

# Grandma and grandpa are good for children

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The first national survey about the relationships that adolescents have with their grandparents shows that grandparents who are involved in the upbringing of their grandchildren can contribute to a child's well-being.

This research led by Oxford University, in collaboration with the Institute of Education, London, challenges previous research showing that grandparents who are heavily committed to looking after their grandchildren could become depressed and have a negative effect on the children.

The research surveyed questionnaires from 1,596 children, aged between 11-16 from across England and Wales, and researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 40 children from a range of backgrounds. Another key finding of the research was that almost a third of maternal

grandmothers provided regular care-taking for their grandchildren, with 40 per cent providing occasional help with childcare.

The survey reveals that grandparents often have more time than working parents to support young people in activities and are well placed to talk to their grandchildren about any problems the young people may be experiencing. They were also found to be involved in helping to solve the young people's problems, as well as talking with them about plans for their future.

Principle investigator Professor Ann Buchanan, Director of the Centre for Research into Parenting and Children in the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at Oxford University, will launch the research findings at the annual meeting of the Grandparents' Association in London on Wednesday 4 June.

Professor Buchanan said: 'We were surprised by the huge amount of informal caring that the grandparents were doing and how in some cases they were filling the parenting gap for hard working parents. Most adolescents really welcomed this relationship. What was especially interesting was the links we found between 'involved grandparents' and adolescent well-being. Closeness was not enough: only grandparents who got stuck in and did things with their grandchildren had this positive impact on their grandchildren.'

Co-investigator Dr Eirini Flouri, from the Institute of Education, said: 'We found that close relationships between grandparents and grandchildren buffered the effects of adverse life events, such as parental separation, because it calmed the children down. This suggests future investigations should pay more attention to the role of grandparents in developing resilience in young people.'

A range of factors predicted the involvement of the grandparents in the

upbringing of their grandchildren including: living in a less deprived area; frequent contact; and the good health of the grandparent. The young people surveyed did not view physical proximity as being necessarily important as they used modern technology to communicate. They said they felt grandparents became closer when they undertook some traditional parenting tasks.

This study also shows that at times of family breakdown and separation, many grandparents played an important role in bringing stability to their grandchildren. Grandparents were also found to be important in times of family adversity and appeared to help the whole family buffer the difficulties. The researchers conclude that given the grandparents' role is almost invisible in family policy in the UK, the government needs to rethink the policy implications of this largely positive role and provide more support for the important intergenerational relationships.

Source: Oxford University

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