

Original Research Report

Support Grandparents Give to Their Adult Grandchildren

Meng Huo,¹ Kyungmin Kim,² Steven H. Zarit,³ and Karen L. Fingerman¹

¹Department of Human Development and Family Sciences, The University of Texas at Austin. ²Department of Gerontology, University of Massachusetts Boston. ³Department of Human Development and Family Studies, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park.

Correspondence should be addressed to Meng Huo, MA, Department of Human Development and Family Sciences, The University of Texas at Austin, 108 E Dean Keeton St, Stop A2702, Austin, TX 78712-1248. E-mail: mhuo@atx.utexas.edu

Received June 15, 2016; Editorial Decision Date December 6, 2016

Decision Editor: Shevaun Neupert, PhD

Abstract

Objectives: Many grandparents are involved in young grandchildren's lives, but we know little about grandparents' support of adult grandchildren. This study assessed frequency of different types of support that grandparents provided to adult grandchildren and examined potential explanations for such support (e.g., affection, grandchildren's needs, parents' support).

Method: Grandparents in The Family Exchanges Study Wave 2 ($N = 198$; $M_{\text{age}} = 80.19$) reported how often they provided six types of support to a focal adult grandchild.

Results: Multiple regressions revealed that grandparents' affective ties with an adult grandchild were associated with more frequent listening, emotional support, and companionship. Grandparents also provided more frequent emotional support to adult grandchildren when parents incurred life problems, and more frequent companionship and financial support when parents were not employed. Moreover, grandparents' listening, advice, and companionship with adult grandchildren were positively associated with the parents providing these types of support to grandchildren.

Discussion: Consistent with solidarity theory, grandparents experiencing greater affective ties with their grandchildren are invested in these ties regardless of family needs. Findings also offer limited evidence for the family watchdog model in that grandparents provide more support to grandchildren when parents incur problems, even though those parents may still provide support.

Keywords: Adult grandchildren—Affection—Family watchdog—Grandparents' support—Needs

Multigenerational ties have become increasingly important in the 21st century and may serve as key sources of support (Bengtson, 2001). These ties typically involve a wide range of support, including emotional support, listening, companionship, advice, money, and practical help with chores or transportation (Fingerman, Miller, Birditt, & Zarit, 2009; Swartz, 2009). The role of grandparents in such support exchanges is not fully understood. Grandparents are often highly involved with young grandchildren, offering everyday assistance via childcare and companionship (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2001; Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005; Luo, LaPierre, Hughes, & Waite, 2012). Yet, many

grandparents today live long enough to watch their grandchildren grow up (Margolis, 2016; Uhlenberg, 2005) and maintain close ties to these adult grandchildren (Geurts, van Tilburg, & Poortman, 2012; Monserud, 2008, 2010; Uhlenberg, 2005). We know little about grandparents' support of adult grandchildren. Thus, this study explored the types of support that grandparents provided to their adult grandchildren.

We further considered reasons why grandparents would assist adult grandchildren. The grandparent role includes both ongoing affective bonds with grandchildren (Silverstein, Giarrusso, & Bengtson, 1998) and a sense of duty to step in

when needed (Hagestad, 1985; Troll, 1983). The current study examined whether grandparents provided different types of support to (a) express closeness in ongoing ties to adult grandchildren or (b) respond to grandchildren's needs. Moreover, the middle generation (i.e., parents) is key in the relationship between the grandchild and grandparent from early in life (Mueller & Elder, 2003), and parents may play a role in grandparents' support in adulthood. As such, we also considered how grandparents' affective ties with the parent, the parent's needs, and the parent's support to the grandchild were associated with grandparents' support to adult grandchildren.

Types of Grandparents' Support

In Western nations, parents often provide considerable support to young adult offspring (Fingerman, 2016). It is worth asking whether grandparents also are involved in support flowing to young adult grandchildren. Prior studies suggest that grandparents typically do not offer financial or practical support frequently to grandchildren. Moorman and Stokes (2016) looked at "functional support" incorporating household chores, financial support, and advice at seven waves of data across 20 years. They found that on average, grandparents gave functional support at only 21% of time points. Similarly, Hoff (2007) reported that few older Germans (17%) made financial transfers to their adult grandchildren and fewer still (1%) provided practical assistance.

Yet, grandparents may provide emotional support, including listening, companionship, or advice. An early study documented that grandparents gave both emotional support and instrumental support to adult grandchildren (Langer, 1990). Recent qualitative studies have also described grandparents' advice (Harwood & Lin, 2000; Kemp, 2005; Taylor, Robila, & Lee, 2005) and companionship with adult grandchildren (Hebblethwaite & Norris, 2011). Nevertheless, systematic data regarding these types of support are sparse. As such, the current study assessed frequency of emotional support, listening, advice, companionship, financial support, and practical help with chores or transportation, aiming to document the full range of grandparents' support to adult grandchildren.

Why Grandparents Provide Different Types of Support

We also considered reasons why grandparents supported adult grandchildren. In providing different types of support, grandparents may draw on distinct aspects of their family role as (a) an emotionally close grandparent who is involved or (b) a "family watchdog" who steps in only during times of trouble. The current study included multiple theoretical perspectives and examined these aspects of the grandparent role to explain various types of grandparents' support.

Affective ties

Grandparents experiencing strong affective ties with adult grandchildren may be invested in helping these

grandchildren. Intergenerational solidarity theory posits that relationships high in positive regard and affection tend to involve frequent support (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991; Silverstein et al., 1998). This model has guided the study of support in parent-child relationships across the life span, but it may also apply to grandparent-adult grandchild relationships. Indeed, as an extension of solidarity theory, the developmental stake hypothesis suggests that grandparents may view adult grandchildren as a continuation of their lives and experience greater affection for grandchildren than the reverse (Giarrusso, Feng, & Bengtson, 2005; Giarrusso, Feng, Silverstein, & Bengtson, 2001). Yet, no study has explicitly tested whether such affective ties with adult grandchildren are associated with everyday support in grandparent-adult grandchild relationships.

