

Jernej Kovač

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8576-1498>


University of Maribor, Slovenia

 <https://ror.org/01d5jce07>

Saška Kumik

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4680-2779>

Role of demographic factors in the formation of grandareting styles

 <https://doi.org/10.15633/pch.15110>

Abstract

As population ageing is a global trend of our time, the relationships we form with older people are becoming increasingly important. The relationship between grandparents, adult children and grandchildren plays an important role. The definition of grandparenthood can also include activities with grandchildren, emotional attachment, and the quality of the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents. In this paper, we have focused on the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, with special attention to the influence of demographic factors on the formation of grandparenting styles. At the same time, we researched the following grandparenting styles that are most frequently mentioned in the literature: formal, fun-seeker, surrogate parent, reservoir of family wisdom and distant figure. We found in our study that there are significant differences in individual grandparenting styles in relation to gender, age and marital status, while no major differences were detected in terms of education and place of residence.

Keywords

Grandparents, grandchildren, parenting style, demographic factors

Introduction

A family is a place of deep relationships, warm and genuine, but sometimes also wounded. No matter what the relationships in the family are, whether the family is more or less ideal, it is still a school of humanity where one learns about relationships, solidarity, coexistence and care for the good of others and the common good.¹ Parents have a great influence on children's human and religious growth.² In addition to parents, grandparents play an important role in raising future generations. The role of grandparents presents itself mainly as taking care of grandchildren, supporting them and participating in various activities.³ The bond with grandchildren can, on the one hand, be extremely beneficial for grandparents, as it rejuvenates them and fills them with energy,⁴ but on the other hand, it can sometimes be too much of a burden, which brings them additional stress.⁵ Grandparents are increasingly involved in the lives of their grandchildren, which is especially evident during family crises when they assume a more significant role in caring for the children.⁶ Even though many grandchildren have regular contact with their grandparents, grandmothers are usually more actively involved than grandfathers. Grandchildren often spend time with grandparents on weekends or at celebrations and help them with housework, while grandparents read stories to younger grandchildren, play with them, take them on trips, etc.⁷ The relationship they establish with their grandchildren can also help elderly people cope with age and possible problems.

¹ B. Simonič, E. Osewska, *Emotional experience and consequences of growing up in a family with alcoholism in adult children of alcoholics*, "The Person and the Challenges" 13 (2023) 1, pp. 63–81.

² J. Stala, *Parents catechesis: for children, family or for adults?* "The Person and the Challenges" 13 (2023) 1, pp. 37–51.

³ V. Timonen, S. Arber, *A new look at grandparenting*, in: S. Arber, V. Timonen. (eds.), *Contemporary grandparenting. – – Changing family relationships in global contexts*, Chicago 2012, The University of Chicago Press, pp. 1–24.

⁴ H. Gürtler, *Otroci imajo radi stare starše: priručnik za življenje z vnuki*, Celje 2013, Celjska Mohorjeva družba.

⁵ G. Brunello, L. Rocco. *Is childcare bad for the mental health of grandparents? Evidence from SHARE*, "Review of the Economics of the Household" 190 (2016), pp. 67–74.

⁶ P. Uhlenberg, M. Cheuk, *The significance of grandparents to grandchildren. An international perspective*, in: D. Dannefer, C. Phillipson. (eds.), *The SAGE handbook of social gerontology*, London 2013, SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 447–458.

⁷ T. Mlakar, *Stari starši v življenju vnukov*, "Kakovostna starost" 18 (2015) 2, pp. 3–21.

When grandparents are also more actively involved in the process of raising children, there may be disagreements with parents regarding the parenting styles and different methods they use. It is then crucial for grandparents to realise that parents have the primary authority in the upbringing of their children.⁸ The way grandparents raise their grandchildren can be influenced by a number of factors, such as the age of grandparents and grandchildren, education, employment, marital status, number of grandchildren, and relationship with the middle generation.⁹ The grandparent-grandchild relationship also changes over the course of life, which means that grandparents may not raise their grandchild in the same way during the preschool period and later in the teenage years.¹⁰ Nevertheless, there are many definitions of different grandparenting styles that have been identified in recent decades. Among them, we often mention the classification, which includes five grandparenting styles: formal, fun-seeker, surrogate parent, reservoir of family wisdom and distant figure.¹¹ In this paper, we first define the concept of grandparenthood and then provide a more detailed description of the role that grandparents play in raising their grandchildren. This is followed by a description of the factors that impact the development of grandparenting styles. The empirical part consists of the definition of the research problem in terms of content and methodology, followed by the presentation and interpretation of the results. Concluding remarks are provided at the end of the paper.

