

“Sometimes I just feel a bit trapped.”

Pleasures, Pressures and Support Needs of Grandparents in New Zealand: Research Findings

Anne Kerlake Hendricks, Principal Policy and Research Analyst, Families Commission



Acknowledgements

> Research Team (Focus Groups):

Dr Cheryl Smith, Bobby Newson, Karen Stewart, Hong-Jae Park, Liz Tanielu, Rosetta Iupeli, Anne Kerlake Hendricks

Web Research: Dr Roberta Hill and Ken Wilson

> UMR Research (Telephone Survey)

> The grandparents who shared their stories with us



Research Questions Explored

- > What are the pleasures and pressures of grandparenting in New Zealand?
- > How well are grandparents balancing their own needs and interests with caring and family responsibilities?
- > What support and information do grandparents need?
- > How and where might this be provided?
- > How do cultural beliefs and practices influence the grandparenting role?



Sources of Data

- > Nine focus groups held throughout New Zealand – just over 70 participants in total
- > A telephone survey of 1179 grandparents
- > The Families Commission's on-line Couch Poll
- > Workshop session at MSD's Volunteer Community Co-ordinators and Positive Ageing Ambassadors Policy Forum



Focus Group Composition

- 3 groups of Māori grandparents
- 2 groups of Pacific grandparents
- 1 group of Korean migrant grandparents
- 1 group of grandparents raising grandchildren
- 2 groups open to any grandparents who wished to take part



Telephone Survey

- > Base sample: 1,000 grandparents with at least one grandchild under the age of 18
- > Booster samples: 162 Māori grandparents; 100 Pacific grandparents
- > Age range <45 to 75 years plus
- > Average grandparent had five grandchildren (average influenced by the 9% with 11 or more)
- > 7% lived with one or more of their grandchildren, including 2% who were raising them
- > Carried out by UMR Research



Families Commission's Online Couch Poll

- > www.thecouch.org.nz
- > Self-selected online panel of New Zealanders
- > Grandparent-focused survey ran during October and November 2008
- > 208 participants
- > 25% male; 75% female
- > Average age: 58
- > 356 parents participated in a complementary survey exploring parents' experiences with grandparents



Additional Data Source

- > A workshop session at MSD's Volunteer Community Co-ordinators and Positive Ageing Ambassadors Policy Forum (Nov, 2008)
- > Small-group discussions on key topics similar to those raised in focus groups



Grandparents in New Zealand

- > A diverse group!
- > Range in age from early 30s onwards
- > Multiple influences on the grandparenting experience, including where they live, who they live with, amount and frequency of contact with grandchildren, relationships with children's parents, memories of own grandparents, cultural beliefs and practices, age, income, ethnicity, health, family form ...
- > UMR estimate: around 700,000 grandparents of under 18 yr olds in NZ – 24% of the adult population



Key Findings: Pleasures

- Nurturing and observing development, sharing skills, knowledge and wisdom
- Reciprocal love for grandchildren enriching lives
- The fun and laughter
- For some, having time and resources available to grandchildren that were not available to their own children
- Many – but not all – grandparents believe that they have the right balance between time spent on their own interests and activities and time spent with grandchildren



Grandparents Speak

“Watching the children grow, watching their development, being part of that is very, very special.” (Focus group grandmother)

“I love my mokos even though I would love to see more of them. [Some live in Australia and] I haven’t been for a few years, but they ring me up...and it’s music to my ears....it makes my world when I hear them cackling on the phone there – sometimes you can just about smell that stuff, you know, coming over the phone.” (Focus group grandparent)



Key Findings: Pressures

- > Not enough time with grandchildren; grandchildren living too far away
- > Grandparenting being (sometimes) tiring and stressful
- > Concerns about what grandchildren exposed to (e.g. drugs, violence, consumer culture)
- > Financial concerns/contributions/demands: small and large
- > Effects of lifestyle changes, eg relocation, migration, employment changes
- > Intergenerational, cultural and language challenges



Pressures (continued)

> Relationships with adult children

Negotiating care arrangements

Negotiating boundaries

Grandparents may be still actively parenting the grandchild's parent

Relationships with adult children's partners following separation (especially when a real/implied threat of losing access to the grandchild/ren)

> “Sandwich generation” – supporting younger and older family members simultaneously

