

Grandparent childcare may not help the well-being of mothers or reduce mother–child conflict, study suggests

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Extra help from another generation alone doesn't help mother-child closeness or reduce mother-child conflict, researchers have found.

Researchers who examined information from a sample of mothers could find no statistical link between their children spending time with grandparents at age three and better social and [emotional development](#) when they were seven, or better maternal well-being and mother-[child](#) relationship at age three.

The academics have called for more investment in child and maternal mental health and well-being in early childhood. Parents who took part in the study indicated grandparents were their primary source of childcare, and they had less other support.

The paper is published in the journal *Early Child Development and Care*. [The study](#) was carried out by Nevra Atış Akyol, from Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Turkey, Derya Atalan Ergin, from Cappadocia University, Turkey, and Angeliki Kallitsoglou, from the University of Exeter.

The researchers examined information from 1,495 mothers and their children. The findings showed that time spent in the care of grandparents for at least six months was not significantly associated with better maternal mental health and well-being and mother-child relationship, or better social and emotional outcomes for children when they were seven.

The study, which used data from the Millennium Cohort Study, shows that poor maternal well-being at age three predicted poor child social and emotional outcomes at age seven.

A total of 39.3% of the children (587), spent between 1 to 10 hours with their grandparents, 33.7%, (505) spent between 11 and 20 hours, and 27%, (403), spent above 21 hours. The Kessler Screening Scale for Psychological Distress was used to assess maternal psychological well-

being. The 15-item Child Parent Relationship Scale was used to measure maternal perceptions of mother-child relationship. The parent report of the 25-item Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire was used to assess child ratings of emotional or behavioral difficulties.

Poor maternal well-being was linked directly with more mother—child conflict and less mother-child closeness. Poor maternal well-being was associated with higher level of emotional problems, conduct problems and peer problems at age seven. Both mother-child conflict and mother-child closeness were linked directly with child social and emotional difficulties when they were seven.

More mother-child conflict at age three was associated with fewer prosocial behaviors and higher levels of inattention/hyperactivity, emotional problems, peer problems and conduct problems at age seven. Lower mother-child closeness at age three was associated with fewer prosocial behaviors, and higher inattention/hyperactivity, emotional problems, peer problems, and conduct problems at age seven.

Dr. Kallitsoglou said, "Our findings suggest that there is no [direct relationship](#) between maternal psychological well-being and the quantity of support provided to families which rely primarily on grandparental childcare arrangements. While an extra pair of hands may impact maternal outcomes such as stress with child upbringing it may not potentially be enough to alleviate more distal parenting outcomes such as maternal [psychological distress](#).

"However, the findings are tentative. Grandparental support in the form of childcare may have different implications for maternal mental health for families who may have access to fewer resources of support, for instance, [single mothers](#) or across different ethnic groups or mothers in full time employment. So, we cannot rule out the possibility the help of grandparents for mothers with characteristics different to those in our

sample to have a different impact.

"We did not find any evidence to suggest that practical support with childcare as measured by the time children spent time in the care of grandparents during the week is beneficial for the parent-child relationship."

More information: Nevra Atış Akyol et al, The pathway from grandparental support with childcare in the early years to child socioemotional outcomes in middle childhood: evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study, *Early Child Development and Care* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/03004430.2023.2218596](https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2023.2218596)

Provided by University of Exeter

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