but particularly relevant studies from other countries on the impact of grandparental care were included. Key messages were extracted from the most relevant publications (identified from their abstracts) and the evidence collated to address the research questions.

How extensive is care by grandparents?

Grandparent care can take many forms, from occasional babysitting through regular help with child care to being the sole or main provider of childcare while parents work, or living with their grandchildren in multi-generation households. (Grandparents may also care for grandchildren whose parents are unable or unwilling to do so, either as 'kinship carers' where arrangements are made by social services² or in households where grandparents and grandchildren live together without a parent present³, but these situations are not covered in this review). Studies of the extent of grandparent care do not always specify the circumstances in which it occurs, its hours and frequency or the other care arrangements that parents may use alongside grandparent care, making it difficult to form a clear picture.

The Childcare and Early Years Survey in 2009 carried out by NatCen for the Department for Education⁴ (based on just over 6,700 parents with children under age 14 randomly selected from Child Benefit records) found that around 26 per cent had received help with childcare from grandparents in the previous (term-time) week. Although an analysis of data from the British Household Panel Study showed an increase between 1991 and 2001 in the use of informal childcare (grandparents were not specifically distinguished)⁵, the annual surveys for DFE suggest that the proportion of families with a child under 14 using grandparent care has remained fairly constant over the past decade at around a quarter^{6 7}. The use of formal care has risen over the same period, especially for three- and four-year-olds.

Analysis of care arrangements at 8, 15 and 24 months for children participating in the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) found that forty four percent were 'regularly' cared for by grandparents at each age, with 28 per cent receiving some level of grandparent care at all three study contacts⁸. The mean level

² See for example Farmer E. and Moyers S. (2008) *Fostering effective family and friends placements*, London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers; Hunt J. et al (2008) *Keeping them in the family: outcomes for children placed in kinship care through care proceedings*. London: BAAF

³ Nandy S. and Selwyn J. (2011) *Spotlight on Kinship Care: using census microdata to examine the extent and nature of kinship care in the UK*. Bristol: The Hadley Centre for Adoption and Fostering

⁴ Smith R. and others (2010) *Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2009*. DFE-RR054. London: DFE

⁵ Gray A. (2005) The changing availability of grandparents as carers and its implications for childcare policy in the UK. *Journal of Social Policy* 34, 4, 557-577

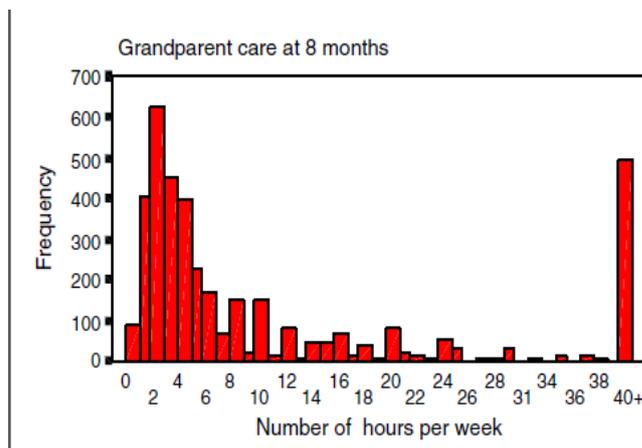
⁶ Woodland S., Miller M. & Tipping S. (2002) *Repeat study of parents' demand for childcare*, Research Report RR348. London: DFE

⁷ Speight S., Smith R., La Valle I., Schneider V., Perry J., Coshall C. & Tipping S. (2009) *Childcare and early years survey of parents*. Research report DCSF-RR136. London: DFE

⁸ Fergusson E., Maughan B. and Golding J. (2008) Which children receive grandparental care and what effect does it have?, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 49, 2, 161-169

of grandparent involvement was approximately ten hours per week but this varied considerably. The most common level of involvement was 2.5 hours per week although a small group of grandchildren were effectively cared for by grandparents full-time (see Table 1).