> Grandparents raising grandchildren face multiple challenges

Additional reference: Worrall, J. (2009) *Grandparents and Whānau/Extended Families Raising Kin Children in Aotearoa/New Zealand*. Contact Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Trust NZ for details

<http://www.raisinggrandchildren.org.nz/>



Grandparents Speak

- > *It's great being a grandparent, but [it] can be very time consuming if you can't set boundaries and ensure you have time out for yourself. As a mother of a disabled daughter, it is a real pressure, but then it has been all her life. [I] also have my aging mother to support at the same time so often feel a bit squeezed and feel like shouting "WHEN IS MY TIME FOR ME AND NO RESPONSIBILITY?!"* (Grandmother, online Couch Poll)
- > *I love them dearly. I love my girls, I love my mokos, but sometimes I just feel a bit trapped... As grandparents sometimes I feel - don't get me wrong - it's like do we get too involved with our grandchildren? You know, I try and tell myself, you know, they are not my children.* (Grandmother, focus group)



Grandparents Speak

- > *I have my ups and downs. Being a grandmother...it's fun, I love them dearly, but the downfall, sometimes it gets on top of you...you've looked after your own children and it's like you end up with the kids again. (Grandmother, focus group)*
- > *It's more the pressure...of having a toddler in the house. At our age, having a two year old running riot and spilling his drink on the carpet. For 20 years we've built a nice house and suddenly in two years the pressure's on...putting gates up so he couldn't fall down the stairs, having to go through the gate in the morning to get to work and just about falling over and going down the stairs yourself. ...You love having them there...it's incredible how they develop, but it's the continual...lack of privacy that we've got. ...And added pressure with lots of doctor's visits, and follow-up visits [due to one child's premature birth]. [Our daughter] doesn't drive so we have to take her. (Grandfather, focus group, living with grandchildren)*



Elder Abuse Resource



What is Elder Abuse?

It's actions which harm and distress older people.

It's lack of care, or neglect, by people close to an older person.

It's not just physical violence or using force like pushing, slapping -

- It's using older people's money without consent
- It's controlling who they see, who they talk to, where they go
- It's taking decisions out of their hands
- It's treating them like children
- It's name calling and put downs
- It's keeping them at home, denying them the care they need
- It's locking them in their room so they don't wander.

Elder abuse is a universal problem, it is not limited to any one gender, religion, cultural, ethnic or income group.

Most elder abuse is caused by family members.

...and it's not OK



Sources of information and support

For information and support call the Family Violence Information Line on 0800 456 450

For specialist information and support visit:
www.ageconcern.org.nz
or visit www.areyouok.org.nz

For a list of services in your local area go to:
www.familyservices.govt.nz/directory/index.jsp

Under 'pick your service' select family violence, then elder abuse.

**IT IS
OK TO ASK
FOR
HELP**



New Zealand Government

ISBN 078-0-478-32336-8

Providing Childcare

PHONE SURVEY DATA:

- > 69% of grandparents looked after at least one of their grandchildren on a regular or irregular basis
- > 58% of those providing care did so because the children's parents were at work
- > 36% said it was **not easy** turning down requests for care

Many focus group participants also had childcare responsibilities



Work-life Balance

- > Some grandparents in paid employment benefit from flexible work options; some have modified their working hours to ensure more time with grandchildren
- > Choices made included:
 - Working in a school so school holidays are free to spend time with grandchildren
 - Contract work to fit in with grandchildren's schedule
 - Swapping roles once a week: the grandparent provides care and the child's mother does the grandparent's paid work
 - Buying a business "*with staff to do our jobs so that we can spend more time with grandchildren*"



Lifestyle Changes

- > Some temporary, some permanent
- > Changes in living arrangements
- > Changes in family structure (eg following separation)
- > Moving within New Zealand, or from one country to another
- > Employment changes (eg reducing hours; taking leave without pay)
- > Implications of changes (eg social, financial, health, career) explored
- > Resiliency and flexibility evident



Grandparent Re-partnering: Effect on Family Relationships

- > *My natural father died 13 years ago and the relationship between my young children and my mother was a good close one, she felt having the children around her helped her grieve. After 5 years she met a new man who had no children and wanted none in his life, he gradually has steered my mother away from 'family' in general to the point that we only see her 2-3 times a year at Mothers' Day, her birthday, Christmas and maybe one time that she can arrange him to go out for a whole day. Sad really. The children do not have a close relationship with her now.
(Parent, Couch Poll)*