Grandparents

Grandparenthood primarily consists of the support and care that grandparents provide for their grandchildren. In a broader sense, the definition of grandparenthood can also include activities with grandchildren, emotional attachment,

⁸ H. Gürtler, *Otroci imajo radi stare starše: priročnik za življenje z vnuki*, Celje 2013, Celjska Mohorjeva družba.

⁹ M. Wetzel, K. Hank, *Grandparents' relationship to grandchildren in the transition to adulthood*, "Journal of Family Issues" 41 (2020) 10, pp. 1885–1904.

¹⁰ J. Sprey, S. H. Matthews, *Contemporary grandparenthood. A systemic transition*, "The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science" 464 (1982) 1, pp. 91–103.

¹¹ B. L. Neugarten, K. K. Weinstein, *The changing american grandparent*, "Journal of Marriage and Family" 26 (1964) 2, pp. 199–204.

and the quality of the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents.¹² Grandparenting can be one of the most rewarding life experiences. Many grandparents said that the role fulfilled them and gave additional meaning to their lives. The role of the grandparent is different for every individual and depends on many factors, but there is no denying the positive effects that a healthy relationship between grandparents and grandchildren can have. For example, children learn to live with older people; they have someone who provides safe shelter, support and unconditional love, while grandparents are filled with optimism and energy. However, “children and grandchildren should not become the only link you have with life.”¹³ In the past, when most of the population in Slovenia still made their living from agriculture, grandparents played a crucial role in child rearing. Parents invested most of their energy in work, whereas grandparents had a little more time and experience raising children. However, with the development of industry, many changes have come to families. Young people began migrating to cities and became more financially independent, housing was mostly only suitable for a small family and people were working later in life, which meant that grandparents were still employed. Two-generational families have become more present, while grandparents gradually became less needed in child rearing.¹⁴

The transition from parenthood to grandparenthood begins even before the birth of the first grandchild. The age of the person who is about to become a grandparent plays an important role in their perception of the new chapter in life. The age at which their children become parents also affects whether grandparents will respond positively or negatively to the new role. If grandparents are unsure of whether their children are mature, independent and responsible enough to take care of their own children, they will approach this role with more hesitation and concern. In contrast, if their children are at a stage in their life when they can independently take care of their child, grandparents are likely to have fewer reservations. If their children are still very young and unprepared, this could mean that the grandparents will have to assume the role of parents.

¹² V. Timonen, S. Arber, *A new look at grandparenting*, in: S. Arber, V. Timonen. (eds.), *Contemporary grandparenting. Changing family relationships in global contexts*, Chicago 2012, The University of Chicago Press, pp. 1–24.

¹³ H. Gürtler, *Otroci imajo radi stare starše: priručnik za življenje z vnuki*, Celje 2013, Celjska Mohorjeva družba.

¹⁴ B. Žorž, *Stari starši in njihovo vzgojno poslanstvo*. Celje 2015, Celjska Mohorjeva družba.

On the other hand, if their children decide to have their own children later in life, there will be a large generational gap between the grandchildren and the grandparents, which can have a negative effect on the relationship. Furthermore, the middle generation is much more independent in comparison to the earlier stages of life, which means that the help of grandparents is not as essential anymore, which can also have a negative, constraining impact on the relationship with grandchildren.¹⁵

Even though the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents plays a key role in connecting generations, it is not as researched and as precisely defined as a child's relationship with their parents. The role of the grandparent largely depends on whether it was expected, whether it appeared at an appropriate time in a person's life and whether it has an impact on other areas in the individual's life.¹⁶ Many grandparents may experience some initial hesitation and doubt about their readiness for the role. Some grandparents may have found a new freedom and meaning in life after their own children had left home, so the thought of grandchildren and taking care of small children again fills them with worries and uncertainty. Relationships with the grandchild's family can also play an important role, especially the relationship between the grandmother (mother-in-law) and the mother (daughter-in-law). In case their relationship is not the best, grandmothers can have legitimate concerns about their relationship with their grandchildren.¹⁷

The role of grandparents in a grandchild's life

Grandparents play an increasingly important role in the lives of the younger generations. Factors such as longer life expectancy and better health, a high number of divorces, and an increasing number of single-parent families and working mothers contribute to this. Not only grandmothers but also grandfathers play a vital role in caring for their grandchildren and are increasingly involved in the

¹⁵ J. Sprey, S. H. Matthews, *Contemporary grandparenthood. A systemic transition*, "The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science" 464 (1982) 1, pp. 91–103.

