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THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP!

Francesca Lundström, Ph.D.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this study, 58 grandparents (44 grandmothers and 14 grandfathers) were interviewed using qualitative interview techniques. The objective of the study was to obtain the views of grandparents from their own perspective.

A questionnaire was also used to obtain the demographic details of the grandparents.

The grandparents ranged in age from 40 and 92. Half of the sample was widowed and the majority had not gone further educationally than their Primary Certificate. Almost one-third of grandparents have a disability.

These grandparents have, on average, 10 grandchildren, which is somewhat larger than those in a previous Irish study and considerably more than grandparents in the UK and the US. Additionally, over one-quarter of these grandparents have great-grandchildren which is slightly less than great-grandparents in the US.

Most grandparents included in the study live within 10 miles of their grandchildren and, on average, saw most of them at least once a week. A small percentage have their grandchild living with them or live in a granny flat owned by one of their children. One-third of the grandparents have some grandchildren who live abroad.

On recounting their feelings on becoming a grandparent, the most prevalent response was delight. However, other responses were pleased, neutral, feeling old and shock/horror. The grandparents who claimed they experienced shock and horror had grandchildren born out of wedlock and some to teenage parents.

For the majority of grandparents, even those who reported initial shock and horror at becoming a grandparent reported that being a grandparent was a source of great joy to them. Many reported that their first grandchild was special and that they have a particular bond with that child.

Some grandmothers reported that their relationships with their daughters' families was stronger than with their sons'. However, this was not a universal experience of Irish grandparents, compared to findings in the US.

Six different kinds of caring for grandchildren were identified, from in-house parent absent to occasional care. The most prevalent type of caregiving identified in this study was done in blocks of time when parents are on holiday or during the grandchildren's school holidays. Grandmothers were more likely to care for their grandchildren and grandfathers usually did so in the company of their spouses. Some grandparents who engage in considerable caregiving reported that this activity can be tiring.

Grandparents also engaged in active pursuits and passive activities with their grandchildren. It appears that as grandchildren mature, grandfathers become more involved with them and engage in activities with them. Most grandparents receive visits from their grandchildren but bi-directional and visits to grandchildren is less prevalent. This pattern of visiting was also found in a previous Irish study.

Some grandparents in this study are or have been denied access to their grandchildren, usually after separation or divorce. This was, and for some, continues to be a very painful experience for grandparents, especially when milestone events such as First Communion and Confirmation take place in their absence. Additionally, these

grandparents experience the courts and the adversarial nature of custody and access battles as painful and inappropriate.

Over a quarter of grandparents reported that they were loath to interfere in their children's lives, particularly in relation to childrearing, even if they considered their children's parenting style contrary to their own. Additionally, some grandparents who have grandchildren in families in which both parents work reported that these grandchildren wielded the power in the family. These findings may be indicative of a shift in the balance of power in the Irish family over the last 100 years.

When grandparents were asked to formulate wishes and concerns for their grandchildren's future, they wished for stable family backgrounds for them. This wish is not surprising given the growing rate of marital breakdown and the prevalence of single and teenage parenthood. The majority of grandparents worried about the growing problem of drug and alcohol abuse in Irish society. Grandparents from a diverse set of circumstances had other wishes and concerns. They mostly revolved around a more equitable system of resolving custody and access problems in relationship breakdown. Grandparents who have non-legal custody of their grandchildren worry that they will be removed from them and placed in less favourable circumstances (e.g., returned to an abusive or neglectful parent).

When asked to formulate social policies which would be beneficial for grandparents, grandchildren or both, these grandparents considered that as a group they need recognition as a resource within family life in Ireland. They consider that this fact is currently ignored in Irish society. They have much to offer and believe their talents are under-utilised.

A good education for their grandchildren was the social policy mentioned most frequently. Additionally, children should be kept out of harm's (and drug's) way by having sports and leisure activities after school and in the school holidays.

The housing crisis and its effects on three-generation families was of concern for some grandparents, especially when they saw that in order to own a house, their children would have to move far away. They believed the government should give some attention to providing money for granny flats and house extensions where the different generations within a family might be able to live separately but also together.

Grandparents who are denied contact with their grandchildren would like to see some less formal system such as mediation introduced. Furthermore, they consider that counselling is necessary to assuage the pain and hurt created by loss of contact. Grandparents suggested that in all custody and access issues the best interests of the child should be paramount.

Some grandparents, especially those in difficult circumstances were unable to find out exactly what their rights are relative to access, custody and social welfare entitlements. Some were frightened to ask about their social welfare entitlements in case those they currently have are removed or diminished. Others reported lack of respect from State employees, especially social workers and social welfare employees.

Grandparents who live in rural areas have difficulty with transportation and would like to see these matters redressed by creative transport initiatives.

Grandparents who are members of the Travelling community would like their views to be sought when sites were being designed and built. They consider that accommodating Travellers from many diverse and sometimes hostile groups on the

same site is inappropriate. They also wanted discrimination to cease and for them to have same rights to live and work as every other citizen.

There are many different kinds of grandparents in Ireland today. This study identified five different categories of grandparents many of which could be helped to enjoy the experience of grandparenthood more fully by interventions from the State or voluntary organisations. These categories are non-involved, custodial, proscribed and conscientious grandparents. A further category identified and named by some of the grandparents in this study are “supergrans”, who have all the qualities of conscientious grandparents but additionally engage in an egalitarian, reciprocally supportive and fun-loving relationship with their grandchildren.

More research, especially in relation to the various categories of grandparents discovered in this study, needs to be undertaken. This could verify these tentative first steps in understanding what the lives, experiences, needs and concerns of grandparents are in a rapidly changing Ireland.

1. IRISH GRANDPARENTHOOD IN A COMPARATIVE CONTEXT

This chapter examines the literature on grandparenthood¹, and is comprised of seven sections:

- **Section 2.1 Sources of Literature:** Examines the main sources of literature on grandparenthood and grandparenting.
- **Section 2.2 Demographics:** Explores the demographics of grandparents in Ireland and elsewhere.
- **Section 2.3 Family Relationships:** Describes factors affecting involvement with grandchildren.
- **Section 2.4 Factors Affecting Degree of Involvement with Grandchildren:** Describes, from a demographic stance, factors which affect degree of involvement with grandchildren including gender, lineage, age etc.
- **Section 2.5 Grandparents as Carers:** Describes factors which lead to grandparents becoming carers and societal reasons for this and the consequences for grandparents' mental health,
- **Section 2.6 Community Supports for Grandparent Carers:** Describes supports for grandparents that are available in the US, together with their strengths and weaknesses.
- **Section 2.7 The Law Relative to Grandparents' Rights:** Examines the law in this regard in the US, Scotland and Ireland.

2.1 Sources of Literature

Until the present study, research on grandparenthood as a stand-alone topic was non-existent in Ireland. However, Fahey and Murray's (1994) study on the health and autonomy of persons over 65 years of age examined the kin and other networks of older people. These data included older persons' social contacts (including grandchildren), distance from kin and transfer of gifts to them (including property and money). Fortunately, the data set from this study has been made available to this researcher. The information on issues relevant to grandparenthood will be re-analysed and used for triangulation with the results of this study.

In the UK and elsewhere, research into grandparenthood is much less prevalent than in the United States of America (US) as demonstrated in the bibliography compiled from the

¹ Grandparenthood and grandparenting are terms used throughout this document. Grandparenthood refers to the fact of being a grandparent whereas grandparenting indicates some involvement in the grandchild/children's lives.

AgeInfo Database compiled by the Centre for Policy and Ageing for this study, which produced 156 relevant references. The bibliography was subsequently augmented by a search of the *Social Science Citation Index* from 1995 to 2000 which produced 164 additional references on grandparents and grandparenting. Many of these articles referred to issues not relevant to this study and were excluded. This resulted in an additional 25 journal articles being added to the table below and the literature review.

The topics and country of origin of articles/books in the above-mentioned bibliography and cited in the *Social Science Citation Index* are presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Studies on Grandparenthood from *AgeInfo Database* and the *Social Science Citation Index* by Topic and Country of Origin

Topic	Country of Origin			Total
	USA/ Canada	UK	Other/ Cross Cultural	
Family relationships	38	10	8	56
Intergenerational reports ²	22	3	4	29
Grandparents as carers	27	1	2	30
Education/learning	9		1	10
Grandmothers	9	1		10
Divorce	10	1		11
The law	5	5		10
Health	7		1	8
Contact with child	4		1	5
Step grandparents	2			2
Public support for grandparents	3			3
Grandchildren with disabilities	2			2
Grandfathers	1	2		3
Great-grandparenthood	2			2
Total	141	23	17	181

This table shows that 78% (141/181) of the studies on grandparenthood were undertaken in the USA/Canada, 13% (23/181) in the UK and 9% (17/181) elsewhere (e.g., Australia, Israel, Japan, South Africa, Zimbabwe) or had a cross-cultural dimension (e.g., comparing grandparenting issues in Finland and Poland; in Pakistan, the Windward Islands and Luton,

² Includes grandparents' and grandchildren's reports of intergenerational relationships

UK). The most prevalent topics in all countries concerned family relationships, which included social characteristics, relationships, living arrangements and other demographic data. The data that are available in the UK are, in the main, qualitative, based on case studies or concern legal issues.

One study, conducted in the US and not included in the above table, is that conducted by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) published in 1999. This research, unlike those in the above table, “paints a broad picture of grandparenting, one which includes the ‘fun’ aspects of the grandparent experience” (AARP, 1999, p. xiii). The data from this research will be invaluable in comparing our results from a broad cross-cultural perspective.

Because of the dearth of information about grandparenthood in Europe, this literature review has been constrained to rely mainly on studies conducted in the US. According to Szinovacz (1998) studies on grandparents in the USA “rarely provide generalizable data” (p. 37) and the “specific characteristics of grandparents such as their involvement in other roles cannot be derived from data on specific age groups” (p. 37). Additionally, this author claimed that US census reports on the surrogate parenting performed by grandparents are prone to underestimation. With these caveats in mind, the following are the results of an examination of the literature on grandparenthood in the US and, where possible, other English-speaking countries.

2.2 Demographics

Lowenstein (1999), in a theoretical paper, claimed that changing family structures and network compositions are parallel processes in the ageing of societies in the Western world. There is a shift from horizontal to vertical in the shape of families—the size of the generations is becoming smaller but the number of living generations is increasing. Additionally, as the age structure of society and the family change, so does the availability and ability for care of its networks. This change was identified in Ireland by Fahey and Murray (1994).

Szinovacz’s (1998) US study showed that grandparenthood was an almost universal experience and that grandparents have, on average, five to six grandchildren. UK

grandparents, on the other hand, have on average three grandchildren (Laslett, 1988). Fahey and Murray's (1994) study found that, with the exception of the minority who never married, people over 65 years of age in Ireland have, on average, "seven or more grandchildren, of whom around four or five are living locally" (p. 108). These studies demonstrate that grandparents in Ireland have, on average, more grandchildren than those in the US and the UK.

According to Szinovacz (1998), the experience of grandparenthood is a mid-life transition but there is a considerable number of 'off time' grandparents who experience the transition into grandparenthood before age 40 or after age 60. This author pointed out that 'off time' grandparenting may have a racial dimension (i.e., that in the US more people who are of African American or Hispanic background experience this phenomenon). In Ireland several different types of 'off time' grandparents were identified. Ethnically, it may be the case in Ireland that members of the Travelling community are 'off time' grandparents, who by their early marriage patterns may have grandchildren before the age of 40. The Department of Social, Community & Family Affairs (2000) reported 3,165 births to teenage mothers in 1999. Many of the parents of these mothers may also be 'off time' grandparents. Other grandparents in this study started their families late in life and were in their 70s when their grandchildren were born.

Longevity is also a factor in grandparenthood. The majority of US grandmothers survive into the adulthood of their oldest grandchildren. However, many grandchildren experience the deaths of one or several of their grandparents during childhood and teenage years. Additionally almost one-third of grandparents experience great-grandparenthood but the duration of four-generation families is quite short (Szinovacz, 1998). Fahey and Murray (1994) indicated that "middle-aged Irish people approximate more closely to 'normal' international patterns [of mortality] than do the over 65s" (p. 47). However, "after middle age Irish mortality begins to slip down the international rankings" (p. 47) but that "mortality among young people in Ireland is relatively low by international standards" (p. 47). We can

therefore expect that Irish grandparents and great-grandparents will have a slightly less favourable survival rate than those in the US. However, if the trends for the younger population continue into their middle and old age, the next cohort of Irish grandparents will fare better in terms of longevity.

2.3 Family Relationships

In the US (and probably elsewhere), the roles and relationships of grandparents with their grandchildren vary and change over time (e.g., from working to retired grandparents; to the possibility of becoming surrogate parents in the event of divorce, separation or death of one of their children; to the possibility of receiving some care from a grandchild in frail old age).

Johnson (1988) defined grandparenting as “primarily a middle-aged activity” (p. 188). In an earlier study (1985) she described how the grandmothers in that study redefined their roles, rejecting the traditional picture of the grandmother as a nurturing and domestic woman, claiming this image was too old fashioned. These grandmothers defined their roles in social and recreational terms focusing on “having fun” with their grandchildren. They saw themselves as providing mutually pleasurable interactions with their grandchildren with whom they had a friendship bond rather than a hierarchical, intergenerational relationship. Additionally, these grandparents viewed grandparenting and parenting as quite distinct with different roles and boundaries.

The AARP (1999) found grandparents play different roles when interacting with their grandchildren. Half of them see themselves as a companion/friend to their grandchildren. Other roles played by the US grandparents in this study are “being a confidant, talking about the good old days, telling the children what their parent did as a child, telling other aspects of the family history, or being an advisor” (p. iv).