Grandparent Re-partnering: Negotiating New Partner's Role

- > *Being able to look after my two grandsons is great. I get immense satisfaction from helping them to develop into the young adults they are becoming. However there is considerable cost in health, social life and a financial cost in spite of help from the government. There is also a huge cost in married life as my husband is not the boys' natural grandfather. He has entered into what he expected to be a peaceful and sharing retirement with the two of us free to travel etc and now it is on hold for a few more years until the boys are able to manage away from home. He has accepted this has to be, but it's not the retirement he anticipated given that he has no children of his own and never wanted any. Financially and emotionally he helps to support the boys. (Couch Poll respondent)*



Support and Information Needs – Total Expressing Interest (Phone Survey)

- > Activities and events that could be shared with grandchildren (65%)
- > School curriculum (61%)
- > Age and stage expectations (55%)
- > Managing grandchildren's behaviour (48%)
- > Maintaining relationships with grandchildren who are not often seen (46%)



Support and Information Needs (continued)

- > Drug, alcohol or other addictions (44%)
- > Keeping in touch with grandchildren when parents separate (34%)
- > Balancing own time with time spent with grandchildren (31%)
- > Responding to grandchildren's requests and demands (27%)
- > How to turn down requests to look after grandchildren when it doesn't suit (18%)



Additional Support and Information Needs – Focus Groups

- > Info about legal rights, custody, access etc – particularly for grandparents raising g’children
- > Learning how to negotiate boundaries (e.g. around requests for childcare)
- > Managing changing family dynamics
- > Managing differing cultural expectations when working with government agencies
- > Dealing with isolation from cultural and social support networks
- > Learning “how to grandparent”
- > How to balance/share time across the family



Cultural Expectations of the Grandparent Role

- > Expectations and roles of grandparents within Māori, Pacific and Korean cultures explored within focus groups
- > Common theme: effects (for individual and for family/whānau) of isolation/separation from traditional support structures
- > Roles influenced by social, demographic and technological changes – how to adapt/accept?
- > In phone survey population, Pacific (42%) and Māori (25%) grandparents were much more likely than other grandparents to be living with one or more grandchildren



Primary Pressures for Māori Grandparents

- > Economic pressures e.g. the need for traditional caregivers to be in paid work; people still working at age 65 plus. Māori die younger, so the over 65 population is small in comparison to a large rangatahi (youth) population.
- > Erosion of traditional whānau supports through urbanisation and emigration, particularly to Australia
- > Increasing pressures on traditional ways of teaching roles and responsibilities, for example, the technology divide/distractions



Summary

- > For most grandparents, the pleasures of grandparenting outweigh any pressures
- > Grandparents' contributions to NZ families must be recognised (e.g. childcare, financial, and other forms of support)
- > Grandparents experiencing pressure/challenges display considerable resiliency
- > Grandparents may need support adapting to changes in family dynamics and structures, as well as technological, societal and other changes
- > Certain groups of grandparents need specific information and support – and need to know how/where to get it (eg grandparents raising grandchildren, migrant grandparents)



Disseminating Research Findings

- > Report now being finalised
- > Will be published later this year
- > Findings to be shared with grandparents, and with those who work for and with grandparents



Where to next?

We are...

- > Considering implications for families, schools, employers, community groups, government and other agencies
- > Identifying avenues for getting information and support to grandparents (beyond those targeted at older people)
- > Considering how, where and with whom we can advocate for grandparents



Potential Advocacy Actions

- > Raising awareness of grandparents' roles and contributions within New Zealand families
- > Advocating on behalf of grandparents with particular needs, e.g.
 - Grandparents raising grandchildren
 - Migrant grandparents
 - Grandparents vulnerable to financial or other pressures from grandchildren and other family members
 - Grandparents in separated/blended families
- > Helping grandparents find out where and how to get the advice and support that they need
- > Promoting opportunities for grandparents to get together to share and discuss experiences



Questions or Comments

Anne Kerlake Hendricks

anne.kerlakehendricks@nzfamilies.org.nz

(04) 917-7070

Families Commission Website:

www.nzfamilies.org.nz