Table 1 The number of hours grandchildren are cared for per week by grandparents at 8 months



Source: Fergusson et al. (2008), *op cit*

The longitudinal Families and Child Care study, which followed the development of over 1200 children in two areas of England from birth to age four and a half, identified cases where grandparents or other relatives were the main form of care. Just under half of mothers reported using some form of child care when children were 10 months old. For 13.5 per cent of these families, grandparents or other relatives were the 'dominant' form of care, looking after the child for at least 12 hours a week. When children were 18 months old, slightly more families were using child care, but grandparents and other relatives were slightly less likely to be the main source (down from 13.5 to 12.6 per cent of those using care, with the proportion using nurseries rising from 10.3 to 13.6 per cent). Grandparents and other relatives were not considered separately in this study⁹.

Useful information on care by grandparents for children at different ages is provided by successive sweeps of the Millenium Cohort Study (MCS). When children were nine months old, grandparents provided at least some care for 42 per cent of families, rising to 71 per cent of families where the mother was in employment or studying. Grandparents were the main childcare arrangement for 35 per cent of

⁹ Sylva K., Stein A., Leach P., Barnes J., Malmberg L-E and the FCCC team (2011) Effects of early child-care on cognition, language and task-related behaviour at 18 months: an English study. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 29, 18-45

families where the mother was working or studying when the child was nine months old, ahead of all other types of care¹⁰.

By age three, just over a quarter of MCS families reported receiving some child care from a grandparent. Among those who had used a maternal grandmother as the sole childcare arrangement at nine months, over a half reported the same care arrangement at 3 years, suggesting a substantial degree of continuity but also of children ‘graduating’ to more formal types of care as they got older¹¹.

By the time of the third sweep¹², at age five when children had started school, grandparents were still the most common form of non-parental care although as in earlier years this was not necessarily so that parents could work. Grandparent care was being used by 27 per cent of families of five-year-olds, with an average of 8.2 hours a week of grandparent care reported by working mothers and an average of 9.3 hours by non-working mothers. The most recent sweep of the MCS in 2008¹³, when children were aged seven, showed that grandparents continued to have a significant role in child care arrangements, particularly during holiday periods. They were the most commonly reported type of child care arrangement, although not necessarily the one in which children spent the longest time (Table 2).

Table 2. Amount of time in childcare arrangements MCS4 (children aged 7)

| | Term-time weekdays | | | Term-time weekend | | | Holidays | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | N using | % using | Mean hrs/wk | N using | % using | Mean hrs/wk | N using | % using | Mean days |
| Nursery | 60 | 0.3 | 6.64 | | | | 109 | 0.7 | 11.27 |
| Childminder | 744 | 5.4 | 7.92 | | | | 438 | 3.1 | 13.06 |
| Grandparent | 3790 | 27.2 | 5.90 | 2648 | 20.1 | 8.24 | 4294 | 32.9 | 9.04 |
| Non-resident parent | 338 | 2.9 | 11.34 | 874 | 6.6 | 22.26 | 546 | 4.8 | 9.11 |
| Older sibling | 679 | 5.0 | 4.45 | 490 | 3.7 | 3.46 | 468 | 3.3 | 7.12 |
| Other relative | 861 | 6.1 | 4.44 | 624 | 4.7 | 5.33 | 917 | 7.1 | 6.16 |
| Friend/neighbour | 809 | 6.5 | 3.04 | 283 | 2.1 | 3.90 | 580 | 4.9 | 4.60 |
| Holiday club | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 1116 | 9.1 | 8.98 |

Other studies have also shown that care by grandparents tends to be part time, often ‘filling in the gaps’ around other care arrangements. Grandparent care typically offers more flexibility than formal care, with grandparents picking children up from childcare, preschool or school and caring for them until parents return from work; providing care during school holidays; and stepping in when care is needed in an emergency or when other care arrangements break down^{14 15 16 17}. Evidence from

¹⁰ Dex S. and Joshi H. (2004) Millenium Cohort Study First Survey: A user’s guide to initial findings. London: Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS), Institute of Education, University of London

¹¹ Hansen K. and Joshi H. (2007) Millenium Cohort Study Second Survey: A user’s guide to initial findings.

¹² Hansen K. and Joshi H. (2008) Millenium Cohort Study Third Survey: A user’s guide to initial findings.

¹³ Hansen K., Jones E., Joshi H. and Budge D. (2010) Millenium Cohort Study Fourth Survey: A user’s guide to initial findings.