Further, the association between affective ties and grandparents' support may be most evident in emotional forms of support. The literature shows that individuals turn to their close social partners for emotional support and comfort (Antonucci, 2001; Burlinson, 2003). Having a close relationship is distinct from simply providing emotional support (Gleason & Iida, 2015); nevertheless, individuals in close relationships are more likely to exchange emotional forms of support. Research finds that grandparents are more likely to offer companionship to young grandchildren with whom they have better-quality relationships (Silverstein & Marengo, 2001), and this pattern may persist into adulthood. We expected grandparents who reported better affective ties with adult grandchildren to provide more frequent emotional support, listening, companionship, and advice to adult grandchildren.

Importantly, grandparent-grandchild relationships are not isolated; grandparents' relationships with grandchildren during childhood and adolescence are often contingent on the grandparent's bond with the grandchild's parent (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Hagestad, 1985; Mueller & Elder, 2003). That is, grandparents' positive regard for a young grandchild may be an outgrowth of positive feelings toward the parents (Fingerman, 2004). As they grow older, grandchildren may become less reliant on the parent generation to determine quality of ties with grandparents (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Cooney & Smith, 1996; Kemp, 2005). Nevertheless, researchers have found associations between grandparents' closeness to the adult grandchild and to the grandchild's parents (Mills, Wakeman, & Fea, 2001; Monserud, 2008, 2010). As such, the current study also considered grandparents' affective ties with the parents. Moreover, we examined whether qualities of ties to parents were associated with grandparents' support to adult grandchildren via grandparents' qualities of ties with these grandchildren.

Family needs

Grandparents may also provide support to adult grandchildren when family members have needs. Family norms

suggest that grandparents are not supposed to interfere in the parent–child bond when parents are raising young children (Cherlin & Furterberg, 1986). Nevertheless, grandparents remain vigilant for problems in the family and step in to assist as “family watchdogs” when needs arise (Troll, 1983). Indeed, scholars have argued that grandparents can act both as “child savers” in response to young grandchildren’s needs and as “mother savers” in response to the parents’ needs (Herlofson & Hagestad, 2012). We examined whether grandparents served similar functions when grandchildren become adults.

It is possible that grandparents directly respond to adult grandchildren’s needs. Contingency theory indicates that family members tailor provision of support to help those with the greatest needs (Eggebeen & Davey, 1998). Prior research has mainly applied contingency theory to material or financial support, revealing that parents offer these types of support more often to offspring who are students, are not married, or are experiencing stressful life problems such as serious health concerns (Bucx, van Wel, & Knijn, 2012; Fingerman et al., 2009; Sutor, Pillemer, & Sechrist, 2006; Swartz, Kim, Uno, Mortimer, & O’Brien, 2011). Parents may also provide emotional forms of support under such circumstances. For example, single adult children receive more advice from parents than their counterparts in intimate relationships (Bucx et al., 2012). By extension, we speculated that grandparents also would provide a variety of types of support (i.e., emotional support, listening, advice, companionship, practical help, financial support) in response to adult grandchildren’s life problems and statuses such as being unmarried or a student. Indeed, Monserud (2011) found that adult grandchildren experiencing negative life transitions (e.g., going through a divorce) reported increased closeness with grandparents, which may co-occur with grandparents’ support.

Parents’ needs may also play a role in grandparents’ support of adult grandchildren. In the 21st century, parents typically help young adults with frequent support (Fingerman et al., 2009; Johnson, 2013). Nevertheless, parents who experience job loss or other life problems are less available to offer practical help and financial support because these circumstances drain time and resources (Henretta, Grundy, & Harris, 2002). Likewise, divorced parents offer less practical support to adult children compared with parents with intact marriages (Bucx et al., 2012). In these situations where young adults cannot receive practical help or financial support from their parents, grandparents may step in and address these grandchildren’s material needs. Accordingly, we hypothesized that grandparents would offer practical and financial support to adult grandchildren when parents were not employed for pay, were not married, or experienced life problems (e.g., physical disability, alcoholism).

In addition, we asked whether grandparents were filling a void left by decreased support from parents. We considered parents’ support to the same grandchild and expected

that parents’ support would be negatively associated with grandparents’ support. Furthermore, we examined whether parents’ support accounted for the associations between parents’ needs and grandparents’ support to adult grandchildren.

Other Factors Associated with Grandparents’ Support

We also considered grandparent, parent, and grandchild characteristics that might be associated with grandparents’ support of adult grandchildren. Age may be a key factor in grandparents’ support of adult grandchildren. Younger adults receive more frequent support from parents (Fingerman et al., 2009) and the same may be true for grandparents’ support. Also, younger grandparents may have fewer health problems and more energy to provide support (Silverstein & Marengo, 2001).

Women are typically more involved in family life and in support exchanges (Rossi & Rossi, 1990), and so we considered gender for all three generations. It is likely that upper socioeconomic status grandparents have more energy and financial resources (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010; Fingerman et al., 2015) and we controlled for grandparent education. This study also included the number of adult grandchildren that grandparents have. Parents typically provide less support to each child in larger families (Davey, Janke, & Savla, 2005; Fingerman et al., 2015), and the same pattern may hold for grandparents. Finally, we included geographic distance between grandparent and grandchild because proximity fosters provision of practical support and companionship (Davey et al., 2005).