With marital breakdown so prevalent in the US, step-grandparenthood is a growing phenomenon. We in Ireland may begin to experience a similar phenomenon shortly with the

provision of divorce legislation in 1996 and the recent reported increases in the divorce rate³ (Coulter, 2000). However, step-grandparents (as in Somary & Stricker, 1998) have been excluded from this study.

2.4 Factors Affecting Degree of Involvement with Grandchildren

Demographic variables identified as important in studies of grandparents' degree of involvement with grandchildren are: gender of the grandparent, lineage⁴, geographical distance from grandchild/children, quality of relationship between grandparent and parent of child, number of grandchild sets⁵, grandparents' marital status, children's marital breakdown and religiousness.

Gender: Two dimensions to the gender variable arose in the literature. These were (a) warmth of relationship and (b) degree of involvement. Some studies suggested that grandmothers were more likely than grandfathers to have warm relationships with their grandchildren (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1985; Tinsley & Parke, 1988). Concerning gender and degree of involvement, Somary and Stricker (1998) revealed that the gender of the grandparent was not found to influence the degree of involvement with grandchildren. Grandparents were shown to work as a team. Grandmothers focused on interactions with their grandchildren and grandfathers focused on interactions with the grandchild's parents (offering them advice on childrearing). On the other hand, Uhlenbert and Hamill (1998) found grandmothers more likely than grandfathers to have frequent contact (and presumably involvement) with their grandchildren.

³ For the years 1998 and 1999 the number of people seeking divorce in Ireland was 2,761 and 3,240 respectively. In the same years, the numbers being granted a divorce was 1,421 and 2,444 respectively. These figures represent a 15% increase in the numbers seeking a divorce and 42% increase in the numbers being granted a divorce between 1998 and 1999 (Coulter, 2000).

⁴ 'Lineage', the line of descent, which according to Somary and Stricker (1998) partially determines the strength of the bond between grandparent and grandchild. According to these authors maternal grandparents, especially maternal grandmothers have stronger bonds with their grandchildren than do paternal grandparents.

⁵ A grandchild set was defined by Uhlenberg and Hamill (1998) as "the group of children living in the household of a grandparent's child" (p. 277).

However, in a study of 146 Australian grandparents, Peterson (1999) found no differences between grandfathers' and grandmothers' levels of satisfaction with grandparenting. Frequent contact with grandchildren predicted high levels of satisfaction in both grandmothers and grandfathers. These grandparents reported the best features of grandparenthood were the opportunities to observe their grandchildren's development and share in their activities. The worst feature was lack of frequent enough contact.

The most prevalent activities grandparents engaged in with grandchildren was eating together, either at home⁶ and somewhat less frequently out in restaurants. Grandparents over 75 years of age are less likely than others to engage in a particular activity. Grandmothers between 50 and 59 engage in the greatest number of activities. Grandfathers were more likely to engage in exercise and sporting activities whereas grandmothers were more likely to take their grandchild shopping for clothes (AARP, 1999).

Lineage: Lineage differences also impacted on the relationship and degree of involvement between grandparents and grandchildren. The strong bond between mothers and daughters extended to grandchildren and they tended to have more contact with, and felt closer to, maternal grandparents (Chan & Elder, 2000; Somary & Stricker, 1988). However, paternal grandparents played almost as important a role as maternal grandmothers in their involvement, especially grandfathers with grandsons (Barranti, 1985; McGreal, 1986). Uhlenbert and Hamill (1998), in a large, nationally representative sample of grandparents in the US, found that maternal rather than paternal grandparents are more likely to have frequent contact with sets of grandchildren and that the effects of lineage is greater for grandmothers than for grandfathers. Johnson (1988) also found a lineage dimension in her study, claiming that grandmothers' relationships with divorced sons is less strong than with divorced daughters.

⁶ The study did not identify if this event took place in the grandchild's or grandparent's house.

Distance: Geographical distance from grandchild was also a factor in the degree of grandparent involvement with grandchildren (Somary & Stricker, 1998; Uhlenbert & Hamill, 1998). Grandparents who lived within an hour from their grandchild/children saw them more often than those who lived further away (Uhlenbert & Hamill). Fahey and Murray (1994) also indicated that in Ireland the presence of family members living locally increased degree of contact with kin (and presumably grandchildren).

Forty percent of US grandparents see their grandchildren at least weekly, one-third have all of their grandchildren living 'nearby', defined in the AARP (1999) study as within an hour's drive from their grandparents. Almost four in ten grandparents have a mixture of grandchildren living nearby and far away (defined as more than an hour's drive distant). Grandparents who are 75 years and older see their grandchildren less often because of geographical distance (AARP, 1999).

Other frequent types of contact mentioned by US respondents were telephone calls, letters and postcards. Grandmothers were more likely than grandfathers to send letters and cards (AARP, 1999).

Relationship Between Grandparent and Child: Uhlenberg and Hamill (1998) stated that when parents have an emotionally close relationship with the grandparents it is reasonable to expect that the grandparents will see that set of grandchildren more frequently than when the parent-grandparent relationship is strained. These findings were similar to those of Johnson (1985) and King and Wider (1995).

Again in the US, Silverstein and Long (1998) found that the relationship between adult grandchildren and grandparents declines over the first 14 years and then reverses somewhat. Nevertheless, contact and proximity decline at an accelerating rate. Cohort age is a factor in contact and proximity. Later cohorts of grandparents decline more rapidly in contact and proximity than younger cohorts. These authors suggest that the role of grandparenting has changed over time.

King and Elder (1997) found that in Iowa, childhood experiences with grandparents impact on grandparenting roles later in life. They believe their findings show that family roles are learned through the culture and interactions of family life. Therefore closeness to a grandparent in childhood predicts a grandparent's closeness to their grandchild/children in later life

Number of Grandchild Sets: Uhlenbert and Hamill (1998) stated that as the number of grandchild sets increases (i.e., the more of their children who produce sets of grandchildren), the greater the likelihood of frequent contact with any particular set decreases. However, these authors also asserted that the probability of having frequent contact with at least one set of grandchildren is greater for grandparents with multiple sets of grandchildren than for those with one set.

Grandparents' Marital Status: This variable is especially important where grandfathers are concerned. According to Rossi (1995), "as childrearsers, caregivers, and kin keepers, women provide the glue that holds family and lineage together" (p. 275). Therefore, grandfathers in the US who are widowed are least likely to have contact with their grandchildren as are those who are divorced or remarried (Uhlenberg & Hamill, 1988).

Children's Marital Breakdown: In the UK, Drew and Smith (1999) found on measures of grandparent-grandchild relationship that proximity, contact frequency and emotional involvement were interrelated and a significant decrease occurred after parental divorce. Grandparents who had lost contact with some of their grandchildren and those who had lost contact with all of their grandchildren were both affected but the latter group was affected to a greater extent than the former. This loss of contact led to emotional and physical health problems.

In her study of white middle-class grandparents whose children were engaged in divorce proceedings, Johnson (1988) found that younger grandmothers had significantly more contact with grandchildren and provided more help to them than those 65 years and older.

Additionally, paternal grandmothers had less contact with and provided less help to their grandchildren than maternal grandmothers.

Gladstone (1998) showed increased contact between grandmothers and grandchildren following a divorce. There were significant increases in contact and several types of support (e.g., babysitting, advice and teaching family history and tradition), especially among grandmothers whose child gained custody of the grandchild and who lived within one hour's distance from their grandchild. For those grandparents whose child did not gain custody and/or lived further than an hour distant from grandchild/children there were no significant changes in contact and helping behaviours.

Religiousness: King and Elder (1999) in their US study of the involvement of grandparents with their grandchildren found that religious grandparents are more involved grandparents. They explained the involvement of these grandparents as being more enmeshed than others in family, social and religious ties.

2.5 Grandparents as Carers

This section examines the demographics of grandparent carers, types of caregiving, factors leading to grandparents providing care, change in lifestyle and mental and physical health.

Demographics of Grandparent Carers: At the micro level, in a comparison of three different types of caregivers, (grandparents, adult-child and spouse caregivers) together with a control group of non-caregivers, Strawbridge, Wallhagen, Shema and Kaplan (1997) found that grandparent caregivers were significantly “more likely than the other two types of caregivers to have experienced negative life events, such as problems with marriages, finances and physical health 20 years earlier” (p. 509). This finding may indicate that the impact of negative life events which occurred in the past may continue to have a damaging influence over several generations of a family (i.e., divorced parents are more likely to have children who also experience marital breakdown).

At the macro level, Pearson, Hunter, Cook, Ialongo and Kellam (1997) claimed that several factors contribute to the increasing numbers of grandparents assuming caring roles in the US. These are (a) the longer and more active life spans of older persons and (b) for their offspring marriage, economic, health and other problems. Fuller-Thomson, Minkler and Driver (1997) identified somewhat different factors leading to grandparents becoming caregivers to their grandchildren (i.e., substance abuse, teen pregnancy, AIDS, incarceration, emotional problems and parental death of the child's parent/s).

In the US, census data showed only 10% of grandchildren lived at any one point in time in households headed by grandparents since the middle of this century. However, well over one-quarter of the respondents in the National Survey of Families and Households (1994) study (cited in Fuller-Thomson et al. 1997) experienced co-residence with grandparents sometime during their childhood or adolescence. Furthermore, in both sets of data there were considerable racial and ethnic differences. These data point to the inadvisability of solely relying on census data on co-residency for estimating the caretaking roles which grandparents might assume. Additionally, Fuller-Thomson et al. claim that when grandparent carers are the householders, the household rarely includes both of the grandchild's parents. The most prevalent composition in three-generation households are daughters with their child living with her parent(s); least prevalent are sons with a child/children living with his parent(s).

Fuller-Thomson et al. (1997), in a study of 3,477 grandparents in the US claimed that two-thirds of grandparents raising grandchildren were caring for a child of a daughter and one-third for a son's child. One indication whether grandparents are acting as carers, according to Szinovacz (1998), is whether grandparents take their children (and grandchildren) to live with them (e.g., after a divorce) or *vice versa* (e.g., after a parent is widowed). According to Szinovacz the presence of grandchildren's parent(s) in the home indicates if grandparents have full or partial responsibility for the care of grandchildren in three-generation households. In Pearson, et al. (1997) grandmothers' degree of parenting varied according to family structure. Grandmothers were more likely to assume full parenting responsibilities when they

were the primary parent or co-parent with their husband (without the grandchild's parent(s) residing in the household). Grandmothers in families where both the grandchild's parents were living in the household were least likely to engage in parenting. Other household compositions had varying degrees of grandparenting responsibilities.

Types of Caregiving: Jendrek (1994) identified three different kinds of caregiving in which grandparents engaged. These are:

- **Custodial:** This type of caring is provided by grandparents who have both legal and physical custody of their grandchild/children. Schulman and Pitt (1982) defined legal custody as “the right or authority of a parent, or parents, to make decisions concerning the child's upbringing” (p. 540). Physical custody refers to being responsible for the daily care of a child who is living with the caregiver. Custodial grandparents often provided care to their grandchild before obtaining legal custody.
- **Living-With:** This type of caring is provided by grandparents who assume a parenting role but do not have legal custody of their grandchild/children. Grandparents in this situation usually care for the grandchildren who live with them in their own home or (rarely) in a home maintained by a grandchild's parents.
- **Day-Care:** This type of caring is provided by grandparents who care for grandchild/children on a daily basis over extended periods (thus excluding casual babysitting). This type of grandparent usually provided care in their own home and usually to very young grandchildren who live with their parents (the children of the grandparents) and return home to them on a daily basis.

All three types of grandparent carers, in Jendrik's (1994) study were, in general, related to their grandchild through their mother, confirming yet again the strong maternal bond within families.

Fuller-Thomson et al. (1977) also claimed that US custodial grandparents were different from non-custodial grandparents. These custodial grandparents were less likely to be married, were

on average three years younger, were more likely to have more children and more grandchildren and have one or more of their own offspring living at home. Additionally, they were more likely than non-custodial grandparents to have their non-resident children living within 20 miles. Grandparents with high school diplomas (equivalent to a Leaving Certificate) were less likely to become custodial ones.

Although Fuller-Tomson et al. (1997) found that the majority of grandparent caregivers in their study were grandmothers, almost a quarter of them were grandfathers. These authors claimed that grandfathers' "roles in grandparenting have been almost totally ignored in the extant studies" (p. 410). Additionally, these authors found that almost a quarter of grandparents raising grandchildren were living below the poverty threshold.

Factors Leading to Grandparents Providing Care: The factors leading to the provision of care were different for the three different types of caregiving grandparents according to Jendrek (1994). This author used a series of 36 questions⁷ to determine the grandparents' reasons for deciding to provide care.

Custodial grandparents provided care because of parents' problems particularly that of the mother. The most often cited reason for assuming custody was that the child was being neglected by a mother involved in crime or drug abuse. This reason did not appear on the list of 36 questions but arose spontaneously in interviews with grandparents.

Living-with grandparents typically provided care because their child was still living at home. In some instances the grandparents were also providing financial assistance to the younger generations.

Day-care grandparents were more focused in assisting their children to fulfil their life goals. The reasons for providing care were quite different from the other two types of caretaking

⁷ These 36 reasons included instances such as divorce, teenage pregnancy, drug or alcohol abuse, parents in full- or part-time employment, death of parent(s), sexual or physical abuse of child, parents' emotional, financial or health problems, parents involved in criminal activity and grandparents not wishing child to be taken care of by strangers,

grandparents. These included (a) child's mother or father working full time, (b) did not want the grandchild to be taken care of by stranger (c) wanted to help their children financially and (d) it gave the grandparent something to do.

In all three of the above-mentioned instances of care, the most likely reason for providing it was that the grandparent offered to do so. However, three-quarters of Jendrek's (1994) sample said they felt pressurised (by themselves from a feeling of obligation or from requests for help from family members or social services) to provide care.