¹⁴ Dench G.. and Ogg J. (2002) Grandparenting in Britain. London: Institute of Community Studies

¹⁵ Bradshaw P., Jamieson L. and Wasoff F. (2008) Growing up in Scotland Study: Use of informal support by families with young children. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/03/12110018/0>

other countries paints a similar picture of grandparents playing an important part in enabling mothers to work, but relatively few providing full-time childcare^{18 19 20}.

Although much research refers to 'grandparents', there is little information about the specific role that grandfathers play²¹. Where they are involved in care it appears to be grandmothers who are primarily responsible even if grandfathers are also present²².

Family policies supporting childcare by grandparents

From April 2011, UK grandparents who give up work to provide at least 20 hours of childcare for a child under 12 so parents can work have been entitled to claim National Insurance credits towards their basic state pension²³. Other European countries recognise, and in some cases reward, grandparents for providing childcare in a variety of ways²⁴. For example in Germany, parents can transfer parental leave to a grandparent if they are seriously ill or disabled or if they are a teenage parent, and working grandparents are entitled to up to ten days paid leave to look after a grandchild in an emergency. Hungary also has transferable allowances and leave, and in Portugal grandparents can take up to 30 days a year and receive a financial allowance to care for a sick child when working parents are unable to do so.

Who uses grandparent care?

Families across the social spectrum use grandparental care for their children, although there is particular reliance among low-income groups on extended family (primarily grandmothers) to provide support so that mothers can work^{25 26}.

Analysis of data from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) showed that grandparents are more likely to be involved with first-born children, when mothers are younger (especially with teenage mothers), and where

¹⁶ Gray A. (2005) *op cit*

¹⁷ Wheelock J. and Jones K. (2002) 'Grandparents are the next best thing': Informal childcare for working parents in urban Britain, *Journal of Social Policy*, 31, 441-463.

¹⁸ Vandell D., McCartney K., Owen M., Booth C. and Clarke-Stewart A. (2003) Variations in childcare by grandparents during the first three years. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 65, 2, 375- 381.

¹⁹ Lewis J., Campbell D. and Huerta (2008) Patterns of paid and unpaid work in Western Europe, *Journal of Social Policy* 18, 1, 21-37

²⁰ Hank K. and Buber I. (2009) Grandparents Caring for Their Grandchildren: Findings From the 2004 Survey of Health, Ageing, and Retirement in Europe. *Journal of Family Issues*, 30, 1, 53-73

²¹ Wilton V. and Davey J. (2006) Grandfathers – their changing family roles and contributions. Wellington New Zealand: The Families Commission

²² Dench and Ogg (2002) *op cit*

²³ NB this was reported as forthcoming in a number of documents, but have been unable to confirm that it has happened.

²⁴ Glaser K. et al. (2010) Grandparenting in Europe: summary. <http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Grandparenting-in-Europe-executive-summary.pdf>

²⁵ Gray A. (2005) *op cit*

²⁶ Leach P., Barnes J., Malmberg L-E., Sylva K., Stein A. and the FCCC team (2008) The quality of different types of child care at 10 and 18 months: a comparison between types and factors related to quality. *Early Child Development and Care* 178, 2, 177-209

mothers work on a part-time basis. Levels of grandparent involvement were highest for those mothers who returned to work before the child was six months old. Grandparent involvement was also greater in single parent families and in families where mothers' marital status changed in the first two years of the child's life, but was lower in step-families²⁷.

Families with no financial problems are the *least* likely to report grandparent care,²⁸ and mothers using grandparent childcare tend to be the more disadvantaged groups²⁹. Just under a quarter of parents in the Millenium Cohort Study (MCS) who were educated to degree level used grandparent care compared to 30-36 per cent of less educated parents³⁰. Looked at from the perspective of those providing rather than using grandparent care, differences by socioeconomic status are also evident. British Social Attitudes survey data showed that working age, working class grandmothers on low incomes were the group most likely to be providing childcare. They were also more likely to have given up work or reduced their paid hours to care for grandchildren³¹.

In a recent survey of grandparents commissioned by Grandparents Plus³², there was strong support for the idea of paying grandparents who provide significant amounts of childcare to enable parents to work, through tax credits or childcare vouchers. Support was strongest among grandparents from lower socioeconomic groups and among grandparents who were in employment. However other studies have found that financial payments tend not to be seen as an incentive for grandmothers to do childcare, although it is suggested that they would help in situations where both grandmother and parents are on a low income³³.