The Current Study

The current study assessed frequency of different types of grandparents’ support to adult grandchildren, including emotional support, listening, companionship, advice, financial support, and practical help. We examined possible reasons underlying each type of grandparents’ support and tested the following hypotheses:

Affective ties

We expected grandparents’ affective ties with adult grandchildren to be associated with grandparents’ emotional support, listening, companionship, and advice to adult grandchildren.

We also expected grandparents’ affective ties with the parents of grandchildren to be associated with grandparents’ emotional support, listening, companionship, and advice to grandchildren.

We examined indirect associations between grandparents’ affective ties with the parents and grandparents’ support of adult grandchildren, considering grandparents’ affective ties with these grandchildren as a mediator.

Family needs

We expected that grandchildren's needs (i.e., life problems, marital status, student status) would be associated with all six types of grandparents' support.

We also considered the needs that parents of these adult grandchildren incurred. We expected parents' life problems, marital status, and nonemployment status to be associated with grandparents' financial support and practical help to adult grandchildren.

Further, we speculated that parents' support to the same grandchild would be negatively associated with grandparents' support. That is, when parents provide more support to a grown child, grandparents provide less support to that grandchild (and vice versa).

We examined indirect effects involving parents' needs and support. That is, we expected parents with greater needs to give less support to adult grandchildren and grandparents to provide more support to compensate for the diminished parents' support.

Method

Sample and Procedures

Data were from The Family Exchanges Study, a large study of three-generation families (Fingerman et al., 2011). This study relied on Wave 2 collected in 2013 (Wave 1 did not include questions about grandparent-adult grandchild ties). We primarily drew on grandparents' reports but derived some grandchild characteristics and parent support from parents' reports. Participants completed a Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI), which lasted approximately 1 hr and they received \$50 for participating.

The Family Exchanges Study Wave 1 was conducted in 2008. A total of 633 midlife adults (40–60 years of age) were recruited from the Philadelphia Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area. Each participant had at least one grown child (i.e., adult grandchild) and an aging parent (i.e., grandparent). These midlife parents provided contact information for 455 grandparents, and 74% of these grandparents ($n = 337$) participated in Wave 1. Compared with grandparents who did not participate in Wave 1, the 337 grandparents who participated were younger, healthier, less likely to be disabled, and more likely to be female.

In Wave 2, we first contacted all grandparents in Wave 1. Of the 337 grandparents in Wave 1, 126 grandparents did not return: 58 were deceased, 5 were too ill to participate, and 63 could not be reached. Compared with grandparents who did not return, grandparents who returned for the second wave ($n = 211$) were younger, healthier, more likely to be married, and had more years of education. We also contacted eligible grandparents who did not participate in Wave 1. Thus, grandparents in Wave 2 included 211 grandparents from Wave 1 and 30 grandparents who were newly recruited in Wave 2 (total sample = 241). We found no differences in background characteristics between

the 211 returning grandparents and the 30 newly added grandparents.

Although there were 241 grandparents in Wave 2, we excluded 43 grandparents who did not have complete data due to no parents participating ($n = 3$), mismatch of the grandchild that the parent and the grandparent discussed ($n = 19$), no contact with any grandchild ($n = 4$), and failure of interviewers to obtain information from the grandparent for the purpose of specifying the grandchild ($n = 17$). Thus, the analytic sample included 198 grandparents.

The 198 grandparents were from 175 families because 46 grandparents were 23 couples and reported on the same parent. Grandparents selected one focal grandchild with whom they had the most contact. Of the 23 grandparent couples, 14 grandparent couples (i.e., 28 grandparents) reported on the same grandchild. Therefore, the 198 grandparents reported on 184 adult grandchildren. Table 1 presents characteristics of grandparents, the parents, and the adult grandchildren.

Measures

Frequency of grandparent and parent support

Using the Intergenerational Support Scale (ISS; Fingerman et al., 2011), grandparents indicated how often they provided six types of support: listening to talk about daily life, emotional support, companionship, advice, practical help, and financial support on an 8-point scale: 1 (*less than once a year or never*), 2 (*once a year*), 3 (*a few times a year*), 4 (*monthly*), 5 (*a few times a month*), 6 (*weekly*), 7 (*a few times a week*), and 8 (*daily*). Parents also reported support on the same items, and we used these reports from the parents' surveys. Table 1 includes the frequency of each type of support that the grandparent and the parent provided the grandchild.

Affective ties

Grandparents rated two commonly used items asking how much each adult grandchild: (a) loved and cared for them and (b) understood them (Birditt, Tighe, Fingerman, & Zarit, 2012; Fingerman et al., 2011; Umberson, 1992), on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*). We averaged ratings of the two items to measure grandparents' affective ties with the grandchild ($\rho = .60$; Eisinga, Grotenhuis, & Pelzer, 2013). Grandparents also rated the same two items for the grandchild's parent ($\rho = .61$).