In Jendrik's (1994) study, as in others (e.g., Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986), "... grandparents saw themselves as protectors of the family, bulwarks against the forces of separation, divorce, drugs, crime..." (p. 129). Additionally, according to Jendrek, they desperately want the nuclear family to be together. Grandparents want to be grandparents, not parents to the third generation.

Caring and Changes in Lifestyle: Jendrik (1993) reported that custodial, followed by living-with grandparents, experienced the most changes in their marriages, friendship and family networks. Whereas day-care grandparents experienced the least changes in their lifestyles. Taking care of grandchildren "alter caregiver's lives, both positively and negatively, especially when they live with the caregiver" (Jendrik, 1993, p. 620). On the positive side, some custodial grandparents reported having more of a purpose for living and that their grandchildren kept them young and active. On the negative side, custodial grandparents experienced the most disruption with friends and family who, according to Jendrik, are "the first line of defense (*sic*) for most people in times of stress" (Jendrik, p. 620). Living-with grandparents have no legal resource to protect their grandchild from parents who may be dangerous (because of alcohol or drug use) and often fear their children may remove the grandchild from their care. In three-generation households grandparents and parents may have conflicts concerning parenting and house rules. Day-care grandparents, have no legal responsibility and their charges return to their parents in the evening and thus they are least affected of the three types by their caretaking role, according to Jendrik.

Pruchno (1999) in a comparison of African American and Caucasian custodial and living-with grandparents found that the two races have more similar than different experiences of grandparenthood. All experienced disruptions in their work life and the amount of time they had for themselves. Fuller-Tomson et al. (1997) referred to this phenomenon as grandparents being stressed from having to engage in “double duties” (p. 409). Work disruption was also experienced by the grandparent carers whose daughters were in prison (Dressel & Barnhill, 1994). On the positive side, the majority of grandparents reported feeling a sense of satisfaction from helping their grandchild, that they enjoyed being with him/her and that their grandchild gave meaning to their life (Burton, 1992; Pruchno, 1999).

The AARP (1999) found that in comparing caregivers who are raising their grandchildren and non-caregivers, the former “spend more, do more, and are interested in more” (p. x).

Grandparents’ Mental and Physical Health: Burton (1992) in a study of African American grandparents found that contextual, familial and individual stressors related to their caregiving roles. She defined ‘stressors’ as “those life events, related to their situation, that caused them [grandparents] problems”(p. 748). Contextual stressors were related to the kinds of environment in which the grandparents were living (i.e., in areas with high levels of crime drug trading, etc.). Familial stressors included having to care for multiple kin in the same or several households, financial problems and the behaviours of their drug-addicted children. Additionally, grandparents were concerned about their ability to keep up with their grandchildren’s school, social and physical activities. Individual stressors concerned having too much to do (several had to take leave of absence from their jobs) and having little time for themselves. Because of these stressors over three-quarters of grandparents reported depression, anxiety, two-thirds reported excessive alcohol consumption and smoking, others reported such medical problems as diabetes, arthritis, slight stroke or heart attack. Many grandparents reported multiples of these stressors in their lives.

Strawbridge et al. (1997) found that all three types of caregivers experienced significantly greater levels of depression and unhappiness than non-caregivers. Additionally, grandparent

caregivers (all of whom were custodial or living-with grandparents) were in poorer physical health and functioning than non-caregivers.

In Pruchno's (1999) study, African American grandparents believed that their caregiving responsibilities had less of a negative impact on their mental health and social lives than Caucasian grandmothers but all grandmothers reported negative effects on their physical health.

Custodial and living-with grandparents are reported by Jendrek (1994) to experience stress, whereas day-care grandparents are less likely to experience this phenomenon. Kivnick, (1982) claimed that "grandparenthood-related experience may be viewed as contributing to psychosocial well-being throughout the life cycle, that is, as contributing to a developmental facet of mental health" (p. 63), suggesting that grandparents who can act as grandparents and not as parents enhance their mental health.

Sands and Goldberg-Glen (2000) using hierarchical block regression analysis, found that in the US, for custodial grandparents, being employed, having conflict with the children's parent, grandchild problems and lack of family resources were associated with a high perception of stress

In Ireland Fahey and Murray (1994) revealed that the grandparents in their study reported that giving money or time (e.g., babysitting) was likely to cause them psychological distress.

2.6 Community Supports for Grandparent Carers

Burton (1992) claimed that the caregiving grandparents in her study received little support from kin networks and were therefore constrained to rely on formal social services as their principal source of support. The kinds of support grandmothers said they required were both instrumental and emotional. The instrumental supports they required were economic assistance, respite services, legal counselling (about fostering and guardianship), parenting programmes, job counselling and information on working from home, seminars to help

understand drug abuse and health care programmes. The emotional supports needed were counselling for depression, anxiety and alcoholism and grandparent support groups.

Minkler, Driver, Roe and Bedeian, (1993) found that in the US, 124 programmes provided support for grandparent carers. Almost three-quarters of these programmes “consisted solely or primarily of support groups for grandparent caregivers” (p. 808). In addition to support groups these authors uncovered programmes which provided information and referral services for grandparent caregivers, respite centre individual counselling, advocacy and a variety of supportive services for children in the care of relatives. These, in turn, could be divided into those which provided emotional and informational support only and those which provided additional services (e.g., counselling, newsletter or handbook). Other programmes provided information and referral services for grandparent carers and had respite centres. Many of these organisations had an external sponsor such as a voluntary agency or a health and social service agency, yet many suffered from insufficient funding.

Minkler, et al. (1993) claimed that these programmes were important for grandparent carers as they helped them feel less isolated. However, because of lack of funding and institutional support their survival was often problematic, especially during economic downturns. Additionally, because of lack of funding, evaluations to determine the effectiveness of the different elements of the programmes were not conducted. This in turn hampered these organisations from seeking continuation funding and institutional support. Other negative impacts of the dearth of funding concerned lack of any and/or appropriate meeting places, and scarcity of professional staff.

These authors claim that “broader societal level policies and programs aimed at recognizing and responding to the needs of the increasing numbers of multigenerational American families headed by grandparents’ need to be implemented” (p. 810).

2.7 The Law Relative to Grandparents' Rights

The law relative to grandparents' rights differs considerably in different countries and in the US between States. In this section we will examine the rights of grandparents in the US, Scotland and Ireland.

The US

Truly (1999) claims that over the past 20 years in the US, the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren has become increasingly complex. She attributes this complexity to the rising divorce rate, soaring single parenthood, increased drug use and a troubled economy.

There are two types of rights available to grandparents relative to their grandchildren: (a) custody and (b) visitation. Custody refers to assuming the role of full-time parent to a grandchild or grandchildren with the legal rights and obligations that go with that role. Visitation rights are scheduled by the courts of the various States to enable grandparents to spend time with their grandchildren (Truly, 1999).

Custody: In order to have the right to seek custody of grandchild/children the grandparents must establish they have had significant past contacts with their grandchild/children. According to Truly (1999), the biggest hurdle grandparents must overcome if they get to court is parental preference. In the majority of States, the courts presume that parents should have custody. Grandparents have to overcome this presumption by proving the parents are unfit to have custody. Some pertinent reasons accepted by courts are:

- Abuse (either sexual or physical) and neglect of a child by its parents;
- Grandparent has already become the primary caregiver as parents have left their child with them, thus the grandparents are forced to seek custody;
- A child welfare agency has placed the child in the grandparents' custody.

If the grandparents have been able to establish abuse or neglect, they then have to show their fitness to become the caregivers and that this custody is in the best interests of the child. In

most States, the determining factor relative to custody, is the “best interests of the child” (Truly, 1999).

Visitation Rights: In three States⁸ the supreme court of those States has declared grandparent visitation laws unconstitutional. According to Truly (1999), this may be the beginning of a trend that will extend to other States. The reasons in the three States that have declared that visitation laws unconstitutional is the belief that the courts may not intervene in parental decisionmaking unless a child is threatened with significant harm resulting from those decisions. Therefore, a fit parent who has not abused, neglected or abandoned their child has a reasonable expectation that the State will not interfere with their decision to exclude or limit the grandparents’ visitation with their child.

In States where it is still possible to file for visitation rights, grandparents may do so for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons are:

- If parents are engaged in a bitter divorce and custody battle and grandparents have always been close to their grandchildren and believe they can help them in this difficult situation. This is particularly relevant if the parent who gains custody is not the child of the grandparents seeking visitation rights.
- If one or both parents have died. This is particularly relevant if the deceased parent is the child of the petitioning grandparents.
- If the non-custodial parent in a divorce or separation cannot or does not exercise their visitation rights.
- If the parents are unstable, either emotionally or financially. This is relevant for monitoring the situation relative to the grandchild to see if more serious action needs to be taken.
- If contact is maintained but there are frequent disputes about scheduling visits, the court may set ground rules.
- If the grandparents’ relationship with the grandchild/children’s parents is bad, court intervention may be the only way of maintaining contact with grandchildren.

The AARP (2000), in a State by State breakdown of petitioning for visitation rights showed the factors considered by courts in evaluating a petition for rights and when visitation rights are permitted. (Strangely the document did not mention that three States had declared

⁸ Tennessee, Florida and Washington.

visitation rights for grandparents unconstitutional.) Table 2.2 gives a breakdown of the factors to be considered in evaluating visitation petitions and when rights are permitted by percentage of States.

Table 2.2: Grandparents' visitation rights in the US by factors considered and when petition is permitted by percentage of States

Factors Considered in Evaluating a Petition		When a Visitation Rights Petition is Permitted	
Determining Factors	% of States	Determining Factors	% of States
Best interests of the child	100 ⁹	Any marital status of parent ¹⁰	60
Must show harm	2 ¹¹	Parents are deceased, divorced and/or unmarried	40
Prior grandparent/grandchild relationship	54	After step-parent adoption	62
Effect on child/parent relationship	36		

Source: AARP, 2000. (N = 50 States)

It is obvious that there are wide variations in legislative practice relative to the visitation rights of grandparents in the US.

Overall, in the US, especially relative to custody, there is a broad recognition that grandparents can and do provide surrogate parenting to grandchildren in need of such care. This recognition is strengthened by legal processes being available for grandparents seeking to formalise their custody roles. However, as elsewhere going to court is expensive and therefore may not be an option for many of the custodial grandparents mentioned above. These were mainly from non-privileged backgrounds and therefore may not be able to afford the legal route.

The position concerning visitation rights in the US is not so clear and seems to be changing to strengthening parental rights over those of grandparents. It is heartening however that in this country the best interests of the child are at the forefront of any decisions in either custody or visitation battles.

⁹ The State of Virginia, held that that the statute could apply to an intact marriage only if there is a finding of harm to the child in the absence of visitation.

¹⁰ The first two factors are mutually exclusive.

¹¹ In the State of Georgia.

Scotland

In Scotland, as in the US, the best interests of the child are paramount, although in many other aspects of grandparents' rights the laws are quite different. From the time of a child's birth automatic parental rights are vested in its mother and its father "if he has been married to the child's mother at or after the time of the child's conception, even if they are now divorced" (Sutherland, 1993, p. 11). In certain circumstances parental rights can be restricted or removed. This can happen through divorce, when the child is in the care of a local authority or the child has been referred to a children's hearing¹².

Parental rights can be exercised over a child (who in law is a person under 16 years of age). There are basically three rights, custody, access and guardianship.

Custody is the right to have the child in residence or the right to decide where the child will live. Custody also gives the right to control the child's day-to-day upbringing (Sutherland, 1993).

Access is the right to have contact with the child and may be residential or non-residential. Residential access means the child can stay overnight or for longer periods of time (e.g., weekends, holidays). Non-residential access means the right to take the child on outings but only for a few hours at a time. Furthermore, a court can decide that access must be supervised, meaning somebody else must be present when the child is being accessed (Sutherland, 1993).

According to Sutherland (1993), guardianship grants the right to manage a child's property and to take legal action on the child's behalf. This may be important if a child inherits property or receives compensation (e.g., in the event of compensation for an injury).

Sutherland (1993) points out that "the law provides that anyone 'claiming' an interest [in a child] can apply to the court for an order "relating to parental rights" (p. 12). A person who is

¹² The children's hearing system has been in operation in Scotland since 1971. It deals with two categories of children, those who need protection and those who have committed offences (Sutherland, 1993).

eligible for “claiming an interest”, according to Sutherland, is interpreted very widely by the courts] to mean anyone claiming an interest or having a connection with a child. Naturally, grandparents, can apply to the courts for an order “relating to parental rights”. However, claiming an interest invests only the right to apply to the court. It does not imply that the person will get the right they apply for.

A person can also apply for ‘an order relating to parental rights’. This usually means that the person applying is asking the court to grant them some or all parental rights. The granting of these rights always removes or restricts the rights of another (Sutherland, 1993).

Anyone applying for some or all parental rights must show the court that there would be a positive benefit to the child. This, again, is based on the best interests of the child principle.

Some of the factors which the court takes into account are as follows:

- The physical welfare of the child. The person applying for rights must show they have adequate accommodation, be able to ensure the child’s care if they work, be in good health. If the person is in frail health or of advanced years, the court may question their ability to care for a lively child. In the case of access only, accommodation is not important, particularly if access is non-residential. However, the applicant must show that they are able to take care of the child’s needs during access (Sutherland, 1993).
- The mental welfare of the child. If it can be demonstrated that a person has a disturbing effect on a child s/he would be unlikely to be awarded custody or access.
- The child’s views. The courts are anxious to discover what the child thinks of any proposed arrangement. If the child is old enough, the court takes their views into consideration. The older the child the more weight is given to their views.
- Stability. The courts are reluctant to diminish or demolish stable and successful custody or access arrangements.
- The applicant’s behaviour. If the behaviour of a person seeking some or all parental rights may have a detrimental effect on the child the court takes this fact into consideration. Sutherland (1993) notes that the court is otherwise not interested in the behaviour of the applicant for parental rights (e.g., adultery is not considered as inappropriate behaviour).