¹⁶ V. R. Kivett, *The grandparent. Grandchild connection*, "Marriage & Family Review" 16 (1991) 3/4, pp. 267–290.

¹⁷ S. Moore, D. Rosenthal, *Grandparenting. Contemporary perspectives*. New York 2017, Routledge.

lives of the younger generation. Although grandparenting is a socially recognised category in all human societies and its meaning varies around the world, it is undeniable that grandparents play an important role in a grandchild's life. Increasing life expectancy and declining fertility mean that most children have grandparents and only some siblings and cousins with whom they must share their grandparents. This means that grandparents have more time and energy to devote to each individual grandchild.

Most grandparents with young grandchildren are healthy and financially stable, and many are already retired. Grandparents are also often involved in taking care of the child when the young family is going through a crisis and are usually the first choice when the parents alone cannot adequately fulfil their role. A critical aspect of the relationship with grandparents is that it is through this relationship that most children experience an important and fulfilling relationship with an older person. Without grandparents, most children would not be in contact with older people.¹⁸

Grandchildren typically have regular contact with their grandparents, with the most significant amount of time spent together during the grandchild's elementary school years. The age of the grandparents is an important factor here because the older they are, the less time they spend with their grandchildren. Grandchildren see grandparents as confidantes and can share their concerns with them, without fear of judgement. Mutual support between grandchildren and grandparents is also important. They learn new knowledge and skills from each other and help each other with tasks. Moreover, grandparents also play an important role in their grandchildren's mental health.¹⁹ Children in rural China who were rejected by grandparents were more likely to become depressed, while emotional warmth from grandparents was negatively associated with depression in children.²⁰ Emotional closeness is one of the more stable characteristics in the grandparent-grandchild relationship, as it is not affected by changes in the life circumstances of grandparents

¹⁸ P. Uhlenberg, M. Cheuk, *The significance of grandparents to grandchildren. An international perspective*, in: D. Dannefer, C. Phillipson, (eds.), *The SAGE handbook of social gerontology*, London 2013, SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 447–458.

¹⁹ T. Mlakar, *Stari starši v življenju vnukov*, "Kakovostna starost" 18 (2015) 2, pp. 3–21.

²⁰ F. Yang, X. Liu, *Grandparenting styles, childhood food insecurity, and depression among Chinese rural left-behind children: A structural equation model*. "Children and Youth Services Review" 13 (2020) 3, pp. 119–123.

or grandchildren, nor is it affected by the reduced influence of parents as a middle generation.²¹

Influences on the Formation of Grandparenting Styles

The formation of grandparenting styles is influenced by several different factors, such as age, employment, education, marital status, and number of grandchildren.²²

Krasnova in her article emphasises, that the age of grandchildren is one of the important factors. She talks about the connection between different grandparenting styles used by grandmothers and the age of the grandchildren, noting that in the period when the grandchildren are younger and need more attention, care and concern, grandmothers act mainly in a formal sense. They read with them, go for a walk, watch TV, etc. grandmothers are often still working during this period of their grandchild's life and can only devote themselves to their grandchild in their free time. When grandchildren get older, grandmothers have fewer direct responsibilities in connection to them since the grandchildren do not need that much help anymore, so their relationship starts focusing more on educational activities like helping with homework, going to the theatre or a museum, etc. When grandchildren grow up, the relationship often turns into a more distant one, grandchildren spend less time with their grandmothers, and their shared activities become more limited. It is often the grandmothers who distance themselves from their grandchildren and not the other way around. At this point in life, there appears to be a switch in the family roles where children and grandchildren start becoming the ones to take care of the grandparents, who need more and more help. Many older grandmothers do not want to accept that and refuse help, so they distance themselves from the family and wish to prove that they are still independent enough and capable of taking care of themselves. The author also emphasises the level of education and notes that grandmothers with lower levels of education spend more time with their grandchildren, while the most educated

²¹ M. Wetzel, K. Hank, *Grandparents' relationship to grandchildren in the transition to adulthood*, "Journal of Family Issues" 41 (2020) 10, pp. 1885–1904.