Grandchild and parent needs

We drew on the parent's interview regarding 10 life problems the grandchild might have experienced in the prior 2 years (e.g., alcohol or drug problems, major health problem, victim of a crime, divorce; Birditt, Fingerman, & Zarit, 2010; Fingerman et al., 2009; Greenfield & Marks, 2006). Due to a skewed distribution, we coded the occurrence of at least one problem in the past 2 years dichotomously

Table 1. Background Information and Measures for Grandparents, Parents, and Adult Grandchildren

Characteristics	Grandparents (N = 198)			Parents (N = 175)			Adult grandchildren (N = 184)		
	M	SD	Range	M	SD	Range	M	SD	Range
Age	80.19	5.73	66–95	54.62	4.82	42–67	27.14	5.50	18–47
Years of education	13.07	2.14	7–17	14.56	1.92	12–17	14.77	1.77	11–17
Physical health ^a	3.01	1.07	1–5	—	—	—	—	—	—
Distance from grandparents (miles)	—	—	—	227.28	517.82	0–3,000	301.07	677.03	0–5,000
Number of adult children	3.94	2.01	1–12	—	—	—	—	—	—
Number of adult grandchildren	5.88	4.10	1–20	—	—	—	—	—	—
Positive relationship quality ^b	—	—	—	4.27	0.67	1.5–5	3.78	0.88	1–5
Support of grandchild ^c									
Listening	3.70	2.00	1–8	6.27	1.58	1–8	—	—	—
Emotional support	3.55	2.05	1–8	5.64	1.91	1–8	—	—	—
Companionship	3.44	1.66	1–8	4.61	1.73	1–8	—	—	—
Advice	2.96	2.07	1–8	5.26	1.74	1–8	—	—	—
Practical support	2.43	1.84	1–8	3.99	1.91	1–8	—	—	—
Financial support	2.30	1.37	1–8	3.65	1.80	1–8	—	—	—
		Proportion			Proportion			Proportion	
Male		.26			.36			.50	
Not married ^d		.61			.23			.75	
Not employed for pay ^e		.92			.24			.24	
Having life problems ^f		—			.43			.55	

^a1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = good, 4 = very good, and 5 = excellent. ^bAverage scores of two items rated 1 = not at all, 2 = a little bit, 3 = somewhat, 4 = quite a bit, and 5 = a great deal. ^cSupport was rated 1 = less than once a year or never, 2 = yearly, 3 = a few times a year, 4 = monthly, 5 = a few times a month, 6 = weekly, 7 = a few times a week, and 8 = daily. ^d1 = not married and 0 = married or remarried. ^e1 = not employed for pay and 0 = employed for pay. ^f1 = having at least one problem and 0 = reporting no problems.

(1 = experienced at least one problem and 0 = did not experience any problem). Grandparents provided this information for each of their children, and thus, for the parent.

We coded other indicators such that positive values indicated greater needs. Marital status was coded 1 = not married and 0 = married/remarried and student status 1 = student and 0 = not student. Parents reported the statuses of grandchildren. Parents also reported their own employment status (1 = not employed for pay and 0 = employed for pay) and marital status.

Control Measures

Grandparent, parent, and grandchild characteristics

We calculated grandparents' age from birth dates. Grandparents also provided age and gender of parents and grandchildren. Grandparents self-rated their health from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent; Idler & Kasl, 1995) and reported education in years. Grandparents estimated geographic distance in miles between their household and the adult grandchild's household. Grandparents also reported how many adult grandchildren they had.

Analytic Strategy

The vast majority of grandchildren (89%) were young adults less than 35 years, but 20 grandchildren were aged 36–47 years. As such, we initially ran all analyses

including only those grandchildren younger than 35 years. We repeated analyses including the full age range of grandchildren. The pattern of findings was nearly identical, and we report findings using all adult grandchildren.

To examine reasons underlying each type of support, we treated frequency of each type of support as a separate outcome. We initially estimated a two-level model (SAS PROC MIXED) to take into account that 46 grandparents (Level 1) were nested in couples (Level 2). Due to a zero random effect of the couple level, we instead used multiple regression models dropping the couple level. To examine whether affective ties co-occurred with each type of support, we included grandparents' affective ties with the grandchild and with the grandchild's parent as predictors. We also examined indirect associations between grandparents' affective ties with the parents and grandparents' support via grandparents' affective ties with grandchildren, and tested the significance of the indirect effects using the bootstrapping technique (bootstrapped sample $n = 2,000$; Hayes, 2013).

To examine whether family members' needs were associated with each type of support, we considered grandchildren's needs (i.e., life problems, marital status, student status) and parents' needs (i.e., life problems, marital status, nonemployment status). To examine whether decreased support from parents was associated with more grandparents' support, we included parents' support of the same grandchild. For parsimony in analyses, we entered all

the predictors simultaneously to the six models (one for each type of support). Moreover, we calculated the indirect effects of parents' support on the association between parents' needs and grandparents' support of adult grandchildren using the bootstrapping technique (bootstrapped sample $n = 2,000$; Hayes, 2013).

Models also included the following covariates: grandparent and grandchild age, gender of the three generations, grandparent health, grandparent education, number of adult grandchildren, and geographic distance between grandparents and adult grandchildren. We had fewer than 3% missing cases on any given variable and used listwise deletion in all the analyses.

Results

Types of Grandparent Support

Table 1 shows the frequency of each type of support that grandparents gave to adult grandchildren. On average, grandparents lent a listening ear ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 2.00$), offered emotional support ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 2.05$) and companionship ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.66$) almost once a month, gave advice ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 2.07$) a few times per year, and provided practical help with chores or transportation ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.84$) and financial support ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.37$) once a year. Indeed, 90% of grandparents provided at least one type of support once a year or more often (or by contrast, only 10% reported that they did not provide any type of support).

Why Grandparents Provide Different Types of Support

Table 2 shows the multiple regression models predicting different types of grandparents' support. We expected grandparents experiencing more intense affective ties with adult grandchildren or with the parents of these grandchildren to provide more frequent emotional forms of support. As expected, grandparents' affective ties with the grandchild were associated with more frequent: lending a listening ear to the adult grandchild ($B = 0.54$, $p < .001$), emotional support ($B = 0.51$, $p < .001$), and companionship ($B = 0.50$, $p < .001$) with the grandchild.