In Scotland, conciliation has been available to families for sorting out problems without resorting to “unpleasant, and often expensive, battles in court” (Sutherland, 1993, p. 22). The conciliator, through discussion, tries to bring the parties to an amicable arrangement that all can accept. This service in Scotland is sometimes called Family Mediation.

Ireland

In Ireland there are two legal routes which grandparents can take concerning access and legal custody. In the latter case adoption is the route which must be taken in order to be granted legal parental rights over a grandchild.

Access: A new section, 11B, was inserted into *The Children (No. 2) Act (1997)*, which allows a person who is related to a child (e.g., a grandparent) to apply for an order granting access to the child. In granting access, the court, according to the *Act*, must have regard to the applicant's connection with the child. Furthermore, the risk, if any that the application will disrupt the child's life (e.g., that the child might be harmed by the disruption) and the wishes of the child's guardian are taken into account. This *Act* does not give the right of access, only the right to apply for access (Government of Ireland, 1997).

Adoption: In some instances, a grandparent may apply to adopt a grandchild. The Adoption Board (1998a) claims that "in **exceptional** cases, the High Court may make orders under section 3 of the Adoption Act, 1998, authorising the adoption of children whose parents have failed in their duty of care towards them" (p. 2, emphasis in original). All adoptions according to these authors is for the benefit of children. They claim "when dealing with any matter relating to an adoption, to regard the welfare of the child as the first and paramount consideration" (p. 3). Specifically, the wishes of a child who is more than seven years of age at the date of an application for an adoption order must be taken into account.

In most cases, the consent of every person legally concerned with the child (i.e., its parent or parents or guardian) must be sought. However, the Adoption Board may dispense with consent "if it is satisfied that the person whose consent is required is incapable by reason of mental infirmity of giving consent or cannot be found" (Adoption Board, 1998a, p. 6) or if the High Court has made an order.

In 1998, seven grandparents applied to adopt. This accounted for only three per cent of all family applications for Irish Adoption Orders and two per cent of all applications (including family and non-family), (Adoption Board, 1998b).

In Ireland concerning visitation rights, there is a growing recognition that in some circumstances grandparents have rights. However, the best interests of the child are not formally taken into account.

For a grandparent to be granted legal custodial rights, they have to adopt their grandchild, which without the parent's or parents' consent in most instances is extremely difficult. It is heartening to note that in the case of adoption the wishes of the child over seven are taken into account.

2.8 Summary

Literature on specifically on grandparenthood in Ireland is non-existent. Additionally, outside the US it is sparse and so this review has been constrained mainly to rely on what emanates from that country to describe the experience of grandparenthood. Care should therefore be taken, because of cultural differences, in generalising the findings to an Irish context, except where the one study in this country which mentions grandparents confirms findings from the US.

Grandparenthood is a mid-life transition and an almost universal experience. However in some cultures there is a degree of 'off time' grandparenting. Increased longevity means that the majority of grandparents (especially grandmothers) will survive into their grandchildren's teenage and adult years. Additionally, many grandparents today can expect, for a short period, to become great-grandparents.

Over time relationships between grandparent and grandchild change. Middle-aged grandparents are the most active 'grandparenters'. Those not involved in providing caregiving to their grandchildren see themselves as friends and providers of social 'fun' rather than being in hierarchical relationships with them.

Gender, lineage, geographic distance and many other factors lead to differences in warmth of the relationship and degree of involvement of grandparent(s) with grandchild/children.

Grandmothers, especially maternal grandmothers, in many of the studies are shown to be the 'glue' that holds the extended family together.

In the US there is an increasing number of grandparents who provide different degrees of care to their grandchildren. The US census data, according to some authors, is not a reliable indicator of how many grandparents are engaged in caring duties. Both macro and micro level variables contribute to grandparents becoming carers. Although more grandmothers become carers, a growing number (or an ignored number) of grandfathers are also taking up caring roles towards their grandchildren. Depending on household structure, (i.e., who, if anyone, lives in the household with the caring grandparent(s) and grandchild/children) the amount of caregiving provided will vary.

Three different kinds of caregiving were identified. Two involved the grandchild/children residing with the grandparent(s) and one in which the grandparent provided care on a daily basis but did not reside with the grandchild. Factors leading to grandparents' caregiving differed relative to the types of care they provided. Custodial and living-with grandparents were more likely to provide care in times of family crisis, whereas day-care grandparents provided care to enhance their children's lives.

Caring for grandchildren produced changes in grandparents' lifestyles, especially for custodial and living-with grandparents. Additionally, these two types of grandparent experienced more physical and mental health problems than day-care and non-caregiver grandparents. Although there were many negative aspects to grandparenting for custodial and living-with grandparents, all types of grandparents reported levels of satisfaction with and delight in their grandchildren.

In the US there is a movement towards providing services for grandparents in order to assist them in providing care to their grandchildren which is, according to many authors, an invaluable benefit to society.

In other countries, where divorce has been a social phenomenon for many more years than it has been in Ireland, the statute books recognise that children, their parents and grandparents need legal protection. In the US and Scotland, the best interests of the child were paramount in all family law cases. This does not appear to be the case in Ireland.

In the US and Scotland the best interests of the child are paramount in deciding on visitation and custody rights. Additionally, legal custody can be awarded to relatives without having to adopt the child. In Scotland family mediation is also available to help embattled families sort out their problems without having to engage in expensive legal battles unless absolutely necessary.

In Ireland, as outlined above, there is a growing acceptance of the possibility of marital breakdown, single parenthood and teenage pregnancy. However, the legal and non-legal resources are not as finely tuned as elsewhere. There is a family mediation service which was established in 1986 by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform which was transferred to the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs in 1998. The Family Mediation Service is a free, professional, confidential service which enables couples who have decided to separate, or who have already separated, to negotiate their own separation agreement (Department of Social, Community & Family Affairs, 2000). The Department plan to put the Service on a statutory basis in the near future (Department of Social Community & Family Affairs, personal communication 14th November, 2000). However, the service seems to be directed mainly at the nuclear family especially in relation to separation and divorce. It does not include mediation for grandparents.

In all instances of family difficulties, except in the case of adoption, the best interests and wishes of the child are not formally stated as a criterion for any decisions made on their behalf. In fact, in relation to access, the wishes of the child's guardian, rather than the child's, are taken into account.

2.9 Conclusions

This is the first Irish study of grandparenthood to be conducted in Ireland. Rather than force the prospective respondents to answer questions based on results of research from other countries whose culture and ethos are different from ours, we decided to conduct a preliminary qualitative study. This will be done in an attempt to see the world of grandparents in Ireland through ‘Irish eyes’. However, a demographic questionnaire, based on the US and other literature will address the following questions:

- What types of family and household compositions in which there are grandparents are there in Ireland?
- Does gender, lineage, geographical distance, relationship with grandchild’s parent, number of grandchild sets and grandparents marital status influence the degree of involvement with grandchild/children?

Additionally, we hoped to discover, from the qualitative interviews:

- What types of grandparents are there in Ireland and how do they experience grandparenthood?
- What sorts of activities do grandparents engage in with their grandchildren?
- What types of grandparent carers are there in Ireland?

For the reader who would like to know about the methods used in carrying out this research, a detailed description of the methodology is contained in Appendix A to this document.

2. GRANDPARENTHOOD IN MODERN IRELAND—THE RESULTS OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

This chapter describes the results of the analysis of the demographic questionnaire. It comprises three sections as follows:

- **Section 3.1 The Grandparents:** Consists of a demographic description of the grandparents who were interviewed.
- **Section 3.2 The Grandchildren:** Consists of a demographic description of the grandchildren, their geographic proximity and the amount of contact grandparents have with them.
- **Section 3.3 Summary**

The data were analysed using standard data analysis techniques.

3.1 The Grandparents

Overall, 58 grandparents were interviewed, 44 individually¹³ and 14 in five focus groups. The composition of the focus groups ranged from six to two participants. Every effort was made to include as many different kinds of grandparents as possible and the following are just a few examples of the diversity of circumstances of the grandparents who were interviewed:

- In a nursing home (2)
- Grandchild's parent is a single mother/teenage mother (3)
- Members of the Travelling community (2)
- Have sole custody¹⁴ of their grandchildren (1)
- Their child and grandchild live with them (3)
- Live with a son or daughter in a 'granny flat' (2)
- Are or have been denied access to some or all their grandchildren (5)
- Are single parents and also are the parent of single parents (2)

Gender: The sample consisted of 44 grandmothers and 14 grandfathers. Of the participants who were interviewed individually, 32 were grandmothers and 12 grandfathers. In the focus groups, 12 were grandmothers and two were grandfathers. (As was mentioned in the previous

¹³ In two instances married couples were interviewed. Because their demographic and response data were almost identical, for the purposes of this study both couple interviews were classified as individual interviews and having been given by grandmothers as they did most of the talking.

¹⁴ Sole custody means that the grandparent has the grandchild living in their house in the absence of the grandchild's parent/s. It does not imply that the grandparents have legal custody.

chapter, grandparents were reluctant to engage in focus groups. Grandfathers were even more reluctant than grandmothers to engage in focus groups.)

Age: The average age of the grandparents was 70 with an age range of 40 to 92 years. The average age of grandmothers was 69 and grandfathers 72 years of age. Figure 3.1¹⁵ gives a breakdown by age category and gender of the grandparents in this study and Figure 3.2 gives the same data in percentages.

FIGURE 3.1 AND 3.2 ABOUT HERE

These figures demonstrate that for this sample, grandparenthood is a middle aged to old age phenomenon, which is similar to data emerging from other countries.

Domicile: Thirty-five grandparents live in urban areas (cities) and 23 in rural areas (comprised of towns and rural areas). Of those in urban areas, 27 were grandmothers and eight were grandfathers. The rural grandparents consisted of 17 grandmothers and six grandfathers.

Marital Status: Figure 3.3 gives a breakdown of grandparents' marital status by gender and Figure 3.4 gives the same data in percentages.

FIGURE 3.3 AND 3.4 ABOUT HERE

This figure shows that over half of all grandparents in this study are widowed. When examined by gender more grandmothers than grandfathers are widowed. The next most prevalent category is married grandparents. It should be noted that three of the grandfathers who are married are in second relationships. One of them has grandchildren and children of a similar age and the other two have no children from their second marriage.

¹⁵ The tables from which all of the following figures were generated are in Appendix F to this document.

Education: The data on education can also be used as a rough indicator of social class. Figure 3.5 gives a breakdown of education by gender and Figure 3.6 gives the same data in percentages.

FIGURE 3.5 AND 3.6 ABOUT HERE

Overall, the majority of grandparents had not gone further in their education than primary school. Grandmothers tended to be less well educated than grandfathers. It could be speculated that when age is taken into consideration, more senior grandparents are less well educated than the younger ones, which could be a reflection on the improvement in educational opportunities in Ireland since the 1960s. However, this is not the case as demonstrated by Figure 3.7 Grandparents' Age and Level of Education.

FIGURE 3.7 ABOUT HERE

Although a higher percentage of the 40-59 year old grandparents went further educationally than their Primary Certificate than 80+ year olds, the highest percentage of grandparents who went further in their education than Primary Certificate are in the 60-79 age group. This result may be a reflection of the way the sample was derived.

Disability: Eighteen grandparents had a disability (i.e., difficulty with walking; hard of hearing etc.). Of these, four were grandfathers and fourteen were grandmothers. Although the incidence of disability increased with age, four of the younger grandparents (40 – 59 years of age) reported having a disability.

3.2 The Grandchildren

The grandparents in this study have between them 199 children (110 daughters and 89 sons) by whom they have 564 grandchildren. The average number of grandchildren is 10 with a range of between one and 42. Table 3.1 gives a breakdown of the number of grandchildren by gender of grandparent.

Table 3.1: Average number of grandchildren by grandparents' gender

Gender	Number of Grandchildren	Average	Range
Grandfathers	107	8	26 – 1
Grandmothers	457	10	42 – 1
Total	564	10	42 – 1

The grandmothers in this study have a higher average number and broader range of grandchildren than grandfathers do. There are several reasons for this result one of which is that grandfathers who were interviewed tend to be more educated than grandmothers and may therefore come from a social class that produced fewer children. Another reason may be that some of these grandfathers may have married later and others widowed earlier than the grandmothers, thus reducing the time they had for reproducing.

Great Grandchildren: Fifteen grandparents have great grandchildren, of these, three are grandfathers and 12 are grandmothers. The average number of great grandchildren was two with a range of between one and 21.

Gender of Children who Produced Grandchildren: Some grandparents have only sons, some only daughters by whom they have grandchildren. Table 3.2 gives a breakdown by grandparents' gender of their children by whom they have grandchildren.

Table 3.2: Grandparents' children by whom they have grandchildren by gender

Gender	Sons Only	Daughters Only	Combination	Total
Grandfathers	1	3	9	14
Grandmothers	9	11	24	44
Total	10	14	34	58

The typical family structure in which grandparents have grandchildren is a combination of sons' and daughters' children.

Grandchildren's Ages: Figure 3.8 gives a breakdown of the ages of the grandparents and their grandchildren.

FIGURE 3.8 ABOUT HERE

The older the grandparents are, the more grandchildren and older grandchildren they have which is to be expected.

There are several reasons for older grandparents having young grandchildren, two of which are:

- In the qualitative interviews some older grandparents reported their late start in marrying and reproducing was a factor in their having young grandchildren.
- Some grandparents had had large families and continued reproducing later than others.

Geographical Proximity: Figure 3.9 gives a breakdown of the geographical proximity of grandchildren by son or daughters' families and Figure 3.10 gives the same data in percentages.

FIGURE 3.9 AND 3.10 ABOUT HERE

Overall, most grandparents and grandchildren live within ten miles of each other.

