

CONTEMPORARY GRANDPARENTHOOD IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: RELATIONS, MEANINGS AND PRACTICES.

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Research project - Role overload: grandparents in the era of active ageing

The project strives to understand the experience of ageing and inter-generational relationships in the context of recent development in Czech society, determined by a new demographic regime, the social policy and economic context, and changes in social values. Grandparenthood is recognized as a dynamic phenomenon, and as a role in competition with other significant social roles stemming from active ageing and the care needs of an ageing society. The project is using multiple data sources. It makes use of secondary data, including panel surveys (SHARE, GGS, EU-SILC), which are supplemented by a survey in the 50 – 70 years age range of the population of the Czech Republic. This poster is thus based on the qualitative part of the research, the in-depth interviews aimed to capture the experience of role overload and its perception by those affected by it.

Related presentation at ESA 2015:

Lucie Vidovičová: *Are active-agers overloaded by their social roles?* RNO1515, Thu 27. 8. 11:00 - 12:30

Research Methods

Mix-methods design of the project allows both to describe general social structures in the population of seniors as well as to capture fluid processes of interaction and meaning making in the specific life experience of older people with the emphasis on grandparenting. Research sample of the quantitative part consists of 730 respondents (50-70 years) selected through the quota sampling. The aim of the survey analysis (CAPI) was to focus on the most important and the most satisfactory roles of seniors and to create the total role index and the role overload index that describe their complexities.

The qualitative part of the research was based on the analysis of 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews with 32 communication partners (21 women and 11 men aged 56-82 years, mean 65 years) conducted between 2013 and 2014 in two collection waves. In the first phase of sampling communication partners were selected intentionally, mostly through the technique of snowballing. Second phase was guided by the principle of theoretical sampling. Interviews were carried in homes of communication partners or in restaurants and café of the larger Czech towns. Interview transcripts were analysed according to the principles of grounded theory. Researchers worked subsequently in the phase of open and focused coding.

Grandparenting over generations – active memories

↑ "the typical grandmother" - ensuring mainly primary care, corresponds to that of the modernist notion of the women in the household, which is dedicated to the care of the youngest children, domestic and emotional work

↑ "rural grandmother" - her care is limited to satisfying the primary needs and is complicated by the demands of hard work → high degree of autonomy of the grandchildren

↑ "urban grandmother" - the counterpart to rural role model, urban intellectuals, more emotionally detached, distinguished; cultivation and education oriented, discipline and decent behaviour symbolically opposed to the "rural" freedom

↑ "absent or very old grandparent" - the major demographic transformation from lower life expectancy, frailty

↑ "patriarchal or emotionally cold grandfather" - the role model of the family with a decisive man, modernist role model of the breadwinner

↑ "admirable and active grandfather" - active, interesting, remarkable storyteller

These images or figures are not passive, but represent the active agents in the self-perception and role performance interpretation of the contemporary grandparents. The perception of their own grandparents was not gendered to such extent as was the way they related them to their own contemporary roles: The most active was the figure of the "typical grandmother" ascribed to someone else - while men were usually using it to describe the role played by their wives, women tended to disassociate from it or ascribe it to other women. For men, the "passive" or "patriarchal" grandfather served as a reference point - most of them perceived themselves as loving and actively involved in their role.

Complexity of roles

The survey showed the gender differences in the evaluation of the roles between men and women - the most important roles were:

↑ mother, wife, grandmother
↑ husband, father, grandfather
The most satisfying roles were:
↑ grandmother (51 %), mother (17 %), friend (8 %)

↑ grandfather (32 %), leisure (15 %), husband (15 %), friend (12 %), father (9 %)

The qualitative data enable us to (carefully) interpret these variability according to the different role performance and role complexity: in spite of the symbolic detachment from the "traditional" care oriented image, women tend to perform their grandparenthood as primary carers (baby sitting, tutoring, care for smaller children etc.) (cf. Hasmanová Marhánková and Štípková 2014), and this performance is overlapping their role of mothers, it is at the same time a performance of mothering. These activities are usually separated from other activities in time and space.

On the contrary, the grandfatherhood performance (cf. Mann 2007; Tarrant 2012) is carried out mostly through joint work (typically work in the garden, DIY) or free time activities (sports), both associated with a transmission of knowledge and skills. The role performance takes place more through shared time oriented on older children (not toddlers) and it is usually compatible with other roles in time and space (cf. Patschová 2014). The importance of the husband role to men might be also connected with the role overlap - while woman "play" also a mother, while taking care of grandchildren, men are "playing" grandfathers, when they create the background for the grandmothers as their husbands.

Emotionality of grandparenting

This social and gender structuring of roles is also reflected in emotional responses to grandparenthood. While the dominant discourse relates the grandparenting experience with positive emotions, we would like to focus on negative emotions.

Some women reported helplessness facing the care for small children that

they "cannot recall". This frustration might be constructed against the shared notion and expectation of "natural" ability of women to provide care.

The perception of fear differentiates the grandparenting from parenting (the situational, "that something might happen to them", they are just borrowed from parents X general fear about the development and future of the children).

Performative void

Some grandfathers are lacking the opportunity to perform their role with very small children due to perceived (by them or by others) lack of abilities or feeling of powerlessness, while grandmothers defined and performed through the care provision is more likely to lead to void experience in the higher age of children, when care and formal education assistance is not needed and demanded. The orientation towards the leisure time activities by grandparents might be "rewarded" by the prolongation of the role performance to higher age of children. It used to be limited by lower life expectancy of men, but with the higher life expectancy this experience of "active" grandparenthood is more common. Gender divide prevails, but takes a different form over the generations. (Arber, Timonen 2012)



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"Well, she is the typical grandmother which bakes these cakes and when children had a broken zipper, so I gave it to them on the weekend and they returned from their grandmother's, of course, with the repaired one to me (laughter) yeah. So in that she is exemplary." (Alžběta, F, 59)



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"And when he was born, it was great, but the first encounter with that boy, he was about three months, daughter went downtown, and they let me to babysit, and he cried so terribly, yeah. And I have got out of practice after xx years, breast-feed I could not, you couldn't do anything, I couldn't, so then when they returned from the shopping, I was sitting above the bathtub, crying [...] It was terrible. A trauma." (Emilie, F, 60)

[My wife] she can go crazy because of the kids [...] More or less if we would have a physical contact, so she dedicates to them 100% of her time. She loves them a lot, well, she would give them everything. And yeah, she is studying with them even on holidays, of course. [...] I don't know, maybe I have a good feeling when I can pass on them something, right, like some kind of experience or teach them something, yeah, it's doing me pretty good when I see they know grasped it [...] Of course, I am proud of them, for a little one, we do not know it yet, but those two guys, they are both clever and are athletes, it's all what I used to do once. (Otto, M, 66)

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