Grandparents' affective ties with the parents were not associated with any type of grandparents' support. Nonetheless, we observed significant indirect effects of grandparents' affective ties with grandchildren on the associations between grandparents' affective ties with the parents and grandparents' listening ($B = 0.21$, $p < .05$, 95% BootCI = [0.07, 0.39]), emotional support ($B = 0.20$, $p < .05$, 95% BootCI = [0.04, 0.41]), and companionship ($B = 0.19$, $p < .01$, 95% BootCI = [0.07, 0.35]).

We hypothesized that when adult grandchildren or parents had needs, grandparents would be more likely to help grandchildren. Parents' life problems were associated with more grandparents' emotional support ($B = 0.81$,

$p < .05$) to adult grandchildren. In addition, parents' lack of employment was associated with more grandparents' companionship ($B = 0.58$, $p < .05$) and financial support ($B = 0.59$, $p < .05$) to adult grandchildren. Nevertheless, grandchildren's needs, as indicated by their life problems, marital status, and student status, were not associated with any type of grandparents' support.

We expected parents' support to be negatively associated with grandparents' support. Contrary to expectations, grandparents were more likely to lend a listening ear ($B = 0.23$, $p < .05$), provide companionship ($B = 0.24$, $p < .001$), and give advice ($B = 0.31$, $p < .001$) to adult grandchildren when the parents themselves provided these types of support more often.

We also examined indirect effects of parents' support on the associations between parents' needs and grandparents' support of adult grandchildren. We did not find evidence for these indirect effects, however (model not shown here).

Last, frequency of practical help with chores or transportation was not associated with any predictor (e.g., affective ties, grandchildren's needs, parents' support). Thus, we do not present the model here.

Discussion

Grandparent-adult grandchild relationships are pervasive. Dating back 20 years ago, researchers documented that 97% of 20-year-old adults in the United States had at least one living grandparent (Uhlenberg, 1996). Grandparents have opportunities to engage in adult grandchildren's lives but grandparents' support of adult grandchildren has not been fully investigated. This study contributes to the scant literature by assessing a wide range of types of support and considering reasons why grandparents may help grandchildren after they are grown.

In the current study, nearly all grandparents were involved with adult grandchildren under some circumstances. Following prior research (Hoff, 2007; Moorman & Stokes, 2016), grandparents provided practical help and financial support infrequently. Yet, this study also showed that grandparents provided a listening ear, emotional support, companionship, and advice to adult grandchildren on a fairly regular basis. Moreover, the reasons underlying different types of support reflected complex factors that may involve ongoing relationship qualities or needs that arise on a periodic basis.

Why Grandparents Provide Different Types of Support

This study drew on multiple theoretical perspectives to examine why grandparents provided multiple types of support to adult grandchildren. Solidarity theory and the developmental stake hypothesis reveal grandparents' regular emotional investment in adult grandchildren. In addition, the family watchdog model explains how grandparents deal with family members' needs with their support.

Table 2. Multiple Regressions Predicting Grandparent Support of Adult Grandchild from Affection, Family Needs, and Parent Support

Parameter	Listening		Emotional support		Companionship		Advice		Financial support	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept	9.16***	2.40	5.82*	2.57	6.40**	2.04	9.06***	2.55	4.20*	1.82
Grandparent affective ties with grandchild ^a	0.54***	0.16	0.51**	0.17	0.50***	0.13	0.34	0.17	0.22	0.12
Grandparent affective ties with parent ^a	-0.29	0.21	-0.26	0.23	-0.15	0.17	-0.20	0.22	0.05	0.16
Grandchild needs										
Grandchild: Having life problems ^b	0.27	0.28	0.34	0.30	0.09	0.23	-0.07	0.30	-0.16	0.21
Grandchild: Student status ^c	0.67	0.45	0.35	0.49	0.48	0.36	0.57	0.48	0.55	0.34
Grandchild: Not married ^d	-0.35	0.33	0.08	0.35	-0.24	0.26	-0.48	0.35	-0.18	0.25
Parent needs										
Parent: Having life problems ^b	0.39	0.29	0.81*	0.32	-0.15	0.24	0.21	0.31	0.04	0.22
Parent: Not employed for pay ^e	0.26	0.31	0.40	0.33	0.58*	0.25	0.62	0.33	0.59*	0.23
Parent: Not married ^d	-0.15	0.32	0.08	0.34	0.07	0.26	-0.05	0.34	-0.14	0.24
Parent support of grandchild ^f	0.23*	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.24***	0.07	0.31***	0.09	0.12	0.06
Covariates										
Grandparent										
Age	-0.09***	0.02	-0.03	0.03	-0.05*	0.02	-0.07*	0.03	-0.02	0.02
Gender ^g	-0.05	0.29	-0.02	0.32	0.32	0.24	0.19	0.31	0.18	0.22
Years of education	-0.10	0.06	-0.07	0.07	-0.09	0.05	-0.21**	0.07	-0.05	0.05
Physical health ^h	-0.10	0.12	-0.25	0.13	-0.09	0.10	-0.18	0.13	-0.10	0.09
Number of adult grandchildren	-0.00	0.03	-0.08*	0.04	0.01	0.03	-0.03	0.04	-0.03	0.03
Geographic distance from grandchild	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00*	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Parent										
Gender ^g	-0.13	0.29	-0.02	0.31	-0.38	0.23	-0.21	0.30	-0.03	0.21
Grandchild										
Age	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.03	-0.01	0.02
Gender ^g	-0.41	0.27	-0.18	0.29	-0.32	0.22	-0.09	0.28	-0.13	0.20
Adjusted R ²	.24		.19		.28		.21		.08	

Note: Support was rated 1 = less than once a year or never, 2 = yearly, 3 = a few times a year, 4 = monthly, 5 = a few times a month, 6 = weekly, 7 = a few times a week, and 8 = daily. Grandparents' affective ties and family needs were not significant for practical help.