²² V. R. Kivett, *The grandparent. Grandchild connection*, "Marriage & Family Review" 16 (1991) 3/4, pp. 267–290.

grandmothers spend the least time with their grandchildren. Grandmothers on the mother's side of the family have more contact with their grandchildren than grandmothers on the father's side of the family, especially because grandmothers on the mother's side tend to live with the young family more often.²³

Research has shown that contact between grandparents and grandchildren is not as frequent once grandchildren reach adulthood, especially because the middle generation has fewer chances to create opportunities for forming intergenerational connections, as well as because of new obligations and responsibilities grandchildren gain once they enter adulthood.²⁴ The middle generation is largely responsible for the formation of bonds between grandchildren and grandparents, especially when the grandchildren are still young.²⁵ Similarly, the generation of parents can on the one hand hinder the development of a relationship between grandchildren and grandparents if they, for example, do not allow the grandparents to have contact with their grandchildren in cases when their own relationship with their parents is not the best. Sometimes grandchildren can notice that their parents are not on the best terms with their own parents, so they adapt their behaviour accordingly. Grandparents often have more grandchildren than children and the grandchildren also have different parents, who can have different views on upbringing and on the relationship that grandchildren should form with their grandparents. For this reason, it is impossible to expect that grandparents would have the same level of connection with every individual grandchild, also because there are several practical obstacles, such as a place of residence that is far away, age (they are healthier and more active at the time they get their first grandchild), and the relationship with the grandchild's parents.²⁶

²³ O. V. Krasnova, *Grandmothers in the family*, "Russian Social Science Review" 43 (2002) 5, pp. 76–91.

²⁴ M. Wetzel, K. Hank, *Grandparents' relationship to grandchildren in the transition to adulthood*, "Journal of Family Issues" 41 (2020) 10, pp. 1885–1904.

²⁵ J. Sprey, S. H. Matthews, *Contemporary grandparenthood. A systemic transition*, "The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science" 464 (1982) 1, pp. 91–103.

²⁶ R. Dunifon, A. Bajracharya, *The role of grandparents in the lives of youth*, "Journal of Family Issues" 33 (2012) 9, pp. 1168–1194.

Grandparenting styles

The grandparenting style is actually an interpersonal relationship between a grandparent and a grandchild, which is constantly changing and evolving under the influence of various factors. The characteristics of the relationship are therefore not permanent and can change over time. It is also important to realise that a grandparent has a unique relationship with each grandchild. Grandchildren are also different from each other, and they have different parents who have unique relationships with their own parents. We must also be careful when defining the grandparenting style because grandparents can claim that they see their grandchildren often, have a friendly relationship with them, etc., but maybe this person is only talking about two grandchildren out of six. Perhaps these are only their daughter's children, but not their son's, etc. Therefore, the authors warn that caution is needed when evaluating the relationship between grandchildren and grandparents.²⁷

We know five different styles of grandparenting. They found that the formal style was more common among older grandparents, while younger grandparents were more often the fun seekers or the distant grandparents.

- The Formal

These grandparents follow the prescribed role of a grandparent, acknowledging the distinction between the responsibilities of parents and grandparents. They leave the task of raising children entirely to the parents and do not offer them unwanted advice on the matter. However, they sometimes take care of the child for a few hours and provide occasional indulgence.

- The Fun Seeker

They are very playful in their relationship with the grandchild and aim to have fun with them as much as possible. They have a distinctly informal, almost friendly relationship with their grandchildren, with almost non-existent boundaries between the roles of a grandparent and a child, especially in terms of authority. The main goal of such a relationship is the satisfaction and entertainment of both the grandparent and the grandchild.

²⁷ J. Sprey, S. H. Matthews, *Contemporary grandparenthood. A systemic transition*, "The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science" 464 (1982) 1, pp. 91–103.

- **The Surrogate Parent**
This style of grandparenting is especially characteristic of grandmothers. It is typical of those families where both parents are at work and are very busy, so the grandparents take on a large part of the caretaking responsibilities.
- **The Reservoir of Family Wisdom**
This is a distinctly authoritarian style, which is characteristic especially of grandfathers. Grandparents represent a source of wisdom, knowledge, and skills that they pass on to their grandchildren. Parents and grandchildren are subordinate to grandparents in this relationship.
- **The Distant Figure**
Grandparents do not have much contact with their grandchildren; they only see each other on special occasions, such as holidays or birthdays.²⁸

Empirical section

Research method

The study relied on descriptive and causal-non-experimental methods of empirical pedagogical research.

Research sample

There were 191 grandparents participating in the study. Due to some missing data in the individual surveys, the number varies. We used purposive and convenience sampling. Shown below is a representation of the respondents according to demographic factors.

²⁸ B. L. Neugarten, K. K. Weinstein, *The changing american grandparent*, "Journal of Marriage and Family" 26 (1964) 2, pp. 199–204.

Table 1. Number (f) and percentage (f%) of respondents according to gender.

Gender	f	f %
Male	44	23.0 %
Female	147	77.0 %
Total	191	100.0

Table 1 shows that the sample consists of 191 grandparents, out of which 77.0% are female and 23.0% are male.