There was no clear pattern in the MCS data indicating differences between **ethnic groups** in the use of grandparent care. The fact that children in some ethnic groups are more likely to be co-resident with grandparents would suggest greater availability to provide childcare, but on the other hand children of White respondents in the MCS had a greater number of living grandparents, meaning there are potentially more opportunities for such care³⁴. Studies in Australia have indicated that grandparents from migrant groups are particularly likely to provide childcare, but it is unclear if this is through choice, cultural expectations or simply responding to the needs of their

²⁷ Fergusson, Maughan and Golding (2008) *op cit*

²⁸ Fergusson, Maughan and Golding (2008) *op cit*

²⁹ Leach et al (2008) *op cit*

³⁰ Hansen K. and Joshi H. (2007) *op cit*

³¹ Grandparents Plus (2009) *The Poor Relation: Interim report*. London: Grandparents Plus

³² Grandparents Plus (2010) *Policy Briefing Paper 03: Poll findings June 2010*.

<http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/briefing-paper-poll-findings-june-2010.pdf>

³³ Arthur S., Snape D. and Dench G. (2005) *The Moral Economy of Grandparenting*. London: NatCen

³⁴ Hansen K. and Joshi H. (2007) *op cit*

grandchildren's parents for childcare so they can both work in order to establish themselves in their new country³⁵.

Whilst grandparents often provide considerable emotional and practical support to families with a **disabled child**, there is a lack of research on their specific contribution to childcare and how this might influence employment decisions among parents of disabled children^{36 37}.

The 'Timescapes' longitudinal study funded by ESRC identified a new demographic of younger grandparents (late 30s and 40s) living in low income communities with high rates of teenage pregnancy, who are effectively parents to two generations of children (and often providing care for their own parents too). This qualitative study is following the lives of a very small sample, but it illustrates how grandparenting in these circumstances is not the 'leisure and pleasure' ideal but is rather a 'rescue and repair' model, where grandparents provide a high level of care and other support to keep families together which can impact negatively on their health, income and future plans. It is argued that this input is often invisible to social care and other services, and that support for teenage parents and their children needs to adopt an approach that works with all family members, including young grandparents³⁸.

What is the impact of grandparent care on children's wellbeing?

Many studies have shown that parents have a strong preference for very young children to be cared for by grandparents while they work, believing that this is better for the child's wellbeing^{39 40 41}. Evidence on whether this is actually the case is available from studies of grandparental 'closeness' to their grandchildren, and from studies comparing outcomes from different types of childcare, although the results from the latter are complicated by the fact that parents often use more than one type of care.

In the US, grandchildren with stronger ties to grandparents reported fewer depressive symptoms as adolescents or young adults than those with weaker ties, and this was particularly the case for grandchildren of single parent families⁴². In

³⁵ Ochiltree G. (2006) The changing role of grandparents. Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse Briefing no 2. <http://www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/briefing/briefing2.html>

³⁶ Russell P. (2003) Bridging the Gap: Developing policy and practice and childcare options for disabled children and their families. London: Council for Disabled Children

³⁷ Mitchell W. (2007) Research Review: The role of grandparents in intergenerational support for families with disabled children: a review of the literature, *Child & Family Social Work*, 12, 1, 94-101

³⁸ Hughes K., Emmel N. and Hemmerman L. (2009) Intergenerational Exchange: grandparents and social exclusion. Briefing paper 2. Mid-term briefing paper for policy makers and practitioners.