^aAverage scores of two items rated 1 = not at all, 2 = a little bit, 3 = somewhat, 4 = quite a bit, and 5 = a great deal. ^b1 = having at least one problem and 0 = reporting no problem. ^c1 = student and 0 = not student. ^d1 = not married and 0 = married/remarried. ^e1 = not employed and 0 = employed for pay. ^fType of parent support corresponding to the outcome variable of each model. ^g1 = male and 0 = female. ^h1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = good, 4 = very good, and 5 = excellent.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Affective ties

Consistent with solidarity theory (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991) and the developmental stake hypothesis (Giarrusso et al., 2005), grandparents' affective ties with young adult grandchildren were associated with emotional forms of support such as lending a listening ear, giving advice, and spending time with the adult grandchild. These findings also are in line with the well-established literature of social support that individuals offer emotional support to express love and care (e.g., Burleson, 2003). Moreover, research suggests that grandparents' intense affective ties with young grandchildren facilitate their involvement with these

grandchildren entering adulthood (Geurts et al., 2012). Grandparents may continue to be involved with grandchildren to whom they have always had close ties, providing frequent advice and companionship in adulthood.

As expected, the parents of adult grandchildren still play an important role in grandparents' support of these adult grandchildren. Grandparents' affective ties with the parents predicted their listening, advice, and companionship with adult grandchildren via indirect effects. Indeed, grandparents' support was more frequent when their strong affective ties with the parents were associated with strong ties with adult grandchildren as well. Findings confirm how

family relations and affection transmit across generations as shown in prior research (Mills et al., 2001; Monserud, 2008, 2010). More importantly, this study also suggests how such transmission may influence intergenerational support in adult families.

Family needs

Partially in line with the family watchdog model (Troll, 1983), grandparents provided emotional support, companionship, and financial support when parents reported life problems or lacked employment. This study offered negligible evidence for contingency theory in that grandparents did not directly help adult grandchildren with needs. Findings suggest that grandparents do not respond to all needs within families; rather, they only step in when parents, who are the mainstay of support to young adults, incur troubles.

The pattern did not provide full support for the family watchdog model (Troll, 1983), however, in that grandparents were not substituting for a decrease of parents' support. Rather, parents with specific needs (e.g., lack of employment) were more likely to provide some forms of support to the grandchild (e.g., companionship). It is possible that the parents lacking employment had more time to provide companionship and bring the generation above and below together to create opportunities for grandparents' companionship. As for emotional and financial support, grandparents may fulfill their role as a family watchdog as long as they notice potential for parents' emotional and material crises, even when the crises do not necessarily hinder the parents from helping.

Moreover, grandparents provided listening and advice to adult grandchildren in situations where the parents were also providing these types of support, regardless of the parents' troubles. These findings also suggest a common family culture of helping younger generations rather than substitutability between grandparents and parents. This shared family cultural may be additional evidence for solidarity theory (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991) and the developmental stake hypothesis (Giarrusso et al., 2005). Stronger family solidarity may bring grandparents and parents together to invest in young adult grandchildren with similar helping behaviors.

Grandparents' support was not associated with parents' marital status as being unmarried may or may not convey greater need. Lack of employment and life problems in the past 2 years may be more episodic than divorce or singlehood. A change in employment status may have been an unexpected and recent event for the present sample who had just experienced a period with especially high employment instability. Future studies should consider whether grandparents step in only briefly when urgent problems arise and whether parents and adult grandchildren use other sources of support for more chronic situations.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There are limitations to this study. It is possible that we overestimated frequency of grandparents' support of a

typical adult grandchild and truncated the variance in such support. Unlike previous studies where a focal grandchild was randomly assigned (e.g., Monserud, 2008, 2011; Moorman & Stokes, 2016), this study examined the adult grandchild with whom grandparents had the most contact and presumably, the grandchild with greatest opportunity to receive support. Also, we only used reports of grandparents, who are likely to feel more positive regard for adult grandchildren than the reverse (Giarrusso et al., 2001, 2005). Thus, grandparents also may have overreported the support they provide. Furthermore, the vast majority of the participants in this study were grandmothers due to selective mortality and morbidity and willingness to participate. Perhaps with a sample that included more grandfathers, we would find the average support of grandchildren to be less frequent (because grandfathers typically provide less support than grandmothers).

This study design also precluded examination of issues pertaining to the middle generation. For example, the parents had to participate in the current study for families to be included and it is possible that we did not capture families where the middle generation was in serious trouble (e.g., drug addiction, incarceration). In addition, we only obtained the grandparent's reports on their own child rather than child-in-law, who also may play an important role in grandparent-adult grandchild relationships (Fingerman, 2004). Last, because each family included one parent, we did not include support to adult grandchildren from grandparents on the other lineage.

Despite these limitations, this study revealed motivations underlying different types of grandparents' support and considered the role of the middle generation. In sum, grandparent-adult grandchild relationships involve a variety of types of grandparents' support, which allow grandparents to continue engaging in adult grandchildren's lives under normal circumstances or when troubles occur. That is, most grandparents seem to hold a meaningful relationship with their adult grandchildren rather than a distant tie merely lengthened by longer life expectancy. More importantly, the findings suggest potential directions for future research regarding challenges and satisfaction associated with grandparent-adult grandchild relationships. Relationships based on strong affection may be inherently satisfying and meaningful (Moorman & Stokes, 2016), but grandparents also serve as a source of support in response to family needs.