Table 2. Number (f) and percentage (f%) of respondents according to age.

Age	f	f %
65 or younger	36	19.1
66 to 75	108	57.4
76 or older	44	23.4
Total	188	100.0

Most of the respondents belonged to the age group between 66 and 75 years (57.4%), followed by respondents who were 76 or older (23.4%), while only 19.1% belonged to the age group younger than 65.

Table 3. Number (f) and percentage (f%) of respondents according to marital status.

Marital status	f	f %
Single	12	6.3
Married	99	51.8
Widowed	42	22.0
Divorced	26	13.6
Cohabiting	12	6.3
Total	191	100.0

The table shows that most of the respondents were married (51.8%), followed by widowed (22.0%), divorced (13.6%) and finally single (6.3%) and cohabiting (6.3%) grandparents.

Table 4. Number (f) and percentage (f%) of respondents according to their place of residence.

Place of residence	f	f%
Countryside	42	22.0
City	116	60.7
Suburb	33	17.3
Total	191	100.0

Most of the respondents lived in the city (60.7%), significantly less in the countryside (22.0%) and the least in the suburb (17.3%).

Table 5. Number (f) and percentage (f%) of respondents according to education level.

Education level	f	f%
Incomplete primary school	2	1.0
Primary school	21	11.0
Vocational, technical school	82	42.9
College, vocational college	52	27.2
Undergraduate programme	28	14.7
Master's programme	5	2.6
PhD	1	0.5
Total	191	100.0

Most of the grandparents completed a vocational or technical school (42.9%), followed by those who completed college or vocational college (27.2%). There are fewer grandparents who completed an undergraduate programme (14.7%), primary school (11 %) or a master's programme (2,6%). Only two respondents did not complete primary school, while one respondent had a PhD.

Research instrument

In the research, we used an anonymous questionnaire, which we designed after a review of the relevant literature. It included 13 questions, of which 9 were close-ended and 4 were open-ended. At the beginning of the questionnaire, we obtained general data about the respondents (gender, age, marital status,

place of residence, and education), followed by questions related to their parental and grandparental roles. The validity of the questionnaire was ensured through mentor review and a pilot study conducted with a sample of five grandparents. We ensured the reliability of the questionnaire by providing precise instructions, unambiguous questions, and clear answer options.

Data collection

We first tested our questionnaire on five grandparents. Based on their responses and feedback, we adapted the questionnaire accordingly and added clearer instructions to avoid potential ambiguity.

Data processing

We used the IBM SPSS Statistics 26 computer programme to analyse the data. We used the following statistical methods: frequency distributions, basic descriptive statistics, Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test.

Results and Interpretation

Table 6. Mann-Whitney test of grandparenting styles according to gender.

	Gender		Mann-Whitney U	
			U	p
Formal.	Male	94.5	3073.500	0.939
	Female	93.8		
Fun seeker.	Male	81.3	2587.000	0.083
	Female	96.7		
Surrogate parent.	Male	106.4	2476.000	0.047
	Female	88.9		
Reservoir of family wisdom.	Male	110.4	2304.000	0.013
	Female	87.7		
Distant figure.	Male	105.7	2387.500	0.036
	Female	87.9		

The results of the Mann-Whitney test indicate that there is a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in some grandparenting styles between males and females. The surrogate parent grandparenting style ($p = 0.047$) was more characteristic of men ($R = 106.4$) than of women ($R = 88.9$). The result was surprising, since we expected women to be in the role of surrogate parents more often than men, especially because women tend to have a more active parental role as well. There is a significant difference according to gender in grandparents who are a reservoir of family wisdom ($p = 0.013$), which is a style that more often appears among males ($R = 110.4$) than females ($R = 87.7$). There was also a significant difference in grandparents who were distant figures ($p = 0.036$). This grandparenting style was also more common in males ($R = 105.7$) than in females ($R = 87.9$).

Table 7. Kruskal-Wallis test of grandparenting styles according to age.

