



# Active (grand)parenting: spectrums of caregiving across socio-economic contexts

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# Contemporary Grandparenthood

- ▶ Grandparents are taking on a significant role in raising the next generation in countries across the world (Buchanan and Rotkitch, 2018),
- ▶ Six million 'unsung heroes' identified in 2014, saving Britain more than £7 billion in child care costs,
- ▶ Unprecedented rise in the numbers of grandparents worldwide, who co-exist with and interact for longer periods of time with grandchildren (Timonen, 2020),
- ▶ Under different welfare contexts and family circumstances, grandparents perform a variety of roles (Arber and Timonen, 2012),
- ▶ Grandparenting continues to evolve as a result of sociodemographic and economic change and in line with grandparents' own agency (Timonen, 2020),
- ▶ Evidence demonstrates diversity in terms of gender, age, geographic locality and mobility, marital status and lineage

# Research background

- ▶ Men's experiences and practices of caregiving as grandfathers and 'new grandfatherhood' and gendered divisions of labour across the lifecourse (Tarrant, 2013; 2016),
- ▶ Grandparenting and kinship care (Tarrant et al. 2017),
- ▶ 'Men, Poverty and Lifetimes of Care' – longitudinal examination of men's care responsibilities in low-income families over time
  - ▶ Included research with young fathers (aged 25 and under)
  - ▶ Mid-life fathers in non-traditional gendered parenting circumstances
  - ▶ Male caregivers (uncles, grandfathers, great-grandfathers) who engage in informal and/or state ratified care (known as kinship care)

# Leisure/pleasure grandparenting

- ▶ Mason et al. (2007) – 'leisure/pleasure' grandparenting
- ▶ Characterised by ambivalence – 'being there'/'not interfering'
- ▶ Identified among well-resourced grandparents who provide irregular or semi-regular childcare on behalf of working parents
- ▶ Family practices are gendered and relational and reflect a gendered division of labour that extends across the lifecourse

*I think the children see... **my wife, more as the, provider of food and home comforts** if that's? and **I'm more the Butlins redcoat** you know, like I always take them swimming or, riding their bike on the prom, well we sometimes do that, I do that kind of thing and [wife] does more of the (tut) I suppose it's an awful thing to say these days isn't it?, Philip, age 61, married and retired*

*I'm the man figure, aren't I? [My wife is] more involved I suppose in the domestic side of things. She'll do ... mending for my daughter-in-law, she's got a particular gift, she'll do some cooking, if needed yeah, I'm much more [into] taking them and playing football with [grandson] or at the moment [granddaughter] likes being picked up and cuddled by me, which all little girls love you know (laughs). I'm aware we're partly setting role models for them, Bill, age 70, married and retired*

## 'New' grandfatherhood?

- ▶ *It was put to me ... I think that it was a generational thing ... I was hopeless, as a father in terms of babies, absolutely hopeless. I didn't avoid it, it was just kind of, not my, area of expertise and, I watched our son and our son-in-law, the way they just got stuck in, and was amazed ... They never gave it a thought ... but in my day, we had our children in our early 20s and had finished our family by our mid-20s and I just had no idea. My wife was a star and didn't seem to have any expectations that I would help except of course, I had to feed them and take them out in push chairs ... Now you have strollers; push chairs and prams in those days ... but when our grandchildren were babies, I had far more to do with them, far more to do with them, and I was the one who would be saying "look you all go out, I will deal with them". [Wife said] "You can't change a nappy", "Oh well...just let me try, I can do it". So it felt, I suppose I'd become kind of modernised a bit, by watching the way, younger people today behave, Arnold, age 65, married*

# Rescue/repair

- ▶ Hughes and Emmel (2011) – low-income grandparenting
- ▶ Supplementary and time intensive care that is often invisible beyond the family and often results in complex and difficult engagements and dependencies on health and social care providers

*[grandson] has changed my life entirely. And when I say at first it was hard, we were a bit skint, you know what I mean, and everything else. Now it has made me more successful in every department. I think just because I'm kind of happy in myself and my situation...that wasn't always the case. When I first got him, I'll be honest with you, it was hard. And I lay there many times on a night, after he's woken me up like, forty times in the night just because he wants his dummy putting in or he wants to get in bed with me or he wants to be poking my ears or sucking on my cheek, I'd go, have I done the right thing? Sam, age 51, grandfather, primary caregiver, single*

## 'New' grandfatherhood?

- ▶ *I were having a stressful job. So I just said right, I will jack it in. I'll look after the kids but it were a massive learning curve because I've never done it before. I mean, when my kids were growing up, I were working on nights for nine years and I went full time on days but I never had to deal with small ones. At the time, my kids were nine and ten when I came off nights. So it were a massive learning curve for me and really, really hard. I can see what women sort of complain about when they've got kids round their feet all day and it's nice when my wife comes home. We get these to bed and we can talk and I've got adult conversation*

Pearce, age 57, primary caregiver, married

# Current research

- ▶ Active (grand)fathering is in evidence across the lifecourse and in different socio-economic contexts,
- ▶ Its character and extensivity is shaped by socio-economic factors and wider demographic and socio-historical processes.

## New research examining active fathering in young men:

- ▶ Following Young Fathers Further, UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship, 2020-24
- ▶ A qualitative longitudinal, participatory and comparative study of the lives and support needs of young fathers
- ▶ Also examines intergenerational exchanges of care within family contexts, and young men's family participation as fathers

Website for more info: <https://fyff.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/>