

Cool Grandpa Podcast

Tuesday, August 16
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Potential Central Question(s): What makes grandfathers unique? What does the “modern grandparent experience” look like for grandfathers?

Summary of Differences Between Grandfathers and Grandmothers from Dissertation Research

Study Purpose: to better understand what being a grandparent in the 2020s looks like and how that experience differs based on certain characteristics of the grandparent (such as gender in this case)

Study Design: mixed methods (meaning both quantitative, or numerical, and qualitative, or written/verbal, responses were collected and analyzed)

Sample:

83.67% grandmothers

15.31% grandfathers

(one participant did not provide gender - they will not be included in results outlined below)

Results specific to grandmother-grandfather breakdown:

- Quality of relationships with grandchildren:
 - Overall, perceived relationship quality was similar and high for grandmothers and grandfathers
 - Excellent: 66.44% of grandmothers and 63.46% for grandfathers
 - Good: 26.3% for grandmothers and 21.15% for grandfathers
 - Fair: 5.54% for grandmothers and 15.38% for grandfathers
- Frequency of contact:
 - A higher proportion of grandmothers felt they were not in contact with their grandchildren enough (62.2%), with most grandfathers feeling they had about the right amount of contact with their grandchildren (53.33%).
- Obstacles related to contact:
 - Living too far away (60.98% of grandmothers, 66.67% of grandfathers)
 - Grandchildren's *parents'* busy schedules (38.59% of grandmothers, 26.67% of grandparents)
 - Grandchildren's busy schedules (29.97% of grandmothers, 40% of grandfathers)
- Roles:
 - For grandmothers
 - family roots (68.29%)
 - teacher (65.85%)
 - storyteller (57.32%)

- source of wisdom (56.1%)
 - valued elder (56.1%)
 - babysitter/daycare (53.66%)
 - For grandfathers
 - teacher (80%)
 - family roots (73.33%)
 - source of wisdom (66.67%)
 - conveyer of family legacy (66.67%)
 - mentor (60%)
 - storyteller (53.33%)
 - valued elder (53.33%)
- Role importance: roughly equal for grandmothers and grandfathers
- Rating as a grandparent:
 - Similar levels of perceived efficacy (out of 3, mean score of 2.57 for grandmothers and 2.47 for grandfathers)
 - Above average: 60.98% of grandmothers and 53.33% of grandfathers
 - Average: 35.37% of grandmothers and 40% of grandfathers
- Challenges:
 - Similar challenges reported by grandmothers and grandfathers
 - Grandmothers were more likely to report:
 - difficulty in knowing their boundaries
 - Grandfathers were more likely to report:
 - difficulty keeping up with grandchildren physically
 - struggling to keep up with new technology
- Topics that grandparents want more information about:
 - Grandmothers were interested in having more information about:
 - Fun activities to do with grandchildren
 - Ways to keep in touch long distance
 - Grandfathers were interested in having more information about:
 - The latest issues grandchildren may be facing
 - Ways to speak to grandchildren about issues in their lives
 - Ways to keep in touch long distance
 - The importance of grandparents to a child's well-being
 - Ways to speak to grandchildren's parents about issues
 - Children's developmental stages
- Preferred methods for receiving information about grandparenting:
 - Email was common for both
 - Grandmothers reported *browsing the internet* (58.54% compared to 33.33% of grandfathers) and *reading magazine or newspaper articles* (39.02% compared to 20% for grandfathers)
 - Grandfathers reported *receiving advice from friends and family* (40% compared to 26.83% for grandmothers)
- Activities carried out with grandchildren:
 - Similar across grandmothers and grandfathers include: attending religious services, attending school events, talking on the phone, texting

- Grandmothers reported other activities at much higher rates than grandfathers, with the exception of going hunting or fishing
- Topics discussed with grandchildren:
 - Similar across grandmothers and grandfathers include: religion or spirituality, news or current events, career advice, internet safety, and social media use
 - Grandmothers reported discussing a variety of topics with their grandchildren at a higher rate than grandfathers
 - Grandfathers did outrank grandmothers on two topics:
 - managing finances and savings (50% compared to 41.1%)
 - politics (58.33% compared to 42.47%).
- Financial support:
 - Grandmothers reported providing various forms of financial assistance more than grandfathers:
 - gifts (97.26% of grandmothers and 66.67% of grandfathers)
 - school or college tuition (27.4% of grandmothers compared to 20% of grandfathers)
 - day-to-day expenses (23.29% of grandmothers and 20% of grandfathers)

Summary: Overall, the experience of grandmothers and grandfathers is similar in many ways. For example, grandmothers and grandfathers reported seeing their grandchildren at roughly equal rates, scored similarly in self-reported efficacy as grandparents, and rated the quality of their relationships with grandchildren similarly.

At the same time, the role assumed by grandmothers in this sample takes on a more relational, nurturing aspect than grandfathers, with more grandmothers citing knowing their boundaries as a difficulty, listing babysitter/daycare as one of their roles, engaging in a greater number of activities with their grandchildren, and discussing a wider range of topics with their grandchildren. Grandfathers expressed a desire for more information related to their role as a grandparent and sought ways to improve relationships with their grandchildren.

What does this mean?

The results suggest the average modern grandfather wants to sincerely learn about his grandchildren as individuals, talk about their feelings, and demonstrate unconditional love and support. However, based on the activities reported by grandfathers and the topics addressed with their grandchildren (e.g., managing finances, politics), there seems to be a disconnect, with grandfathers wanting to engage deeply in relational aspects of grandparenting but currently not doing so at the same level expressed. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting the activities engaged in by grandfathers reflect a masculine view held towards their identity as grandfathers, which was often modeled for them in previous family experiences (Smorti et al., 2012; Margolis & Wright 2017). However, this study provides insight in the sense that grandfathers voiced a desire to grow in the relational aspects of their role.