Degree of Contact: Figure 3.11 gives a breakdown of the degree of face-to-face contact grandparents have with their grandchildren and Figure 3.12 gives the same data in percentages. It should be noted that telephone contact with their grandchildren was rarely mentioned by the grandparents in this study.

FIGURE 3.11 AND 3.12 ABOUT HERE

These data demonstrate that on average grandparents and grandchildren see each other at least once a week. Because of the nature of the data (i.e., small cell size) it was not possible to analyse in any further detail the proximity and degree of contact variables.

Two grandparents who live with their grandchildren do so because they live in granny flats, three have their child and grandchild living with them and one grandmother has sole custody of her grandchildren.

Contact, naturally, is less when grandchildren live abroad. Grandchildren can only visit during the school holidays which often restricts visits to once per year. Many grandparents travel to visit their families who live abroad but again these visits are rarely more than once or twice a year and last for relatively short durations.

When grandchildren are married and have their own homes, grandparents, especially those with large families, had difficulties in remembering and recounting how often they saw these grandchildren. It was also difficult to record these data as proximity and contact with grandchildren was recorded in sets¹⁶. Many grandparents (especially the more senior ones) often reverted to recounting their own children's proximity and degree of contact.

Large family size and age of grandparents seemed to impact negatively on degree of contact. Grandparents, especially the more senior ones, who have large numbers of older grandchildren, seem to have less frequent contact with them than those who have fewer grandchildren. Those with fewer but adult grandchildren maintain contact that is more frequent.

3.3 Summary

The demographic data derived from the questionnaire revealed many facets to grandparenting. These were presented under two headings: (a) the grandparents and (b) the grandchildren. This was followed by a description of the many facets of grandparenting as perceived by the grandparents in the study.

The Grandparents: The grandparents in this study are from a broad diversity of backgrounds. The sample covers what we hoped for in relation to basic demographic characteristics. In noting this, it must be emphasised that exact representation of the actual population was not sought in this study, only a reasonable variety of grandparents.

¹⁶ A 'set' of grandchildren refers to all the children of a nuclear family (i.e., parent/s and children).

Over half of the grandparents are widowed and are from a diversity of ages (from their early 40s to over 90 years of age) and educational backgrounds. However, a large proportion of the grandparents have not gone further in their education than the Primary Certificate. Finally, over one-quarter of the grandparents have a disability.

The Grandchildren: The average number of grandchildren per grandparent is 10 with a range of between one and 42. Additionally, one-quarter of the grandparents in this study have great-grandchildren.

Although some grandparents have grandchildren by sons or daughters only, the most typical family structure in which to have grandchildren is by both sons and daughters. The older the grandparents are, the more grandchildren they have and the older the grandchildren tend to be. Some grandparents have young children and grandchildren of a similar age. This was generally because of late childbirth and in one instance a second marriage.

Most grandparents and grandchildren live within 10 miles of each other which was also the case in Fahey and Murray (1995). Additionally, on average, grandparents see grandchildren at least once per week. Grandparents who have grandchildren living abroad naturally have considerably less contact with them than with their grandchildren living in Ireland.

There are indications that some of the more senior grandparents who have many grandchildren tend to lose contact with them when the grandchildren get married and move out of the family home. This was not the case for senior grandparents who have a small number of grandchildren.

3. GRANDPARENTHOOD IN MODERN IRELAND—THE RESULTS OF THE QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

This chapter describes the results of the analysis of the qualitative interviews. These sections are followed by a chapter summary. The seven sections are as follows:

- **Section 4.1 Becoming and Being a Grandparent:** Describes grandparent’s reactions when they first realised they were to become a grandparent and the impact grandparenthood has on them today.
- **Section 4.2 Grandparenting:** Gives grandparent’s accounts of the different kinds of interactions they have with their grandchildren.
- **Section 4.3 The Future:** Grandparents relate their wishes and concerns for their grandchildren’s future.
- **Section 4.4 If Grandparents were Government Ministers:** Describes what grandparents consider issues which could be addressed by legislation and/or social policy.
- **Section 4.5 Summary**

The qualitative data were derived from the interviews and were analysed using the methods described in Appendix A.

4.1 On Becoming and Being a Grandparent

This section describes the first segment of the qualitative interviews. It has two themes: (a) becoming a grandparent—that is grandparents’ responses to the prompt “Tell me about the feelings you had when you first learned that you were to become a grandmother/father” and (b) being a grandparent.

The initial prompt proved to be an excellent starter and many grandparents continued without much further prompting to discuss their grandparenting roles, involvement in their grandchildren’s lives and wishes and concerns for themselves and their grandchildren’s future.

4.1.1. Becoming a Grandparent

This theme contains only one variable in which grandparents recount their perceptions/feelings on realising they were to become a grandparent. It is normally considered bad research practice to request information about events which have occurred in the past, based on the principle that “hindsight is no sight”. However, in this instance, it was decided to use this prompt because it

was found in the pilot study to be a useful strategy for getting the interview started. Subsequently, although for many respondents becoming a grandparent had occurred many years ago, the event was still surprisingly fresh in their memories. Sudman and Bradburn (1985) point out that the saliency of an event (i.e., events which occur rarely in one's life) is a factor which aids recall¹⁷, whereas habitual events are "difficult to remember for even a day or so" (p. 42). It was therefore decided to use the data from this prompt in describing the phenomenon of becoming a grandparent.

Table 4.1 gives a breakdown of the responses of the grandparents by gender.

Table 4.1: Grandparents' Reactions to becoming a grandparent

Response	Grandmothers		Grandfathers		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Delighted Excited, Thrilled	22	50	3	21	25	43
Pleased	6	13	3	21	9	16
Neutral	3	7	3	21	6	10
Feeling Old, Denial	3	7	4	29	7	12
Shocked, horrified	10	23	1	8	11	19
Total	44	100	14	100	58	100

There were five main responses to this prompt, which were:

Delight, excitement pleasure and looking forward to the event—the most common response:

I can't explain the joy I felt ... I just sat and gazed at him and loved him from the word go (Grandmother, 80, rural domicile).

My [Grandchild] arrived in February and it was the most unbelievable feeling and I can remember back the feeling of joy when my own children were born and it was just so totally different it was a feeling of another generation and just a part of us. It was magical when I look back, the joy he brought to our lives (Grandmother, 61, rural domicile).

This response was more common among grandmothers than grandfathers:

¹⁷ Sudman and Bradburn (1985) claim that everyone who was old enough remembers what they were doing when John F. Kennedy, President of the US was assassinated or when World War II started or ended.

Being 'pleased' was a response somewhat more common among grandfathers. Perhaps these grandfathers are just as enthusiastic as the grandparents in the category above but may have been unable or unwilling to express the depth of their feelings.

I was quite pleased and looking forward to it. Pleased for my daughter ... That was the general immediate reaction. Pleased and kind of wondering what is it going to be like. And was I going to be involved to any extent or was I not going to be involved (Grandfather, 61, urban domicile).

Neutral comments which were those responses which were both positive and negative or neither positive or negative:

I suppose to be honest with you I was concerned, because they weren't married and I didn't know were they going to get married. ... On the other hand I was very excited because it was a grandchild for me (Grandfather, 59, urban domicile).

Well I am a grandfather four years and I have a daughter in America and she has a baby of two years, she is a nurse and she has a girl (Grandfather, 83, rural domicile).

Feelings of suddenly becoming old or avoiding the question (denial) were combined in this category:

We all have ideals of what grandparents are and I never, then or now, saw myself as a grandparent because there are certain ideas about being a grandparent the ones with the bald heads. ... I never saw myself as that and I still don't see myself as that and I don't really see myself as a grandparent at all just as I don't really see myself as a parent I don't see myself as a father to my son I see myself as a friend and God knows what I am to the grandchildren, probably a bit looney (Grandfather, 69, urban domicile).

I felt very old, older than I am now (Grandmother, 84 urban domicile).

The feelings of becoming old may be related to the negative perceptions of ageing in our society.

Devastation, shock and horror, was usually the response of grandparents whose children became pregnant out of wedlock and/or were teenage parents. In some instances,

grandparents heard about the pregnancy in an inappropriate way (e.g., through a neighbour).

which added to their distress

When I heard about it first, my daughter was unmarried and she was young, so I wasn't impressed. I didn't mind the grandmother part but I minded the daughter having a child at that age ... She was just gone 15, so I wasn't a bit impressed to be honest with you but then ... everything changed ... [and I was] delighted to have a grandchild (Grandmother, 50, rural domicile).

For most grandparents these feelings changed to acceptance if not joy, after the birth of their grandchild. However, one grandmother who is a single parent as is her child commented:

The grandparents are almost having their second family, which is such a lack of freedom but you can't turn your back on this child that is pregnant (Grandmother, 56, urban domicile).

4.1.2. Being a Grandparent

This theme contains eight variables which describe (a) the ongoing joy and delight grandparents say they feel being a grandparent, (b) their first grandchild is special, (c) relationships with daughter's families are stronger than those with sons' families (d) good relationships depend on equality between grandparents and grandchild, (e) grandchildren who confide, (f) grandparents should not interfere in how their grandchildren are reared, (g) grandparents of yesteryear and (h) the impact of disability on their grandparenting role.

The Joy of Being a Grandparent: Overall 28 grandparents (23 grandmothers and five grandfathers) said that being a grandparent was a source of great joy to them.

[My grandson] is just a joy and a pleasure to all our lives, ... he's a dear and special child and I couldn't imagine a life without him and I'm pleased to have him (Grandmother, 56, urban domicile).

One grandfather has an adopted grandchild and stated that he gets as much joy from this child as he does from his biological grandchildren.

The First Grandchild is Special: Five grandmothers and three grandfathers mentioned that their first grandchild was special and that they had developed a particular bond with them.

I can't explain the joy I felt. He was a gorgeous bundle and a little chubby baby and his features were lovely and I just sat and gazed at him and loved him from the word go and I still do. And he is seventeen in September and he was my first grandchild and I have an extra "gra" as we call love in Irish all the time (Grandmother, 80, rural domicile).

The Importance of Equality: Four grandparents mentioned the importance of there being equality between grandparents and grandchild which enriches their relationship.

There was never a generation gap (Grandmother 90, urban domicile).

I am just part of the gang. They call me Super Gran!. ... I think it is terribly important to come down to their level and yet even though you are acting as one of them, yet they know that you can simply be the voice of authority with them. (Grandmother, 68, urban domicile).

Grandchildren who Confide: Four grandparents, three of whom mentioned the importance of equality, also mentioned that their grandchildren confide in them.

... they know if there is a problem and if their parents don't understand they can come and have a chat and that and know I won't split the gaff on them I won't go back and tell tales I'll just listen (Grandfather, 69, urban domicile).

Daughters' versus Sons' Families: Four grandparents (three grandmothers and one grandfather) mentioned that relationships with daughters' and sons' families were different which impacted on the quality of the relationships they had with their grandchildren.

It's not the same when your son has children, you'll be glad for him and you love them but you don't see as much of them because she has her mother (Grandmother, 56, urban domicile).

However, there were other grandparents who reported equally warm relationships with both daughters' and sons' families.

Interference: Fifteen grandparents (10 grandmothers and five grandfathers) said they were careful not to interfere in their children's lives. They considered they should give the parents of their grandchildren the freedom to rear their children in whatever way they saw fit, even if this was contrary to their own views and beliefs.

You hear of families whose grandparents are awkward and interfering and that. I mean I would give advice but I wouldn't interfere or that and I don't

discipline them, no I don't and I always believed in them living their own life (Grandmother, 80, rural domicile).

Grandparents of Yesteryear: Five grandparents mentioned their own grandparents or parents. The impression was that in most cases these were formidable people with 'strict notions'.

I know my own mother was so involved with her grandchildren, not my children but my brother's children, and I could never understand why she used to be concerned and worry so much about the children. I used to say, they're not your children Mam, you know, they have a Mam and Dad and why are you getting so upset and why are you worrying about them? But now, I can understand, not that I was or would get involved to that extent as she was with them, you know (Grandmother, 50, urban domicile).

The Impact of Disability: Eighteen grandparents have disabilities. These affect grandparenting to a greater or lesser extent. One grandfather who is hard of hearing described how his disability impeded him in his grandparenting role:

Having a hearing problem is a problem because grandchildren, certainly at the beginning, ... are small and squeaky and with my hearing loss I find it very difficult to hear small squeaky people. They shout at you and are very difficult to hear and maybe they felt I was a bit aloof and its only now I am beginning to get a bit more out of my grandchildren now that they are older and more adult and they can talk like normal human beings I can hear them better and so I can respond better (Grandfather, 69, urban domicile).

4.2 Grandparenting

This segment comprises two themes: caregiving and other involvement.

4.2.1 Caregiving

This theme has four variables: (a) the many and varied types of caregiving grandparents engage in with their grandchildren, (b) grandparenting can be tiring, (c) giving financial or other assistance to families and grandchildren, (d) the reciprocal support some grandparents receive from their grandchildren and the isolation felt by others when grandchildren grow up, get married and do not visit.

Caregiving: Many different levels of caregiving were provided by the grandparents in this study. Caregiving ranged from complete care of the child in the grandparent's or

grandparents' home with or without the presence of the grandchild/children's parents to no caregiving at all. Table 4.2 gives a breakdown of the caregiving the grandparents reported doing or having done when their grandchildren were younger.

Table 4.2: Grandparents' Level of Caregiving

Level of Caregiving	Grandmothers		Grandfathers		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
In house parent absent	2	5	0	0	2	4
In house parent present	5	11	0	0	5	9
Daily, full-time	4	9	0	0	4	7
Daily, part-time	5	11	1	7	6	10
In blocks of time ¹⁸	16	36	1	7	17	29
Occasionally	2	5	5	36	7	12
Never ¹⁹	10	23	7	50	17	29
Total	44	100	14	100	58	100

Over one-quarter of grandparents did not mention engaging in caregiving. As grandparents reached their 70s fewer of them engaged in this activity. Over 29% (17/58) of the sample (nine grandmothers and six grandfathers) never engaged in caregiving and were over 70 years of age. This may be a factor of their age but also that their grandchildren are grown and do not need caregiving.