	Age		Kruskal-Wallis	
			Kruskal-Wallis H	p
Formal.	65 or younger	95.94	4.043	0.132
	66 to 75	96.86		
	76 or older	78.95		
Fun seeker.	65 or younger	99.13	6.874	0.032
	66 to 75	95.95		
	76 or older	73.41		
Surrogate parent.	65 or younger	80.33	3.827	0.148
	66 to 75	90.83		
	76 or older	102.49		
Reservoir of family wisdom.	65 or younger	86.21	0.643	0.725
	66 to 75	91.61		
	76 or older	95.63		
Distant figure.	65 or younger	72.36	6.729	0.035
	66 to 75	93.62		
	76 or older	98.09		

The Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there was a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between some grandparenting styles according to the age of the grandparents. There was a significant difference in the fun seeking ($H = 6.874$, $p = 0.032$) and the distant grandparenting styles ($H = 6.729$, $p = 0.035$). Younger

grandparents (65 or younger) tend to be fun seekers, while older grandparents (76 or older) rarely identify themselves as such. The distant grandparenting style was the most common among older grandparents (76 or older) and the least common among younger grandparents (65 or younger). We expected such results, especially because younger grandparents tend to have more energy that is required to maintain an active relationship with their grandchild, while older grandparents can spend the time with their grandchildren in a more inactive and relaxed way, which is not necessarily perceived as fun by grandchildren. Older grandparents can also have more health issues that prevent them from spending time with their grandchildren in ways that they would like. We did find it surprising, however, that there was no significant difference in surrogate parents according to age, as we presumed that this style would be more common among younger grandparents.

Table 8. Kruskal-Wallis test of grandparenting styles according to marital status.

	Marital status		Kruskal-Wallis	
			Kruskal-Wallis H	p
Formal.	Single	111.09	6.262	0.180
	Married	95.05		
	Widowed	78.47		
	Divorced	99.79		
	Cohabiting	108.96		
Fun seeker.	Single	110.21	3.185	0.527
	Married	95.52		
	Widowed	83.21		
	Divorced	93.19		
	Cohabiting	86.00		

According to the Kruskal-Wallis test, there is a significant difference in the distant grandparenting style according to the marital status of the grandparent ($H = 17.625$, $p = 0.001$). The table shows that the distant grandparenting style is most common among divorced grandparents and the least common among cohabiting couples.

Table 9. Kruskal-Wallis test of grandparenting styles according to the place of residence.

	Place of residence		Kruskal-Wallis	
			Kruskal-Wallis H	p
Formal.	Countryside	96.63	0.160	0.923
	City	93.54		
	Suburb	92.16		
Fun seeker.	Countryside	100.02	2.174	0.337
	City	93.47		
	Suburb	82.50		
Surrogate parent.	Countryside	91.83	1.489	0.475
	City	96.09		
	Suburb	83.83		
Reservoir of family wisdom.	Countryside	102.11	2.311	0.315
	City	92.23		
	Suburb	83.70		
Distant figure.	Countryside	78.94	4.447	0.108
	City	97.32		
	Suburb	91.03		

The Kruskal-Wallis test did not show any significant difference in grandparenting styles according to place of residence, which indicates that different grandparenting styles appear among grandparents regardless of where they live (countryside, city or suburb).

Table 10. Kruskal-Wallis test of grandparenting styles according to education level.

	Education level		Kruskal-Wallis	
			Kruskal-Wallis H	p
Formal.	Incomplete primary school	146.00	8.731	0.189
	Primary school	110.62		
	Vocational, technical school	97.79		
	College, vocational college	83.34		
	Undergraduate programme	85.75		
	Master's programme	85.20		
	PhD	146.00		
Fun seeker.	Incomplete primary school	147.50	8.555	0.200
	Primary school	104.20		
	Vocational, technical school	98.51		
	College, vocational college	82.23		
	Undergraduate programme	85.37		
	Master's programme	77.00		
	PhD	147.50		
Surrogate parent.	Incomplete primary school	137.50	10.197	0.117
	Primary school	120.30		
	Vocational, technical school	94.34		
	College, vocational college	84.89		
	Undergraduate programme	81.63		
	Master's programme	88.50		
	PhD	99.00		
Reservoir of family wisdom.	Incomplete primary school	124.00	8.971	0.175
	Primary school	113.08		
	Vocational, technical school	93.60		
	College, vocational college	95.64		
	Undergraduate programme	70.91		
	Master's programme	92.50		
	PhD	71.00		

	Education level		Kruskal-Wallis	
			Kruskal-Wallis H	p
Distant figure.	Incomplete primary school	157.00	10.625	0.101
	Primary school	93.75		
	Vocational, technical school	98.51		
	College, vocational college	83.27		
	Undergraduate programme	77.71		
	Master's programme	116.80		
	PhD	107.50		

According to the test, there is no significant difference in grandparenting styles according to the education level of grandparents, which means that different grandparenting styles appear among grandparents regardless of their level of education. This finding was unexpected since we presumed that some grandparenting styles would be more frequent in grandparents with higher levels of education.