Funding

This study was supported by grants from the National Institute on Aging (NIA), R01AG027769, *Family Exchanges Study II* (K. L. Fingerman, principal investigator). The *MacArthur Network on an Aging Society* (John W. Rowe, network director) provided funds. This research also was supported by grant, 5 R24 HD042849 awarded to the Population Research Center (PRC) at the University of Texas at Austin by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements) or nonfinancial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge, or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

References

- Antonucci, T. C. (2001). Social relations. In J. E. Birren & K. W. Schaie (Eds.), *Handbook of the psychology of aging* (pp. 53–77). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Bengtson, V. L. (2001). Beyond the nuclear family: The increasing importance of multigenerational bonds. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *63*, 1–16. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00001.x
- Bengtson, V. L., & Roberts, R. E. (1991). Intergenerational solidarity in aging families: An example of formal theory construction. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *53*, 856–870. doi:10.2307/352993
- Birditt, K. S., Fingerman, K. L., & Zarit, S. H. (2010). Adult children's problems and successes: Implications for intergenerational ambivalence. *The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, *65*, P145–P153. doi:10.1093/geronb/gbp125
- Birditt, K. S., Tighe, L. A., Fingerman, K. L., & Zarit, S. H. (2012). Intergenerational relationship quality across three generations. *The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, *67*, 627–638. doi:10.1093/geronb/gbs050
- Bucx, F., van Wel, F., & Knijn, T. (2012). Life course status and exchanges of support between young adults and parents. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *74*, 101–115. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2011.00883.x
- Burleson, B. R. (2003). The experience and effects of emotional support: What the study of cultural and gender differences can tell us about close relationships, emotion, and interpersonal communication. *Personal Relationships*, *10*, 1–23. doi:10.1111/1475-6811.00033
- Conger, R. D., Conger, K. J., & Martin, M. J. (2010). Socioeconomic status, family processes, and individual development. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *72*, 685–704. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00725.x
- Cherlin, A. J., & Furstenberg, F. F., Jr. (1986). *The new American grandparent*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Cooney, T. M., & Smith, L. A. (1996). Young adults' relations with grandparents following recent parental divorce. *The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, *51*, S91–S95. doi:10.1093/geronb/51B.2.S91
- Davey, A., Janke, M., & Savla, J. (2005). Antecedents of intergenerational support: Families in context and families as context. In M. Silverstein & K. W. Schaie (Eds.), *Annual review of gerontology and geriatrics* (pp. 29–54). New York, NY: Springer.
- Edgebeem, D. J., & Davey, A. (1998). Do safety nets work? The role of anticipated help in times of need. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *60*, 939–950. doi:10.2307/353636
- Eisinga, R., Grotenhuis, M. T., & Pelzer, B. (2013). The reliability of a two-item scale: Pearson, Cronbach, or Spearman-Brown? *International Journal of Public Health*, *58*, 637–642. doi:10.1007/s00038-012-0416-3
- Fingerman, K. L. (2004). The role of offspring and in-laws in grandparents' ties to their grandchildren. *Journal of Family Issues*, *25*, 1026–1049. doi:10.1177/0192513X04265941
- Fingerman, K. L. (2016). The ascension of parent-child ties in the twenty-first century. *The Psychologist*, *29*, 114–117.
- Fingerman, K. L., Kim, K., Davis, E. M., Furstenberg, F. F., Jr., Birditt, K. S., & Zarit, S. H. (2015). "I'll give you the world": Parental socioeconomic background and assistance to young adult children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *77*, 844–865. doi:10.1111/jomf.12204
- Fingerman, K., Miller, L., Birditt, K., & Zarit, S. (2009). Giving to the good and the needy: Parental support of grown children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *71*, 1220–1233. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2009.00665.x
- Fingerman, K. L., Pitzer, L. M., Chan, W., Birditt, K., Franks, M. M., & Zarit, S. (2011). Who gets what and why? Help middle-aged adults provide to parents and grown children. *The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, *66*, 87–98. doi:10.1093/geronb/gbq009
- Fuller-Thomson, E., & Minkler, M. (2001). American grandparents providing extensive child care to their grandchildren: Prevalence and profile. *The Gerontologist*, *41*, 201–209. doi:10.1093/geront/41.2.201
- Geurts, T., Van Tilburg, T. G., & Poortman, A. R. (2012). The grandparent-grandchild relationship in childhood and adulthood: A matter of continuation? *Personal Relationships*, *19*, 267–278. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2011.01354.x
- Giarrusso, R., Feng, D., & Bengtson, V. L. (2005). The intergenerational stake phenomenon over 20 years. In M. Silverstein & K. W. Schaie (Eds.), *Annual review of gerontology and geriatrics* (pp. 55–76). New York, NY: Springer.
- Giarrusso, R., Feng, D., Silverstein, M., & Bengtson, V. L. (2001). Grandparent-adult grandchild affection and consensus cross-generational and cross-ethnic comparisons. *Journal of Family Issues*, *22*, 456–477. doi:10.1177/019251301022004004
- Gleason, M. E. J., & Iida, M. (2015). Social support. In M. Mikulincer, P. R. Shaver, J. A. Simpson, & J. F. Dovidio (Eds.), *APA handbook of personality and social psychology* (pp. 351–370). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/14344-013
- Greenfield, E. A., & Marks, N. F. (2006). Linked lives: Adult children's problems and their parents' psychological and relational well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *68*, 442–454. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2006.00263.x
- Hagestad, G. O. (1985). Continuity and connectedness. In V. L. Bengtson & J. F. Robertson (Eds.), *Grandparenthood* (pp. 31–48). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Harwood, J., & Lin, M. C. (2000). Affiliation, pride, exchange, and distance in grandparents' accounts of relationships with their college-aged grandchildren. *Journal of Communication*, *50*, 31–47. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2000.tb02851.x
- Hayes, A. F. (2013). *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Hayslip, B., Jr., & Kaminski, P. L. (2005). Grandparents raising their grandchildren: A review of the literature and suggestions

