

GRANDPARENTAL LABOUR IN RUSSIA: ITS SCOPE, FORMS, AND PERSPECTIVES FOR COST RECOVERY

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Abstract

Traditionally, the grandparents' participation in raising children is significant in Russia.

The paper aims to study the content, forms, and scope of the grandparental labour, parents' attitude towards this type of labour, and opinions on how to stimulate it. We conducted a sociological survey in Sverdlovsk Region with both under-age children and their currently living parents and/or those of the spouse (river sample followed by random selection, n=500).

Our results are as follows: more than 70% of parents receive grandparents' support in taking care of grandchildren and developing them; most often, grandparental labour lies in having conversations with grandchildren on various topics, working together, taking them to educational establishments, arranging leisure activities, etc.; parents regard grandparental labour as grandparents' will to help, a pleasure for them, and only lastly as a duty; almost 50% of those surveyed claim that grandparental labour should be financially supported by the government.

The results enhance the understanding of the grandparental labour in Russia and its peculiarities. They prove it is big in scope and raise the question of its stimulation by the state. Considering these results may contribute to the effectiveness of demographic policy measures currently implemented in Russia.

Key words: grandparenting, grandparental labour, Russian parents

JEL Code: J13, J14, Z13

Introduction

As a rule, parents are the ones most responsible for taking care of and developing children, followed by grandparents. Traditionally, the grandparents' participation in raising children is significant in Russia (Sivak, 2017). The Russian researcher Verbianova emphasises that the role of grandparents is especially important in the upbringing of preschool-age children. She

found that cohabitation with two grandparents (a grandmother and grandfather) positively influences the development of children's self-regulation both in nuclear and one-parent families (Verbianova, 2015). Scholars from other countries also highlight the beneficial impact of grandparents on children's social skills (Luo et al., 2020) and the importance of grandparents in the lives of adolescents (Attar-Schwartz et al., 2009).

After retiring, self-realisation in the family is known to be crucial for the secondary socialisation of older people, as their knowledge, experience, and help will be in demand; otherwise, both grandparents and society as a whole face a set of negative socio-psychological consequences. Involvement in grandchildren's life can be considered as a need for the majority of older people (Kalachikova et al., 2018). A number of studies demonstrate various positive social, economic, and demographic effects from the intergenerational interaction; for example, Danielsbackaa and colleagues showed a relationship between childcare and grandparents' health improvement (Danielsbackaa et al., 2019).

Today, grandparents are "the largest provider of informal childcare services" (Smethers, 2015) implementing some parental functions related both to childcare and development. Following the approach to parenthood as a labour activity (e.g., Robertson et al., 2019), grandparenting can also be considered a type of labour, meaning grandparents' activity aimed at grandchildren, such as care, development, and help, accompanied by their time costs that reduce those of mothers and fathers to exercise parental labour.

Grandparents' work includes cooking (Jongenelis et al., 2019), helping with grandchildren's social adaptation (Luo et al., 2020), and fostering family values (Kemp, 2007). Grandparents' involvement is common worldwide (Daly et al., 2019; Daly et al., 2021), and it continues to grow (Sarti, 2010; Smethers, 2015). In Italy, grandparents' contribution to childcare allows parents to economise on babysitters, thereby saving the family budget (Sarti, 2010). In England, grandparents play an increasingly important role in family life, which significantly affects mothers' employment (Smethers, 2015).

The paper aims to study the content, forms, and scope of the grandparental labour in the Ural region of Russia, parents' attitude towards this type of labour, and opinions on how to stimulate it.

Data and Methods

In May-June 2021, we conducted a sociological survey to analyse the grandparental labour. We interviewed the residents of Sverdlovsk Region; filter questions were to control that

respondents are those with both under-age children and their currently living parents and/or those of the spouse (i.e., grandparents).

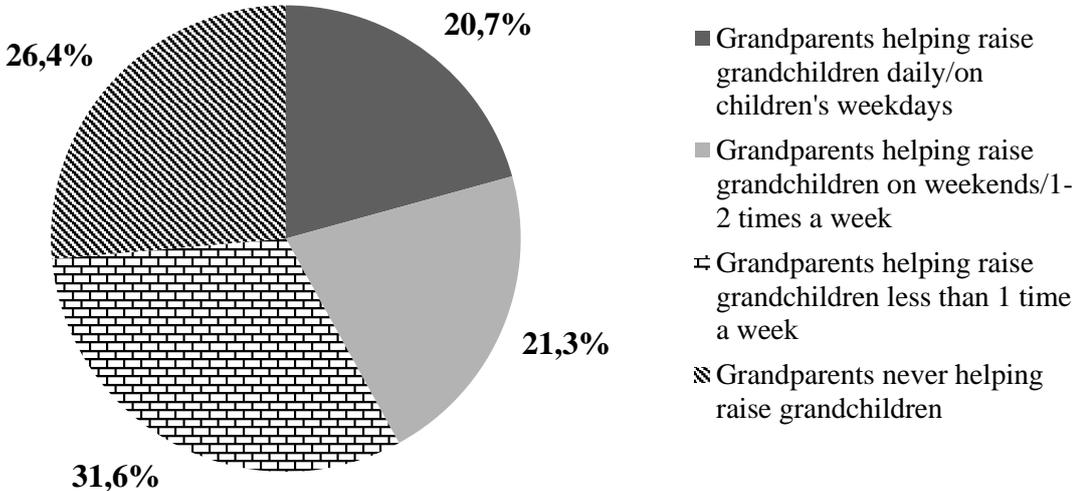
We applied river sample and posted the questionnaire on several websites (regional mass media and communities on social media) to ensure maximum coverage of the target population. To distribute the questionnaire, we involved public organisations that deal with families, parents, and children. In total, the survey collected data from 563 respondents. Then, 500 responses were selected randomly, which increased random selection of the population units collected with river sample.