Conclusions

The study revealed a statistically significant difference in grandparenting styles according to gender. The surrogate parent, reservoir of family wisdom and distant figure are the styles that are more characteristic of grandfathers than grandmothers. The most common grandparenting style among men is the reservoir of family wisdom, while women are most often the fun seekers. We presumed that surrogate parents would be more characteristic of women, as demonstrated by Neugarten and Weinstein's research, that this grandparenting style more often appears when the younger generation spends a lot of time at work, so the grandmother is usually the one that takes on primary care of the child.²⁹ The result could be explained by the fact that nowadays, grandmothers are also more often employed, while men can assume some roles that have long been perceived as exclusively female. According to the literature, grandparenting as the reservoir of family wisdom is more frequent among men than women. Grandfathers are usually the ones who pass on special skills and life wisdom

²⁹ B. L. Neugarten, K. K. Weinstein, *The changing american grandparent*, "Journal of Marriage and Family" 26 (1964) 2, pp. 199–204.

to their grandchildren, and in this role, they may also be somewhat superior to the grandchild's parents.³⁰ Grandmothers are often more present and actively involved in their grandchildren's lives than grandfathers, which is in line with our findings, as it turned out that the distant grandparenting style is more characteristic of men than women.³¹

Fun seekers are most frequently younger grandparents, while older grandparents rarely identify themselves with this style. The fun seeker grandparenting style is more common among younger grandparents, which agrees with our findings.³² The opposite is true for the distant figure grandparenting style, which most frequently appears in older grandparents.³³ In contrast,³⁴ we observed that grandparents younger than 65 are usually more distant than older grandparents. Perhaps such a change has occurred because older grandparents are increasingly spending the rest of their lives at an older age in a nursing home, or they want to prove their independence despite their age. In accordance with our findings, the research of,³⁵ points out that many grandmothers in old age prefer to distance themselves from their children and grandchildren and refuse their help, as they find it difficult to accept the fact that they should become more dependent on someone or that they would no longer be able to take care of themselves. Krasnova researched the styles of grandparenting that are characteristic of grandmothers and found that among younger grandmothers, who are under 55 years old and still working, the formal style prevails, since it does not require a lot of effort and energy from them, as it mainly consists of taking walks and watching TV with the grandchildren. For older grandmothers, after retirement, this style shifts into one of two directions: active or distant grandparenting. On the one hand, after retirement, they have more time to actively devote themselves to their grandchildren, but on the other hand, a new lifestyle can almost completely distance them from the grandchildren.

³⁰ B. L. Neugarten, K. K. Weinstein, *The changing american grandparent*, "Journal of Marriage and Family" 26 (1964) 2, pp. 199–204.

³¹ T. Mlakar, *Stari starši v življenju vnukov*, "Kakovostna starost" 18 (2015) 2, pp. 3–21.

³² B. L. Neugarten, K. K. Weinstein, *The changing american grandparent*, "Journal of Marriage and Family" 26 (1964) 2, pp. 199–204.

³³ T. Mlakar, *Stari starši v življenju vnukov*, "Kakovostna starost" 18 (2015) 2, pp. 3–21.

³⁴ B. L. Neugarten, K. K. Weinstein, *The changing american grandparent*, "Journal of Marriage and Family" 26 (1964) 2, pp. 199–204.

³⁵ O. V. Krasnova, *Grandmothers in the Family*, "Russian Social Science Review" 43 (2002) 5, pp. 76–91.

We found that the distant figure grandparenting style is associated with the grandparent's marital status. This style is most characteristic of divorced grandparents, with the biggest difference compared to married, widowed and cohabiting grandparents. We anticipated this result because in the case when the grandparents are divorced, one of them usually does not live as close to the grandchildren as the other, and in the distant type of grandparenting, the physical distance is the key factor. Therefore, it is understandable that some divorced grandparents have a more distant relationship with their grandchildren, do not see them as often and do not know them very well. This style is characteristic of grandparents who live the furthest away from their grandchildren.³⁶

The place of residence and the education level of the grandparents did not turn out to be factors associated with the formation of grandparenting styles. The distant style of grandparenting, specifically in grandmothers, was most characteristic of those with the lowest levels of education, while among the most educated grandmothers, a symbolic style prevailed, which is characterised by wanting to serve as an example to children, to teach them good work habits and familiarise them with moral principles.³⁷ The most educated grandmothers spend the least time with their grandchildren.³⁸ Perhaps there are discrepancies here due to the more than twenty-year difference in the years of research. In the context of the more recent research, we can assume that more educated grandmothers are still active, still devote themselves to their careers and do not have as much time to devote to their grandchildren. In the 1970s, however, perhaps due to their lower levels of education, they had to take on more jobs in order to support the family and could therefore not devote as much time to their grandchildren. Our second hypothesis can be partially confirmed, as there are statistically significant differences in the grandparenting styles according to gender, age, and marital status, but there are no differences according to the place of residence and education level of the grandparents.

