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

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 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 Vídvocová. Are active agents overloaded by their social roles? RN0S15, 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 flow 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. Interviewees were carried in homes of communication partners or in restaurants and cafés of the large 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” – mainly from their own experiences, corresponds to that of the modernist notion of the woman in the house, who is dedicated to the care of the youngest children, domestic and everyday 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 mode, urban, emotionally detached, distinguished; cultivation and education oriented, disciplined and decent behaviour symbolically opposed to the “rural freedom
† “absent or very old grandfather” – the major demographic transformation from lower life expectancy, frailty
† “patrilineal or emotionally cold grandfather” – the role model of the family with a decisive man, modernist role model of the breakdown
† “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 contemporaneous grandparent. 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 dissociate from it or attribute it to other women: “For me, the “grandmother” or “patrilineal” 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
† bucket, father, grandfather
† grandmother (33 %), mother (17 %), friend (8 %)
† grandfather (32 %), leisure (15 %), husband (15 %), friend (12 %), father (9 %)
The qualitative analysis enabled 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 grandmotherly as primary carers (baby sitting, tutoring, care for smaller children etc.), cf. Marnínkova and Stipáková 2014, and this performance is overlapping their role of mothers, it is at the same time a performance of mothering. These activities are usually separate 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, OTH 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 shared role to men might be also connected with the role overlap - while woman “play” also a mother, while taking care of their grandchildren, men are “playing” grandfathers, which 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 grandparenting. 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 experience. In some situations, “that something might happen to them”, they are just borrowed from parents xgeneral fear about the development and future of the children.

Performance 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 grandfathers might be “rewarded” by the prolongation of the role performance to higher age of children. It is used to be limited by lower life expectancy of men, but with the higher life expectancy this sequence of “active” grandparenthood is more common. Gender divide prevails, but takes a different form over the generations. (Arber, Timon 2012)

*Ref:

References

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