The majority of grandparents who provide caregiving do so in blocks of time. This is the perception of one grandmother:

When she [daughter] went back to work, I looked after [granddaughter] for six months, purely because they had bought a house and I thought if I minded the child for two months, she [her daughter] would save two thousand pounds ... I felt good about doing it and it was an absolute joy having [granddaughter] as a baby. We had her for eleven months (Grandmother, 67, urban domicile).

Another grandmother who cares for her grandchildren for blocks of time said:

I wouldn't consider that as babysitting ... they [her grandchildren] say its a treat to them and its a treat to me too, because we have good fun (Grandmother, 68, urban domicile).

¹⁸ When parents are on holiday or when grandparents take grandchildren for school holidays.

¹⁹ Some grandparents of adult grandchildren did not mention any caregiving, although they may have engaged in it when their grandchildren were younger.

Several grandparents mentioned they felt aggrieved if they considered they were being taken advantage of for babysitting purposes.

We babysit and I like to think that we are available to babysit. But I don't like to be taken advantage of. I have my life to lead too and if I figure that I am being asked to babysit so [the grandchild's father] can go and play cricket, that goes against the grain for me. 'Cause I am entitled to my leisure time and he is entitled to his of course but he's got to realise that it is his kid and not just [the mother's] (Grandfather, 59, urban domicile).

There are considerable gender differences for this variable. Approaching one-half of grandfathers did not mention engaging in caregiving and none were involved in caregiving on a full- or part-time daily basis. However, more grandfathers than grandmothers mentioned occasional caregiving. This was often in the company of their spouses. As grandchildren become more mature, grandfathers play a greater role in their lives by engaging with them in activities which we will be reported below.

Grandparenting can be Tiring: Ten grandparents (eight grandmothers and two grandfathers) commented, some reluctantly, that taking care of grandchildren can be tiring and somewhat of a strain. Some grandparents who reported being tired seemed (to the researcher) to be physically worn out. Many of these grandparents were engaged in full- or part-time caring on a daily basis.

I do get tired from time to time and looking after [the grandchildren] sometimes you have to say no to them. And it took me a long time to get there, to say no to them, because kids today are far more courageous than in my time (Grandmother, 56, urban domicile).

One grandfather, the full-time carer of his wife who had had a stroke, found visits from grandchildren very tiresome.

... we never spend much time with them and as the years are gone by, my missus got a stroke and I am full time carer for her. So really we found it a bit of an annoyance really. It is grand for a visit but the amount of stuff that comes with them, bottles, nappies and cough syrup and coming by car and all that and after a bit of an evening when they stay we would be looking forward to going to bed at a certain time and their kids would not be really ready for bed at that time and I found yet again that kids are so alert and

bright in the morning that they are under your feet before you are ready to adjust like (Grandfather, 78, rural domicile).

Financial Assistance: Fourteen grandparents mentioned giving some financial assistance²⁰ to their sons and daughters and/or buying clothes or equipment for their grandchildren. Clothes often consisted of First Communion or Confirmation outfits or sports equipment. One grandmother paid for driving lessons for her grandson. Others reported providing pocket money to their grandchildren on a weekly or monthly basis.

Reciprocity for Some, Lack of Contact for Others: Six senior grandmothers, including two with disabilities, recounted that their adult grandchildren were very kind to them and took care of their needs. There were two kinds of reciprocal support engaged in by grandchildren. Instrumental support (cutting the grass, painting, making cups of tea, shopping, taking care of their pets when grandparents were in hospital) was provided to the more senior grandmothers. Emotional support (giving advice, support on the death of a spouse, chats) was provided to both senior and younger grandmothers.

[Granddaughter] would come along and she asks me do I need anything from town today and I would say no. Anything I want she will get for me and every night before I go to bed, there is one thing I love is the cup of tea and a cream cracker. They would share anything with you and come and tell you about being out and who they met and about their school (Grandmother, 83, rural domicile).

Other grandparents, especially the more senior ones with many grandchildren reported that when their grandchildren grew up and got married, they did not have as much contact with them as they would have liked.

... they get big and you don't see much of them but then they all come in when they are small and they'e are a pest. They are the best in the world on the back of it but you have to understand they are getting older and have to live their own lives (Grandmother, 87, urban domicile).

²⁰ For example, contributions or loans to help to buy or repair a house.

4.2.2 Other Involvement

This theme has five variables: (a) the activities grandparents involve themselves in with their grandchildren, (b) visiting and family gatherings, (c) why grandfathers do not get involved in their grandchildren's infancy, (d) grandchildren who live abroad, (e) having more time for grandparenting than parenting and (e) grandparents who are or have been denied access to some or all of their grandchildren.

Activities: Overall, 24 grandparents (15 grandmothers and nine grandfathers) reported engaging in activities with their grandchildren. In this instance, age of grandparent was a factor in determining whether they engaged in activities with their grandchildren. Table 4.5 gives a breakdown of the age groups of grandparents who engage in activities with their grandchildren.

Table 4.3: Age groups of grandparents who engage in activities with their grandchildren

Age group	Engage		Do not Engage	
	N	%	N	%
40 – 49	0	0	3	5
50 – 59	5	9	4	7
60 – 69	12	21	5	9
70 – 79	5	9	8	14
80+	2	2	14	24
Total	24	41	34	59

This table demonstrates clearly that grandparenting is indeed a late middle-aged activity as the age group 60 – 69 were the grandparents most likely to be involved in activities with their grandchildren. Additionally, the more senior the grandparent (and, usually, their grandchildren) the less likely they are to engage in activities with them. Of the three

grandparents in the youngest age group who do not engage in activities with their grandchildren, one is denied contact with her grandchild and the grandchildren of the other two are infants.

There are two kinds of activities engaged in by grandparents. These can be loosely classified as active pursuits and passive activities. Those which are active include the following outlined in Table 4.4:

Table 4.4: Active pursuits engaged in by grandparents by gender

Activity	Grandmothers	Grandfathers
Drive to football/activities	2	
Play football/rugby		3
Trips to the country/hill walking	5	
Go to the park		2
Play with	5	1

Shopping	3	1
Outings/trips	2	1
Gardening	1	1
Barbecue/picnics/parties	2	
Swimming	2	
Other sports	1	
Play cards and games	2	
Fishing		1

Many grandparents who recounted engaging in active pursuits with their grandchildren engaged in more than one of them. Grandparents of younger grandchildren were the ones who reported playing with them. Three grandmothers (all part of the special group identified in the Being and Becoming segment above) recounted forgetting to be old and doing crazy things with their grandchildren. Some of these ‘crazy’ activities are going rollerblading, climbing mountains, dressing up and going out at Halloween. There are indications that grandfathers engage in quite different activities with their grandchildren than do grandmothers.

Passive activities engaged in by grandparents are shown in table 4.5:

Table 4.5: Passive activities engaged in by grandparents by gender

Activity	Grandmothers	Grandfathers
Go to the pub		1
Help with homework	1	
Take to religious services	2	
Read to	3	
Teach them reading	1	
Tell stories to	1	1
Watch TV		2
Draw/paint	1	1
Crafts	1	
Singing		1
Tell about nature	2	1
Take photographs		1
Discuss issues		2

Grandparents who engage in passive activities usually engaged in more than one of them. Again, there are gender differences for these activities.

Visiting and Family Gatherings: There are two different kinds of familial involvement. These are visiting and family gatherings.

There are three different kinds of visiting patterns (a) visits to grandparent/s; (b) visits from grandparent/s and (c) bi-directional visits. Table 4.6 gives a breakdown of the types of visiting engaged in by grandparents and grandchildren by gender.

Table 4.6: Patterns of visiting between grandparent and grandchild

Type of Visit	Grandmothers		Grandfathers		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Visits from grandchildren	22	50	6	43	28	48
Visits to grandchildren	2	5	2	14	4	7
Bi-directional visits	9	20	5	36	14	24
No visits	2	5	1	7	3	6
Grandchild lives with g/parent	3	7	0	0	3	6
Not mentioned	6	13	0	0	6	9
Total	44	100	14	100	58	100

It is obvious that the most common type of visit is from grandchildren to grandparent and the least common are visits to grandchildren. Caution is recommended in interpreting these data, as they are the result of unsolicited comments by grandparents during their interviews. For

example, it could be the case that grandparents may have omitted to mention visits to their grandchildren and therefore this category, and others, could be underreported.

Some grandparents recounted having parties, barbecues and large family gatherings at the weekend for lunch/dinner.

Grandfathers' Involvement: One grandfather explained why he did not get involved with his grandchildren until they were out of infancy:

I feel that as infants [my grandchildren] didn't have much character ... and therefore they're not that terribly interesting ... as they get older and develop their own character, you see little things in them that reminds you of your own family and your forebears and that's intriguing. As they get a little bit older they can go out with grandad, you try to show them things such as fishing (Grandfather, 75, urban domicile).

However, a few grandfathers of baby girls mentioned being 'besotted' by them. Furthermore, some grandmother respondents recounted special relationships developing between grandfathers and young granddaughters.

Contact with Grandchildren Living Abroad: Seventeen grandparents have grandchildren who live abroad. There were indications that if grandchildren are born at home and then move abroad missing them is more painful than if grandchildren are born abroad.

[Granddaughter] was with us 'till she was three, and [grandchild's mother] decided she would go to England. We were heartbroken, she was like my own to me, it was like my own child gone, you know (Grandmother, 50 rural domicile).

Other grandparents, whose grandchildren live abroad do not experience such pain as expressed by this grandfather.

I think a relationship is a relationship whether it is continuous or whether it is intermittent, like friendship. You have a good friend, you might not see them for 10 years and then you meet them again and you take up where you left off (Grandfather, 69, urban domicile).

An issue mentioned by some grandparents concerning grandchildren living abroad was that the influence a different culture imposed on the grandchildren created cultural differences which led to another kind of distance between grandparent and grandchild.

More Time for Grandchildren: Nine grandparents (seven grandmothers and two grandfathers) remarked they had more time to spend with their grandchildren than they did with their children.

I wouldn't have had as much time then as I have now for the grandchildren. Then I wouldn't have had the same time for my own kids (Grandmother, 50, rural domicile).

On the other hand, one senior grandmother confessed that often she had been too busy with her housework and was sorry she had not made more time to spend with her grandchildren when they were young.

Grandparents who are Denied Access: There is a group of five grandparents (all grandmothers) who through divorce, separation and other circumstances are, or have been, denied access to some or all of their grandchildren. Most of them had previously had warm and loving relationships with them and all find the separation and lack of contact very painful and distressing.

The most painful times reported by these grandparents are their exclusion from significant religious and familial events such as First Communion and Confirmation, birthdays and Christmas.

... the worst things was Communion and Confirmation and my granddaughter made her Communion last year and my other granddaughter made her Confirmation within a week of one another and their father or myself were not told about it (Grandmother, 64, urban domicile).

Another painful issue for grandmothers in this study was that sons who have also been denied access to their children, in most cases, the sons have been accused of sexually abusing their children.

4.3 The Future

This segment comprises two themes wishes and concerns for the future. Wishes describe grandparents' responses to the prompt about their wishes for their grandchildren's future. Concerns describe grandparents' responses when asked about their concerns for the future for their grandchildren. The segment incorporates those wishes and concerns they mentioned spontaneously. Both of these themes can be classified into social, familial and individual wishes or concerns.

Wishes

Overall, 44 grandparents expressed wishes for the future for themselves and for their grandchildren. Eighty-four per cent (37/44) of grandparents who gave individual interviews expressed wishes compared to 50 per cent (7/14) of those who were in focus groups. The low response rate in focus groups may be a factor of the composition of some of the groups (i.e., the relative seniority of the members, especially in two of groups). Alternatively, the low response of members in focus groups may be due to inhibition in a group setting.

Grandparents only made familial and individual wishes. Table 4.7 gives a breakdown of the three different types of wishes by type.

Table 4.7: Grandparents wishes for themselves and their grandchildren

Type	Wish	N	%
Social	None	0	0
Familial	Children will have a stable family background	15	31
	Children will keep up their religion	5	10
Individual	That grandchild/children will get a good education	14	29
	That grandchildren will be happy	13	27
	That grandchildren will be healthy	12	25
	That grandchildren will get good jobs	4	8

Familial Wishes: The most common wish, expressed by 15 grandparents, was that grandchildren will have a stable family background. Grandparents especially, but not exclusively, those whose children were in relationships but were not married, were concerned about the possibility of the relationship breaking down and the impact this would have on their grandchild/children.

Five grandparents wished that their grandchildren would keep up their religion there was no age or gender difference for this variable. One of these grandparents also wished to have a priest or a nun in the family.

Individual Wishes: Fourteen grandparents wished that their grandchildren would get a good education. One grandfather wished that his grandchildren would get a better education and do better in life than he had. He recounted that his parents had had a similar wish for their family, which he believed he had fulfilled.

Happiness, health and good jobs for their grandchildren were also wishes of some of the grandparents.

Grandparents Who Are or Have Been Denied Access: The wishes of this group of grandparents are quite different from those of other grandparents. They wished for restoration of access and to be able to attend their grandchildren's rites of passage like First Communions or Confirmations.

I'd like to be able to go in and say that I've a right to see my grandchildren ... just to see the grandchildren, that's all I want really (Grandmother, 50, rural domicile).

Free legal aid for all parties in court cases involving access to children was also a wish of grandparents who are denied access and others who are aware of this possibility. Some grandparents in this category claimed they and their child who had been denied access were financially drained by legal fees.

Many of these grandmothers wished for mediation in family matters rather than court appearances which were damaging of already strained relationships.