- for practice. *The Gerontologist*, 45, 262–269. doi:10.1093/geront/45.2.262
- Hebblethwaite, S., & Norris, J. (2011). Expressions of generativity through family leisure: Experiences of grandparents and adult grandchildren. *Family Relations*, 60, 121–133. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3729.2010.00637.x
- Henretta, J. C., Grundy, E., & Harris, S. (2002). The influence of socioeconomic and health differences on parents' provision of help to adult children: A British–United States comparison. *Ageing and Society*, 22, 441–458. doi:10.1017/S0144686X02008735
- Herlofson, K., & Hagestad, G. O. (2012). Transformations in the role of grandparents across welfare states. In S. Arber & V. Timonen (Eds.), *Contemporary grandparenting: Changing family relationships in global contexts* (pp. 25–51). Bristol, UK: Policy Press.
- Hoff, A. (2007). Patterns of intergenerational support in grandparent-grandchild and parent-child relationships in Germany. *Ageing and Society*, 27, 643–665. doi:10.1017/S0144686X07006095
- Idler, E. L., & Kasl, S. V. (1995). Self-ratings of health: Do they also predict change in functional ability? *The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 50, S344–S353. doi:10.1093/geronb/50B.6.S344
- Johnson, M. K. (2013). Parental financial assistance and young adults' relationships with parents and well-being. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 75, 713–733. doi:10.1111/jomf.12029
- Kemp, C. L. (2005). Dimensions of grandparent-adult grandchild relationships: From family ties to intergenerational friendships. *Canadian Journal on Aging*, 24, 161–177. doi:10.1353/cja.2005.0066
- Langer, N. (1990). Grandparents and adult grandchildren: What do they do for one another? *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 31, 101–110. doi:10.2190/RTH3-C7WY-17GG-D9KQ
- Luo, Y., LaPierre, T. A., Hughes, M. E., & Waite, L. J. (2012). Grandparents providing care to grandchildren a population-based study of continuity and change. *Journal of Family Issues*, 33, 1143–1167. doi:10.1177/0192513X12438685
- Margolis, R. (2016). The changing demography of grandparenthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78, 610–622. doi:10.1111/jomf.12286
- Mills, T. L., Wakeman, M. A., & Fea, C. B. (2001). Adult grandchildren's perceptions of emotional closeness and consensus with their maternal and paternal grandparents. *Journal of Family Issues*, 22, 427–455. doi:10.1177/019251301022004003
- Monserud, M. A. (2008). Intergenerational relationships and affectual solidarity between grandparents and young adults. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70, 182–195. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2007.00470.x
- Monserud, M. A. (2010). Continuity and change in grandchildren's closeness to grandparents: Consequences of changing intergenerational ties. *Marriage and Family Review*, 46, 366–388. doi:10.1080/01494929.2010.528320
- Monserud, M. A. (2011). Changes in grandchildren's adult role statuses and their relationships with grandparents. *Journal of Family Issues*, 32, 425–451. doi:10.1177/0192513X10384466
- Moorman, S. M., & Stokes, J. E. (2016). Solidarity in the grandparent-adult grandchild relationship and trajectories of depressive symptoms. *The Gerontologist*, 56, 408–420. doi:10.1093/geront/gnu056
- Mueller, M. M., & Elder, G. H. (2003). Family contingencies across the generations: Grandparent-grandchild relationships in holistic perspective. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65, 404–417. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2003.00404.x
- Rossi, A. S., & Rossi, P. H. (1990). *Of human bonding: Parent-child relations across the life course*. New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Silverstein, M., Giarrusso, R., & Bengtson, V. L. (1998). Intergenerational solidarity and the grandparent role. In M. Szinovacz (Ed.), *Handbook on grandparenthood* (pp. 144–158). Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Silverstein, M., & Marengo, A. (2001). How Americans enact the grandparent role across the family life course. *Journal of Family Issues*, 22, 493–522. doi:10.1177/019251301022004006
- Suitor, J. J., Pillemer, K., & Sechrist, J. (2006). Within-family differences in mothers' support to adult children. *The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 61, S10–S17. doi:10.1093/geronb/61.1.S10
- Swartz, T. T. (2009). Intergenerational family relations in adulthood: Patterns, variations, and implications in the contemporary United States. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 25, 191–212. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.34.040507.134615
- Swartz, T. T., Kim, M., Uno, M., Mortimer, J., & O'Brien, K. B. (2011). Safety nets and scaffolds: Parental support in the transition to adulthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 73, 414–429. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00815.x
- Taylor, A. C., Robila, M., & Lee, H. S. (2005). Distance, contact, and intergenerational relationships: Grandparents and adult grandchildren from an international perspective. *Journal of Adult Development*, 12, 33–41. doi:10.1007/s10804-005-1280-7
- Troll, L. E. (1983). Grandparents: The family watchdogs. In T. H. Brubaker (Ed.), *Family relationships in later life* (pp. 63–74). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Umberson, D. (1992). Relationships between adult children and their parents: Psychological consequences for both generations. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 54, 664–674. doi:10.2307/353252
- Uhlenberg, P. (1996). Mortality decline in the twentieth century and supply of kin over the life course. *The Gerontologist*, 36, 681–685. doi:10.1093/geront/36.5.681
- Uhlenberg, P. (2005). Historical forces shaping grandparent-grandchild relationships: Demography and beyond. In M. Silverstein & K. W. Schaie (Eds.), *Annual review of gerontology and geriatrics* (pp. 77–97). New York, NY: Springer.