³⁶ A. J. Cherlin, F. F. Furstenberg, *The new american grandparent. A place in the family, a life apart*, London 1992, Harvard University Press.

³⁷ J. F. Robertson, *Grandmotherhood. A study of role conceptions*, "Journal of Marriage and Family" 39 (1977) 4, pp. 165–174.

³⁸ O. V. Krasnova, *Grandmothers in the family*. "Russian Social Science Review" 43 (2002) 5, pp. 76–91.

Limitations

In the research, all limitations are attributed to the sample. The research is based on the oldest grandchild and not on the remaining grandchildren. One of the limitations is the purposive random sample, which prevents us from generalising the results to the entire population. Regardless of the highlighted limitations, the acquired empirical knowledge allows the derivation of further guidelines for research.

Guidelines for further research

As we have already mentioned, the field of grandparental parenting styles is quite unexplored. In the future, it would also be interesting to investigate the role of great-grandparents, who are also increasingly present in families, given that life expectancy is increasing. Also, it might make sense to include both grandchildren and grandparents in the research on grandparenting styles, thus gaining insight into the same problem from both sides. Future research could also examine in more depth what differences in grandparents' parenting styles can occur in the relationship of grandparents with different grandchildren, perhaps even in different stages of the grandchildren's lives. Even in this case, it would make sense to focus on both sides, i.e., grandchildren and grandparents.

References

- Brunello G., Rocco, L. *Is children bad for the mental health of grandparents? Evidence from share*, "Review of the Economics of the Household" 190 (2016), pp. 67–74.
- Cherlin A. J., Furstenberg, F. F., *The new american grandparent. A place in the family, a life apart*, London 1992, Harvard University Press.
- Dunifon, R., Bajracharya A., *The role of grandparents in the lives of youth*, "Journal of Family Issues" 33 (2012) 9, pp. 1168–1194.
- Gürtler H. *Otroci imajo radi stare starše: priročnik za življenje z vnuki*, Celje 2013, Celjska Mohorjeva družba.
- Kivett V. R., *The grandparent. Grandchild connection*, "Marriage & Family Review" 16 (1991) 3/4, pp. 267–290.
- Krasnova O. V., *Grandmothers in the family*, "Russian Social Science Review" 43 (2002) 5, pp. 76–91.
- Mlakar T., *Stari starši v življenju vnukov*, "Kakovostna starost" 18 (2015) 2, pp. 3–21.
- Moore S., Rosenthal D., *Grandparenting. Contemporary perspectives*, New York 2017, Routledge.

- Neugarten B. L., Weinstein K. K., *The changing American grandparent*, "Journal of Marriage and Family" 26 (1964) 2, pp. 199–204.
- Robertson J. F., *Grandmotherhood. A study of role conceptions*, "Journal of Marriage and Family" 39 (1977) 4, pp. 165–174.
- Simonič B., Osewska E., *Emotional Experience and Consequences of Growing Up in a family with Alcoholism in Adult Children of Alcoholics*, "The Person and the Challenges", 13 (2023) 1, pp. 63–81.
- Stala J., *Parents catechesis: for children, family or for adults?*, "The Person and the Challenges" 13 (2023) 1, pp. 37–51.
- Sprey J., Matthews, S. H., *Contemporary grandparenthood. A systemic transition*, "The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science" 464 (1982) 1, pp. 91–103.
- Timonen V., Arber S., *A new look at grandparenting*, in: S. Arber, V. Timonen. (eds.), *Contemporary grandparenting. Changing family relationships in global contexts*, Chicago 2012, The University of Chicago Press, pp. 1–24.
- Uhlenberg P., Cheuk M., *The significance of grandparents to grandchildren. An international perspective*, in: D. Dannefer, C. Phillipson, (eds.), *The SAGE handbook of social gerontology*, London 2013, SAGE Publications Ltd, pp. 447–458.
- Yang F., Liu X., *Grandparenting styles, childhood food insecurity, and depression among Chinese rural left-behind children. A structural equation model*, "Children and Youth Services Review" 13 (2020) 3, pp. 119–123.
- Wetzel M., Hank K., *Grandparents' relationship to grandchildren in the transition to adulthood*, "Journal of Family Issues" 41 (2020) 10, pp. 1885–1904.
- Žorž B., *Stari starši in njihovo vzgojno poslanstvo*. Celje 2015, Celjska Mohorjeva družba.