<http://www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk/assets/files/timescapes/June%20Briefing%20Paper.doc>

³⁹ Barnes J., Leach P., Sylva K., Stein A., Malmberg L-E. and the FCCC team (2006) Infant care in England: mothers' aspirations, experiences, satisfaction and caregiver relationships. *Early Child Development and Care* 176, 5, 553-573

⁴⁰ Bell A., Finch N., La Valle I., Sainsbury R. and Skinner C. (2005) A Question of Balance: Lone parents, childcare and work. DWP Research Report RR230

⁴¹ Wheelock and Jones (2002) *op cit*

⁴² Ruiz S. and Silverstein M. (2007) Relationships with grandparents and the emotional well-being of late

England, analysis of longitudinal data showed a positive association between grandparental closeness and child adjustment when children were on average nine years old, but by age 14 that link had disappeared⁴³. Another UK study funded by the ESRC, on grandparenting and child wellbeing as seen through the eyes of young people, surveyed 1596 children aged 11 to 16 and conducted interviews with 40 young people. Greater reported grandparental involvement was significantly associated with fewer emotional problems and with more pro-social behaviour, especially when grandparents were involved in the child's hobbies and interests; their schooling and education; and talking about future plans. A range of factors predicted the level of grandparental involvement including the child's age (greater involvement with younger children), living in a less deprived area, frequent contact, good grandparental health and grandparent-grandchild closeness. Geographical proximity was less important as new technology overcame some of the barriers created by distance⁴⁴.

Data from the Millenium Cohort Study showed that after controlling for other variables, children who were cared for in informal childcare (75 per cent grandparents) between the ages of nine months and three years were more likely to be overweight than those cared for only by a parent, particularly if they were in full-time childcare. This relationship only held for children from more advantaged families (mothers with a higher educational level, from a professional background and living with a partner), and there was no association between the use of formal childcare and children being overweight. The researchers suggest that the introduction of NI credits for grandparents who care for their grandchildren may provide a useful opportunity for promoting messages about healthy eating⁴⁵.

Comparison of the quality of care offered in four different types of non-parental childcare to over 300 infants at ten and eighteen months old found few differences in the observed quality of care by childminders, grandparents and nannies, although grandparents had somewhat lower safety and health scores and offered children fewer activities⁴⁶.

What is the impact of grandparent care on children's cognitive attainment and behaviour?

One study using ALSPAC data found a negative impact of informal care (unpaid care by a friend, relative – including grandparents - or neighbour) in the first three years of a child's life on children's performance in literacy and numeracy tests between the

adolescent and young adult grandchildren, *Journal of Social Issues*, 63, 4, 793-808

⁴³ Bridges L., Roe A., Dunn J. and O'Connor T. (2007) Children's perspectives on their relationships with grandparents following parental separation: a longitudinal study. *Social Development* 16, 3, 539-554

⁴⁴ Griggs J., Tan J-P., Buchanan A., Attar-Schwartz S. and Flouri E. (2010) 'They've always been there for me': grandparental involvement and child well-being. *Children and Society* 24, 200-214

⁴⁵ Pearce A., Li L. et al (2010) Is childcare associated with the risk of overweight and obesity in the early years? Findings from the UK Millenium Cohort Study. *International Journal of Obesity* 34, 7, 1160-1168

⁴⁶ Leach, Barnes et al (2008) *Op cit*

ages of four and eight⁴⁷. Grandparents were not identified separately in this study. The negative effects were also restricted to children from more advantaged households who used such informal care for more than short periods, and who did not also use formal child care such as a nursery or playgroup. Other researchers using ALSPAC data found that grandparent care when the study children were aged 8, 15 and 24 months was associated with some elevated rates of hyperactivity and peer difficulties when children were aged four, but concluded that these were largely attributable to variations in the characteristics of the families using grandparent care⁴⁸.

Other studies have painted a broadly similar picture. Analysis of MCS data showed that children who had been looked after by grandparents at the age of nine months while their mothers worked had, on average, similar vocabulary scores at age three to those who had attended formal group care (nurseries, crèches, nursery schools and playgroups) and were ahead of those who had been involved in other informal care arrangements. But they were behind on assessments of their school readiness (understanding of colours, letters, numbers etc.). The researchers suggest this may be due to grandparents having less access to settings where children can interact with their peers, such as toddler groups and children's centres⁴⁹. This suggestion is strengthened by an unexpected finding of the Families, Children and Child Care (FCCC) study⁵⁰, which was that more hours of group care in nurseries predicted higher cognitive (but not language) functioning at 18 months even though the quality of care in nurseries was judged to be lower than in individual care settings. It was hypothesised that some of the beneficial effect of nurseries may stem from the influence of peers on children's development. The FCCC study also showed that greater hours of individual care, such as that provided by grandparents and nannies, were related to lower scores on a measure of orientation and engagement (e.g. being task-focused, cooperative and curious), after controlling for demographics and the quality of maternal caregiving.