Grandparents Who Have Non-Legal Custody: The wishes of this group of grandparents are also different from the mainstream. The wish of one grandmother was that if her grandchildren were taken from her again that they would not be split up. Another grandparent who had gone through numerous court cases wished that the same judge would be assigned to all the hearings of the case. She recounted judges trying to familiarise themselves with the

intricacies of the case while in court and the idiosyncratic judgements which were handed down because different judges had different ideas as to what was a suitable outcome for the case.

you get a different judge and they are making so many laws. This idea of different judges coming in and do not know nothing about it and that is one thing that should be changed (Grandmother, 75, urban domicile).

Grandparents who are Travellers: Again the wishes of these two grandparents were slightly different from those of the mainstream grandparents. They wished for better living conditions, respect from the general public and that their children or grandchildren would not let them down by engaging in criminal activities.

Concerns

More concerns than wishes were mentioned by grandparents. Again, the concerns were categorised into social, familial and individual. In this instance, no individual concerns emerged from the interviews. Table 4.8 gives a breakdown of the concerns grandparents have for themselves and their grandchildren.

Table 4.8: Grandparents concerns for themselves and their grandchildren

Types of Concern	Concerns	N	%
Social	Drugs	30	52
	Alcohol	13	22
	Sexual promiscuity	6	10
	Discrimination	2	3
Familial	Children have too much	9	16
	Discipline is too lax	7	12
	Children watch too much TV	5	9
Individual	None	0	0

Social Concerns: Over half of all the grandparents are concerned that their grandchildren might get involved in drugs. However, one grandparent remarked that she believes her grandchildren’s generation will be wiser about drug use and abuse.

Well the other side of the coin would be that children will be well aware of drugs and vices like and I think they will be very well tuned to that. I think that they would be wiser to that than the present generation are. I think so

*'cause they more open and they will tell every thing at home now
(Grandmother, 65, rural domicile).*

One grandfather, worried about drug abuse, although in poor health, is engaged in work to keep the young people of his community occupied, therefore less likely to engage in negative activities during the summer. He is doing this by helping to organise a GAA/Irish culture summer camp for local children.

... we are planning with parents, to keep them involved in sport, Irish dancing and set dancing and all these things and it is something which might help to keep them off the streets. I find if they are not playing hurling or kicking a football and soccer, they can be lounging around the streets even at a young age and they are standing around pub doors and this is were the trouble begins (Grandfather, 64, rural domicile).

Alcohol abuse is also a concern but not as prevalent as drugs. Slightly more grandfathers (29%, 4/14) than grandmothers (20%, 9/44) were concerned about their grandchildren abusing alcohol.

The two members of the Travelling community were very concerned about the impact of discrimination on their grandchildren, especially in relation to getting jobs.

Grandparents also worry about sexual promiscuity:

*I don't necessarily agree with all this jumping in and out of bed that people seem to do nowadays. Again this seems to be their sort of way of doing things and it's not up to me really to comment on it but I don't agree with it
(Grandfather, 69, urban domicile).*

Another grandparent spoke about the implications for society of casual and indiscriminate sexual relationships where children are born out of wedlock:

I have grandchildren that are not married and have children and when they grow up they could meet a brother, a half brother. I worry that about that for the children (Grandmother, 72, rural domicile).

Familial Concerns: Nine grandparents, especially those with younger grandchildren, believe they have too much. By this, they mean too many toys, games and too much equipment. They were fearful that children's imagination was being stunted by their parents providing

them with so many toys and that the children had forgotten how to play. Some grandparents believed their children felt guilty over having to work and having less time to spend with their children and that by buying them toys etc. the parents were assuaging their guilt.

Other grandparents considered their children were so exhausted coming home from work that the toys and games were a substitute for parental interaction with children. Some grandparents believed it was grandparents' role to make up to their grandchildren for parental lack of, or inability to interact.

Another issue along these lines, for ten grandparents, was that during the grandparents' childhood 'children were seen and not heard' whereas in today's world they considered that children took centre stage, interrupted their parents, were rude and generally were in the forefront rather than the background of family life. Again, this was attributed to parents' guilt over having to work and spend less time on family life. However, many grandparents, as we saw above, are reluctant to interfere.

The influence of TV on children, especially when they watch it unsupervised is a concern. Additionally, when TV programmes promote values from an alien culture they worry that Irish cultural values will vanish and be replaced by those of a more violent, less caring culture.

Grandparents who have or had been denied access to their grandchildren have other concerns. They are worried that their grandchildren are being manipulated and turned against them. Others worry that the parent who has denied them access is being abusive or neglectful of the child.

The one grandparent who had non-legal custody of her grandchildren worried about what would happen to them if she were to die. This is a well-founded fear as she is in frail health. Other grandparents, especially grandmothers, expressed sadness at the thought of their death and the implications of the loss for their families.

The grandparents who are members of the Travelling community were concerned about the overall effects of racism. In particular its impact on the job prospects of their grandchildren was a particular concern.

4.4 If Grandparents were a Government Ministers

This section describes the final segment in the analysis of the qualitative data. Some grandparents initially had difficulties with the concept of being ‘promoted’ to government minister status. With practice, however, as the fieldwork progressed, the researcher found that reminding grandparents about their wishes and concerns generally helped them overcome the problem and recommendations and/or comments on laws, social policies and practice flowed after that. The segment consists of two themes: (a) general laws and social policies impinging on grandparents and grandchildren and (b) laws and social policies particular to the grandparents from the diversity of circumstances identified at the beginning of this chapter. The reader should remember that the views of the grandparents expressed here are *their views* and on occasion may not reflect current social policy and practice in Ireland.

Overall, 46 grandparents (34 grandmothers and 12 grandfathers) mentioned changes they would like to see happen relative to laws, social policies and practice. Because many of these recommendations are idiosyncratic, no indication of the number of grandparents mentioning each one of them are given.

4.4.1 General Laws and Social Policies

This theme consists of comments and suggestions relative to the perceived needs of the general body of grandparents. The variables have been categorised into laws, social policies and practice concerning (a) grandparents, (b) grandchildren and (c) those which encompass both.

Laws, Policies and Practices Concerning Grandparents: These include the following:

- **Recognition of the Role and Respect for Grandparents**

There should be some recognition of the value of grandparents, their importance within the family structure and their contribution to society. Grandparents should be regarded as a resource and more emphasis should be placed on the value of their experience.

The government should encourage grandparents to give some balance to their grandchildren's lives, especially when both parents are working, based on the belief that grandparents fill the gap that busy working parents cannot provide.

There is a need for respect from government officials in their treatment of citizens. Grandparents, especially those for whatever reason had to approach Government Departments for assistance, reported they are sometimes treated with less than respect by social workers and social welfare officials (e.g., one grandmother on social welfare reported being asked how she could afford the—second-hand—furniture in her house).

- **Financial Recompense and Income Supports**

There should be an allowance for grandparents who are full-time carers of their grandchildren, especially when the children are attending school.

Pensions for older people should be index-linked. It is too much of a drop in income for a pension to be half the salary of the person before he or she retired.

There should be a improved fuel allowance for senior citizens.

It would be nice to have a large enough pension to be able to leave a small inheritance for grandchildren.

There should be more money for single parents and lower income families should also be helped financially.

- **Supporting and Protecting the Grandparenthood Role**

It might help the childminding crisis if grandparents were offered some financial inducement by the government to take up childminding.

Sometimes people can be overburdened by childminding and yet cannot refuse their children. Grandparents need to know that they can say 'no'.

Older people should get help in finding out what their entitlements are.

Grandparenting should be promoted as a positive role for older people.

In order to promote positive attitudes to ageing, local communities should set up panels of surrogate grandparents who would be willing to mentor youngsters and for those who can, teach children trades and crafts that might otherwise be lost.

- **Rural Areas**

There should be better transport. In rural areas grandparents do not have transport to visit their grandchildren, go shopping, and go to the bank, etc. although they have free travel passes. The government should examine ways in which rural transportation could be improved. The government should provide rural areas with more taxis and hackney cabs.

- **Security**

The government should provide security facilities for older people. The alarm systems available free for older people living alone are not publicised. Additionally, if the systems are applied for at certain times of the year the person has to wait an inordinate length of time before the appliance is installed.

Laws, Social Policies and Practice Concerning Grandchildren: These include:

- **Education**

There should be proper schools for children living in less well off areas.

There should be classes in school for children in swimming and driving. Having driving on the curriculum would reduce road deaths and traffic accidents in general.

There should be financial aid for school books and nourishing school meals.

Children should be taught about nature and helped to appreciate it.

If there is a dispute between teacher, pupil and/or parents there should be an independent arbitrator to help to resolve the issue.

The Leaving Certificate should be marked on continuous assessment basis which would give a better overall picture of the child.

Early school leaving and 3rd Level dropout should be discouraged.

- **Drug, Alcohol Abuse and Other Social Problems**

There should be better education about drug abuse. Drug users should visit schools and talk to students about the evils of drugs. Drug pushers should get stiffer sentences because what they are doing is tantamount to murder.

Teenagers should not be allowed into pubs until they are over 18 years of age.

There should be an investment in out of school activities for children to keep them off the streets, out of mischief and avoid the temptation to use alcohol or illegal drugs. This is especially important now that so many parents have to work. Additionally, people who work in a voluntary capacity running activities for children should have their expenses reimbursed.

The government should take better medical care of our children. They should not have to go to England for treatment.

Homeless children should get accommodation all year round. Shelters should not be shut down in the summer. There is neglect of our children by the State when homeless youngsters can be picked up and sexually abused by adults.

There should be more input into getting jobs for school leavers.

Laws, Social Policies and Practices for Grandparents and Grandchildren: These include:

- **Health**

All grandparents should have medical cards as should children up to the age of three.

The midwife scheme in operation in certain parts of Dublin should be made available nationwide.

There should be a better ambulance, accident and emergency service in rural communities.

- **Housing**

Give extra grants to the poorer, younger members of society, to enable them to have their own house in which to raise their children.

Give grants so that children can build ‘granny flats’ for their parents and to grandparents to build extensions to their houses to accommodate their children. This might help with the housing crisis. Granny flats would alleviate the loneliness felt by many grandparents when they become widowed, give them access to their grandchildren and avoid children having to travel distances to check on their elderly parents.

- **Contact and Interaction**

We need to examine the potential for grandparents helping their grandchildren and the potential for grandchildren helping their grandparents. Thought should be put into how supportive roles can be encouraged.

- **Other Comments**

A Government Minister should have knowledge of the subject that he or she is expected to carry out in their Department. Government ministers should strive to be statesmen, not party politicians.

4.4.2 Particular Laws, Social Policies and Practices

This theme consists of six variables relative to the perceptions of the diversity of grandparents identified at the beginning of this chapter.

Teenage Mothers Issues: A mother of a teenage mother had her own single parent allowance revoked in favour of her teenage daughter²¹²¹. She was told that there could only be one single parent allowance per household. As her daughter conceived at 14 years of age, she believes

²¹ According to the Department of Social, Community & Family Affairs (personal communication 29 March 2001, “presuming the mother was in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment (OPFP), she would still be entitled to the audit portion for herself (£77.50) but not the additional amount for a qualifying child (15.20). The daughter is entitled to both portions. The mother is pursuing the case, which she appealed twice, with the Department

the government is aiding and abetting under age sexual activity. Teenagers who give birth and are still under the guardianship of their parent should not be expected to manage the single parent allowance. It creates havoc in mother/ daughter relationships.

The government should not encourage single parenthood by providing accommodation for single teenage mothers.

Legal Rights Issues: Many grandparents, especially, but not exclusively, those who are deprived of contact with their grandchildren, do not know what are their legal rights (if any). This lack of knowledge of rights spreads into areas such as social welfare entitlements. Lack of knowledge generates fears in grandparents' minds that if they look for extra social welfare entitlements the ones they have will be taken away.

There is nowhere grandparents can go to find out what their entitlements are. They consider that knowledge of what a person's rights and entitlements are is a fundamental right (e.g., legal rights, social welfare entitlements, etc.).

Issues for Grandparents who are Denied Access: There should be mediation for families, including grandparents, if there are legal disputes about access to grandchildren²¹. Going to court is extremely costly and destructive, it worsens relationships between family members, creates bitterness in families and is bad for the grandchildren.

One judge should be assigned to a family case and should follow it through all the court appearances.

When families do go to court, there should be free legal aid for all the parties who cannot afford court costs.

²¹ See Chapter 2 for a description of the current Family Mediation Service.

The best interests of the child should be paramount in all legal and familial wrangles, above those of their parents or grandparents. Some grandparents considered the child becomes invisible in the legal arguments when both sides are presenting their case to the court.

Children have a right to know their extended families.

Social workers should be more sympathetic. They came in for a considerable amount of criticism in family law cases. One grandparent who has had experience of social workers in family cases in Ireland and the UK claims that UK social workers are more reasonable and sympathetic. Additionally, they always put the child's needs first.

When there is a family breakdown all parties need counselling.

There should be pre-birth contracts for unmarried parents so that if the relationship ceases the mechanism will be there to take care of custody and other issues concerning what is best for the child. This will prevent the trauma of a court case which causes more hurt than is necessary.

Issues Concerning Grandparents who have Non-Legal Custody: Grandparents who have non-legal custody of their grandchildren should have some protection. These grandparents are worried that at any time, the children will be taken away and put into care, a foster home or returned to inadequate and/or abusive parents. This has already happened to one grandparent who had non-legal custody for the first five years of her grandchild's life and who was removed suddenly and without warning by the child's mother. The grandmother is fearful that the child is being abused and neglected but her concerns have repeatedly been ignored by social workers.

If grandchildren have to be removed from custody, it should be done sensitively. One grandmother reported her grandchildren being removed from her custody on several occasions late at night with a Garda presence which terrified the children and the grandparents.

The preferences of children should be listened to when custody is an issue.