For the analysis, we selected questions aimed to study the content, forms, and scope of the grandparental labour, parents' attitude towards this type of labour, and opinions on how to stimulate it. We processed and analysed data using IBM SPSS Statistics 23.0. For the analysis, we also used descriptive statistics, frequency analysis, and non-parametric statistics (Mann–Whitney U-test).

Results

1. More than 70% of the parents surveyed claim that to some degree grandparents help them to take care of and raise children. At the same time, the frequency of such help differs. Grandparents structure by the frequency of grandparental labour based on the parents' answers is shown in Figure 1.

Fig. 1: Grandparents structure by the frequency of grandparental labour



Source: Authors' Calculations

2. The content of grandparental labour (i.e., the labour functions performed) is presented in Table 1 and ordered by decreasing prevalence. Answering the question, the respondents could choose up to 5 options therefore, the total frequency exceeds 100%. On average, they chose 3.7 answers. Most often, grandparental labour lies in having conversations with grandchildren on various topics, working together, taking them to educational establishments, arranging leisure activities, supporting them financially, cooking, and helping grandchildren with their school homework.

Tab. 1: Labour functions performing frequency as part of grandparental labour

Labour functions	Frequency, %
Conversations on various topics	56.8
Joint work	41.3
Taking grandchildren to educational and development establishments	29.3
Leisure activities	24.0
Financial support	20.3
Cooking	17.3
Cultural activities	16.0
Help with school homework	16.0
Treatment	10.7
Washing of clothes	2.7

Source: Authors' Calculations

3. Parents regard grandparental labour as grandparents' will to help, a pleasure for them, and only lastly as a duty (Table 2). Almost every seventh parent to some extent agrees that it is grandparents' duty to help their grandchildren.

Tab. 2: Degree of parents' consent with associations on grandparental labour (on a 7-point scale, where 1 – completely disagree, 7 – completely agree)

Grandparental labour is ...	Median	Mode	Share of completely or partially agreed, %
Will	7	7	85.2
Pleasure	6	7	79.4
Duty	2	1	13.0

Source: Authors' Calculations

4. Almost half (49.6%) of those surveyed believe that grandparental labour should be financially supported by the government and that material forms of its stimulation are more important than non-material ones (Table 3).

Tab. 3: Degree of parents' consent with stimulation forms of grandparental labour (on a 5-point scale, where 1 – completely disagree, 5 – completely agree)

Possible stimulation forms	Median	Mode	Share of completely or partially agreed, %
Letters of thanks and awards	3	1	31.4
Media coverage	3	1	22.8
State financial support	3	5	42.2
Benefits and discounts for goods and services	4	5	60.4

Source: Authors' Calculations

Opinions on which forms of grandparental labour are essential have nothing to do with the frequency of help but stand in a relationship with the very fact of providing it.

Tab. 4: Degree of consent of parents having and not having grandparents' help with the stimulation forms of grandparental labour (on a 5-point scale, where 1 – completely disagree, 5 – completely agree)

Possible stimulation forms	Parents having grandparents' help in raising grandchildren		Parents not having grandparents' help in raising grandchildren		Mann-Whitney's U-test		
	Median	Mode	Median	Mode	U	Z	Asymp. Sig.
Letters of thanks and awards	3	1	2	1	13808.000	-2.005	.045
Media coverage	3	1	2	1	13115.000	-2.703	.007
State financial support	3	5	3	1	12453.500	-3.346	.001
Benefits and discounts for goods and services	4	5	4	4	12345.000	-3.529	.000

Source: Authors' Calculations

Discussion

The results obtained allow us to make some important conclusions.

Firstly, in the Ural region, more than 70% of grandparents participate in taking care of and raising grandchildren. With such a large scope of grandparental help, we have to admit that formal infrastructure of taking care of preschool- and school-age children (meaning the part which is currently carried out by grandparents) is ineffective. For example, in the Ural region, transport services—such as children-friendly taxi, school buses, and the like—are not developed enough to transfer children to educational establishments in the daytime, when parents are at work. It explains why grandparents widely perform this labour function.

Secondly, one of the results may seem controversial. On the one hand, parents regard grandparental labour as grandparents' will to help, a pleasure for them. On the other hand, almost half of those surveyed claim that grandparental labour should be financially supported by the government. In our opinion, though, there is no contradiction; desired and pleasant work should be rewarded, only enjoyable and paid jobs entail self-realisation of actors and increase the quality of the work done.

Thirdly, we consider grandparents' help a type of labour because it complies with characteristics of labour activity: purpose (helping children in parenthood and development of grandchildren), demand (grandparents' help is demanded and encouraged in the Russian

society; it is socially and economically valuable), and result (improving the quality of children's human capital).

Conclusion

We obtained the following results: the scope of grandparental labour in the Ural region is significant; most often, grandparental labour lies in having conversations with grandchildren on various topics, working together, taking them to educational establishments, arranging leisure activities, supporting them financially, cooking, and helping grandchildren with their school homework; parents regard grandparental labour as grandparents' will to help and a pleasure for them; almost half of those surveyed claim that grandparental labour should be financially supported by the government.

The results enhance the understanding of the grandparental labour in Russia and its peculiarities. They prove it is big in scope and raise the question of its stimulation by the state. Considering these results may contribute to the effectiveness of demographic policy measures currently implemented in Russia.

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