The advantages of grandparent care as a supplement to other forms of care are highlighted by Australian research, which found a tendency for children using either 'long day care' (day nurseries) or family day care (childminders) *in combination with* grandparent care to have better early communication skills than children who used long day care only⁵¹.

What is the impact of grandparent care on grandparents themselves?

⁴⁷ Gregg P., Washbrook L., Propper C. and Burgess S. (2005) The effects of a mother's return to work decision on child development in the UK. *The Economic Journal* 115, 48-80

⁴⁸ Fergusson et al (2008) *op cit*

⁴⁹ Hansen K. and Hawkes D. (2009) Early childcare and child development, *Journal of Social Policy*, 38, 211-239

⁵⁰ Sylva K., Stein A., Leach P., Barnes J., Malmberg L-E and the FCCC-team (2011) Effects of early child-care on cognition, language and task-related behaviours at 18 months: an English study. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 29, 18-45

⁵¹ Wise S. et al. (2005) The relationship of multiple and changeable child care arrangements to early communication skills. Paper presented at the 9th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, Melbourne Australia, 9-11 February 2005.

Most evidence on the impact of caring for grandchildren on grandparents themselves relates to providing full-time care of grandchildren in place of parents (custodial or 'skipped generation' care)⁵². In such circumstances grandparents are often poor and in poor health themselves, caring for grandchildren who have already experienced difficult lives, and taking over their care puts further strain on the grandparents' health and wellbeing. However, the evidence in relation to providing care for grandchildren while parents work indicates that this is often welcomed and enjoyed by grandparents, provided it is not too onerous and that it fits with their personal preferences. Australian researchers investigating the experiences of grandparents distinguished four styles of caregiver experience⁵³.

- **Avid** caregivers whose lives revolved around their grandchildren
- **Flexible** caregivers who were concerned with family but also gave some priority to their personal time
- **Selective** caregivers whose grandchildren are an important part of their lives but who did not want to be defined simply as grandparents
- **Hesitant** caregivers who did not anticipate caring for their grandchildren

Grandparents who actively contribute to family life and provide care and support to grandchildren can benefit from an enhanced sense of purpose, even if they find childcare physically and emotionally draining⁵⁴. UK studies show that grandparents find caring stressful when they feel under pressure to fulfil a role they do not want or to provide more hours of care than they would ideally wish^{55 56}. Part-time care is generally a preferred option, and the evidence suggests that it is providing extensive amounts of care that is more likely to have a negative impact on grandparents' own health and wellbeing. For example one US study⁵⁷ analysing data from over 3,000 grandparents in a national household survey found that providing 30 or more hours a week or 90 or more nights a year of care was associated with higher levels of depression among grandmothers; and another showed that higher levels of stress plus lower marital satisfaction were reported by grandmothers as the amount of childcare provided increased⁵⁸. Grandparents taking on a significant childcare role often do so at the expense of their own retirement plan^{59 60}.

⁵² Glaser K. et al. (2010) Grandparenting in Europe. London: Grandparents Plus

⁵³ Goodfellow J. and Laverty J. (2003) Grandparents supporting working families: satisfaction and choice in the provision of childcare. *Family Matters* 66, 14-19. Australian Institute of Family Studies.

⁵⁴ Grandparents Plus (2009) Rethinking Family Life: exploring the role of grandparents and the wider family. London: Grandparents Plus

⁵⁵ Dench and Ogg (2002) *op cit*

⁵⁶ Arthur S., Snape D. and Dench G. (2005) The Moral Economy of Grandparenting. London: NatCen

⁵⁷ Minkler M. and Fuller-Thomson D.E. (2001) Physical and mental health status of American grandparents providing extensive care to their grandchildren. *Journal of the American Medical Women's Association* 56, 4, 199-205

⁵⁸ Culp A.M., Culp R., Noland D and Andersen J. (2006) Stress, marital satisfaction and childcare provision by mothers of adolescent mothers: considerations to make when providing services. *Children and Youth Services Review* 28, 673-681

⁵⁹ Mooney A. & Statham J. (2002) The Pivot Generation: Informal care and work after fifty. Bristol: Policy Press

Contact with grandchildren after parental separation or divorce

The Grandparents Association has estimated that one million children lose touch with their grandparents as a result of parental separation or divorce⁶¹, but there is little hard information in the UK to back up this claim. The best data on contact with grandchildren post separation comes from the Grandparents in Separated Families study in Australia, which was part of an extensive evaluation into the impact of reforms to the Family Law Act in 2006 (see below). After separation, most children (aged two to ten) continued to experience a close relationship with their maternal grandparents, but for at least half, their relationship with paternal grandparents (which was already weaker than with maternal grandparents) became more distant. Seventeen per cent of paternal grandparents whose grandchild lived mostly with the mother lost contact completely. Closeness and contact seemed to relate more to which parent the child mainly lived with rather than to whether the parent was the grandparent's son or daughter. If a child lived mostly with their father, there was usually a high level of contact between paternal grandparents and grandchild. However such situations were unusual. Paternal grandfathers in Ireland likewise reported greater difficulties in maintaining contact with their grandchildren post divorce or separation, although a few became more closely involved⁶².

The Australian law reforms introduced a 'presumption of contact' for both parents with their children post separation, and also specifically recognised the need to consider continuing contact with grandparents. Grandparents who lose contact with grandchildren were given the right to apply to a Family Relationship Centre for an order to allow them to see their grandchild provided this is judged to be in the child's best interests; however this service has not been widely used⁶³. The evaluation provided some evidence that the new legislation contributed to highlighting the important role of grandparents in children's lives. Just over half of parents separating post-reform reported that time with grandparents had been taken into account in their parenting arrangements compared to a smaller proportion (40 per cent) pre-reform. However, the evaluation concluded that it was important to avoid automatically assuming that involvement of grandparents would contribute positively to children's lives, since grandparents could create conflict by taking sides and adding fuel to parental conflict. Caution was similarly sounded in a qualitative study of grandparenting in divorced families in Cardiff, Wales, which found a wide range of experiences both positive and negative⁶⁴.

⁶⁰ Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne (2010) The changing role of grandparents. Policy brief No 19. http://www.rch.org.au/emplibrary/ccch/PB19_Grandparents.pdf

⁶¹ Grandparents Plus (2011) Policy Briefing Paper 01: Statistics <http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Policy-Briefing-01-paper-statistics-Feb-2011.pdf>

⁶² Timonen V., Doyle M. and O'Dwyer C. (2009) The role of grandparents in divorced and separated families. Dublin: School of Social Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin

⁶³ Kaspiew R., Gray M., Weston R., Moloney L., Hand K., Qu L. and the Family Law Evaluation Team (2009). Evaluation of the 2006 family law reforms (see chapter 12). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

⁶⁴ Ferguson N. et al (2004) Grandparenting in divorced families. Bristol: The Policy Press

Analysis of data from 155 children in the Avon Brothers and Sisters study (part of ALSPAC) found that greater closeness to maternal grandparents was significantly associated with fewer adjustment problems after parents had separated, even when other family variables were controlled for. Closeness to paternal grandparents did not explain additional variance⁶⁵. However, paternal grandparents may help to facilitate communication between their sons and former partners, encouraging continuing contact⁶⁶. In another UK study, grandparent involvement was more strongly associated with reduced adjustment difficulties among adolescents in lone-parent and step-families than those from two-parent biological families, suggesting that grandparents may act as 'buffers' when children experience changes in family structure⁶⁷. However, the impact of continued contact with grandparents is likely to depend on the quality of the relationship between the grandparent and the parent with care⁶⁸.

⁶⁵ Lussier G., Deater-Deckard K., Dunn J. and Davies L. (2002) Support across two generations. *Journal of Family Psychology* 16, 363-376

⁶⁶ Grandparents Plus (2009) Rethinking Family Life. *op cit*.

⁶⁷ Attar-Schwartz S., Tan J-P., Buchanan A., Griggs J., Flouri, E. (2009) Grandparenting and Adolescent Adjustment in Two-Parent Biological, Lone-Parent and Step-Families, *Journal of Family Psychology*, 23, 67 - 75

⁶⁸ Glaser K. et al. (2010) Grandparenting in Europe: summary. <http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Grandparenting-in-Europe-executive-summary.pdf>