Issues Concerning Members of the Travelling Community: Sites for Travellers should be as well designed with open spaces, grass and trees as for the settled population. Proper facilities should be provided with on-site water, an adequate number of toilets and showers, and a regular bin collection service.

Travellers say they should have a choice of where they live. If they are forced to live on sites which they do not choose in the first place and have no say in its design layout they are not going to look after them.

Additionally, Travellers say they should not be crowded into small areas mixing groups that are unfamiliar with, or hostile to, each other. This leads to rows and is damaging for Traveller society, especially for children and grandchildren growing up in antagonistic atmospheres.

There should be respect for Travellers in society and discrimination in employment and admission to public places (e.g., pubs) should cease.

Being a Traveller and a woman can lead to double discrimination.

Issue Concerning Grandparents in Nursing Homes: The government should not consider the income of all the family when an older person has to go into a nursing home²².

4.5 Summary

The demographic data derived from the questionnaire revealed many facets to grandparenting. These were presented under two headings: (a) the grandparents and the grandchildren. This was followed by a description of the many facets of grandparenting as perceived by the grandparents in the study.

The Grandparents: The grandparents in this study are from a broad diversity of backgrounds. The sample covers what we hoped for in relation to basic demographic characteristics. In noting this, it must be emphasised that exact representation of the actual population was not sought in this study, only a reasonable variety of grandparents.

²² This practice has been discontinued.

Over half of the grandparents are widowed and are from a diversity of ages (from their early 40s to over 90 years of age) and educational backgrounds. However, a large proportion of the grandparents have not gone further in their education than the Primary Certificate. Finally, over one-quarter of the grandparents have a disability.

The Grandchildren: The average number of grandchildren per grandparent is 10 with a range of between one and 42. Additionally, one-quarter of the grandparents in this study have great-grandchildren.

Although some grandparents have grandchildren by sons or daughters only, the most typical family structure in which to have grandchildren is by both sons and daughters. The older the grandparents are, the more grandchildren they have and the older the grandchildren tend to be. Some grandparents have young children and grandchildren of a similar age. This was generally because of late childbirth and in one instance a second marriage.

Most grandparents and grandchildren live within 10 miles of each other which was also the case in Fahey and Murray (1995). Additionally, on average, grandparents see grandchildren at least once per week. Grandparents who have grandchildren living abroad naturally have considerably less contact with them than with their grandchildren living in Ireland.

There are indications that some of the more senior grandparents who have many grandchildren tend to lose contact with them when the grandchildren get married and move out of the family home. This was not the case for senior grandparents who have a small number of grandchildren.

Becoming a Grandparent: It is evident that becoming a grandparent had a profound effect (positive and negative) on the majority of the grandparents in this study. Although, for many of them, the birth of their grandchildren was not a recent event, the feelings it generated were still fresh in their memories. The reason for this result is because the perceptions and feelings generated by salient 'life events' do not decay as quickly as those of more mundane events.

Although grandparenting had come as a shock to some of the grandparents in this study, the role of being a grandparent brought most of them enormous joy and satisfaction. It was evident from their comments that the bond between grandparent and grandchild, from the grandparents' perspective, was quite special. For some of the grandparents this is particularly so with the first grandchild. The grandparents who mentioned that equality between grandparent and grandchild was important were different from the other grandparents in their description of their relationships with their grandchildren. These grandparents were also, understandably, the ones who reported that their grandchildren confided in them.

The relationship with daughters' children is closer than that with sons'. However, many grandparents recounted that relationships with both daughters' and sons' families were equally close. The reason for this phenomenon is not clear and may be specific to Ireland.

The fact that so many grandparents mentioned the importance of not interfering in the lives of their children and grandchildren is remarkable. It may indicate a shift in the balance of power in the extended family. Did grandparents of yesteryear interfere and wield the power over their extended family? The perception among some grandparents is that they did.

It may be that having a disability can impede grandparenting to a greater or lesser extent. However, it is also apparent that some maturing grandchildren take disability and infirmity into account in their relationships with their grandparents. This will be mentioned below relative to reciprocity.

Grandparenting: This segment revealed there are many types to grandparenting. The most important of these is caregiving which takes place when grandchildren and grandparents are younger rather than those who are more mature. There is also a broad range of caregiving from full-time, in-house to occasional babysitting. It is evident also, that caregiving is a late middle-aged activity. Grandmothers are the ones who are responsible for most of the caregiving activities reported here. Grandfathers who are engaged in babysitting mainly do so in the company of their spouses.

For some grandparents, especially grandmothers, the caring role can be tiring and some who reported being tired were visibly worn out.

Almost one-quarter of grandparents reported helping their families and/or grandchildren financially or with money or 'benefit-in-kind' (e.g., clothing for special events).

Some senior grandparents received instrumental support from their grandchildren, whereas emotional support from grandchildren, when received, was given to all age groups of grandparents.

Activities with grandchildren started when grandchildren had passed infancy and decreased when both they and their grandparents became older. (For grandparents the decline in activities started in their 70s.)

Both active pursuits and passive activities are engaged in by grandparents. There are considerable gender differences for both active pursuits and passive activities.

Visiting and arranging family gatherings are another activity engaged in by grandparents and their families. Grandparents were more likely to report receiving visits *from* their grandchildren than visiting them or engaging in bi-directional visiting.

Although there is some contact with grandchildren living abroad, it is sporadic and of short duration. However most grandparents seemed satisfied or accepting of the arrangement. The only grandparents who showed distress about their grandchildren who live abroad were those whose grandchildren had moved abroad after being reared for some time in Ireland (and presumably having bonded more strongly with their grandparents).

Some grandparents reported having more time to spend with their grandchildren than they did with their own children. They attributed this to pressures of childrearing or working having diminished.

The pain experienced by grandparents who are denied access to some or all of their grandchildren through divorce or separation is palpable. Additionally, the bitterness engendered by accusations that fathers have sexually abused their children is very apparent.

A special group of grandmothers, identified in the Becoming and Being segment above receive either or both instrumental and emotional support from their grandchildren. Additionally, they engage in what they called ‘crazy’ or atypical activities with their grandchildren.

The Future: The wishes and concerns of the grandparents in this study overall centred around social, familial and individual issues. It is interesting to note that grandparents had no wishes which concerned social issues and that conversely they had no concerns that focused on individual issues. The reason for this may be that wishes are more personal, aspirational and therefore unreal, whereas talking about concerns about individual family members was tantamount to letting a family member down and not considered appropriate in the context of an interview with a stranger.

Concerning familial wishes, it is not surprising that in a world of changing sexual mores, marital instability, cohabitation, rising divorce and relationship breakdown rates, that grandparents wish for stable family backgrounds for their grandchildren. A small minority of grandparents also wished that their grandchildren would stay faithful to their grandparent’s religion.

Individual wishes centred around education, health, happiness and good jobs.

Some of the grandparents in diverse circumstances identified at the beginning of this chapter had particular wishes. Those who are or have been denied access to their grandchildren wished for a more equitable legal system for them and their children. Grandparents with non-legal custody wished for safer custody arrangements for themselves and their grandchildren. Grandparents who are members of the Travelling community wished for decent living conditions, respect from the general public and that their children would not let them down.

The social concerns of over half of all grandparents centred around the destructive nature of drug abuse in society and the fear that their grandchildren might get caught up in drug abuse.

Somewhat fewer grandparents mentioned concerns about their grandchildren and the evils of alcohol abuse.

Familial concerns centred around materialism and its impact on young families, Some grandparents attribute the decline in the standards of caregiving and discipline to the necessity that modern mothers work outside the home.

Again, the concerns of grandparents who are or have been denied access are different. Their concern is that the bitterness that develops in family breakdown may impact on their long-term prospects of having a relationship with their grandchildren from whom they are denied access.

Laws, Social Policy and Practice: Many of the grandparents in this study had comments and suggestions concerning laws, social policies and practices which they consider would make their lives and the lives of their children and grandchildren better if they were implemented.

The suggestions and comments of the grandparents from a diversity of circumstances identified issues which were of particular importance to them and would make life better for their particular group.

Overall, grandparents in this study provided a rich and nuanced picture of grandparenthood in modern Ireland.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we will examine the results reported in the preceding chapter. This is contained in five sections, followed by the conclusions:

- **Section 5.1 The ‘Credibility’ of the Data:** Discusses and examines the ‘credibility’ of the findings from an Irish and international perspective.
- **Section 5.2 The Major Findings:** Examines some of the major findings, not found elsewhere and brought to light by this research including a possible shift in the balance of power in Irish families.
- **Section 5.3 The Future:** Explores the wishes and concerns of grandparents.
- **Section 5.4 Social Policy Implications:** Examines the social policy implications of the grandparents statements concerning changes they would like to see implemented in the law, social policy and practice.
- **Section 5.5 A Proposed Classification of Grandparents:** Proposes a classification of grandparents from an Irish perspective.
- **Section 5.6 Conclusions**

5.1 The ‘Credibility’ of the Data

Qualitative data should be judged in terms of its ‘credibility’, unlike quantitative data which many, but not all, researchers believe should be ‘generalisable’ to the population from which it is drawn²³. There are several ways in which ‘credibility’ can be judged. In this study, we shall firstly ‘triangulate’²⁴ our results with the Fahey and Murray (1994) study and secondly, compare our findings with the international literature cited in Chapter 2.

5.1.1. ‘Credibility’ From an Irish Perspective

Fahey and Murray (1994) found that, on average, older Irish people have seven or more grandchildren, that some of their children live locally or within ten miles and that level of contact with relatives is on average once per week.

In this study, we found that on average our grandparents have 10 grandchildren which is somewhat more than in Fahey and Murray. This result may stem from the sampling method

²³ For more detailed information about qualitative methods see Appendix A to this document.

²⁴ For information about triangulation, see Appendix A to this document.

used. However, the Fahey and Murray findings on grandchildren's geographical proximity and degree contact are very similar to the findings from this study.

Additionally, concerning direction of contact, a secondary analysis of the Fahey and Murray data set revealed that older people in that study were more likely to receive visits from their sons and daughters than to visit them.

These results suggest that our demographic data, although derived from snowball rather than random sampling methods is broadly similar to previous research and therefore, credible.

5.1.2. 'Credibility' from an International Perspective

Compared to the international literature, the grandparents in this study have considerably more grandchildren than those in other countries (i.e., US grandparents have on average six grandchildren AARP, 1999 and UK grandparents, three, Laslett, 1988). This probably reflects Ireland's high birth rates prior to the 1980s. Nevertheless, caution is recommended in interpreting the Irish data because of sample selection and the fact that the findings on number of grandchildren from this study were not replicated in the Fahey and Murray (1994) study.

'Off Time' Grandparents: In this study, there were 'off time' grandparents in their 40s and 60s, similar to those described by Szinovacz (1998) in the US. 'Off time' grandparenting in Ireland did not have a racial dimension it has in the US. However, the hypothesis that some members of the Travelling community may be 'off time' grandparents is suggested by the ages of the two grandmothers interviewed in the study.

Great Grandchildren: In our study, one-quarter of grandparents reported having great grandchildren, whereas in the US one-third experience this phenomenon (Szinovacz, 1998). The reason for fewer great grandparents in this study may be the higher mortality of Irish people once they are over 65 (Fahey & Murray, 1994), thus reducing the probability of finding great grandparents, especially using non-random sampling methods. Unfortunately, Fahey and Murray (1994) did not collect data on great grandparenthood, so we have no Irish data with which to compare our findings in an Irish context.

Roles and Relationships: We did find that different age groups of grandparents had different roles and relationships with their grandchildren. Infant grandchildren tended to be cared for by their grandmothers. As the children matured, some grandfathers became more engaged with them in various activities. The Commission on the Family (1998) also confirmed, in an Irish context, that “many new mothers would be lost without the support and advice of an experienced grandparent” (p. 302). These findings were very similar to those of the AARP (1999). We also found a group of grandmothers as described in Johnson (1985) who rejected the traditional picture of grandparenting and focused on having fun with their grandchildren.

Gender: The warmth of the relationship between grandmothers and grandchildren reported by Tinsley and Parke (1998) was confirmed in this study. This was especially the case between grandmothers and younger grandchildren. The Australian findings of Peterson (1999) that frequency of contact predicted high levels of satisfaction for grandmothers and grandfathers, although not quantifiable in this study, seemed to be similar.

Concerning gender and caregiving, although we only had a small number of grandparents in the study, we found that similar to the US studies (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1985; Tinsley & Parke, 1988), grandmothers were more likely than grandfathers to have a warm relationship with their grandchildren. However, we did not find that grandfathers were more likely to offer advice on childrearing as did Somary and Stricker (1998). What we did find was that grandmothers were more likely than grandfathers to have frequent contact and involvement with their grandchildren as did Uhlenbert and Hamill (1998). The Commission on the Family (1998) reported, in an Irish context, that “grandparents keep the family history alive and help grandchildren to know where they fit into the family. They also build their self-esteem by taking a personal interest in them. They represent an important store of local, historic, economic and social knowledge” (p. 302).

Lineage: We found, similar to Somary and Stricker (1998), that lineage for some grandparents impacted upon the relationship with their grandchildren. These were the grandparents who reported that they had better contact with their daughters’ than their sons’

families. This was not the case for other grandparents in our study who had equally warm relationships with both daughters' and sons' families.

Number of Grandchild Sets: Uhlenbert and Hamill (1998) reported a negative correlation between number of grandchild sets and frequency of contact. We were not able to quantify our findings. However, there were indications that this variable, together with age of grandparent (and also grandchildren) affected the frequency of contact.

Types of Caregiving: In the US, Jendrek (1994) identified three different categories of caregiving, custodial, living with and day-care. In this study, five different types of caregiving were identified from in-house, parent absent to occasional caregiving. Unlike Fuller-Thomson, Minkler and Driver (1997), we did not find grandfather carers, in fact, grandfathers were likely to babysit only occasionally and then only in the company of their wives.

Jendrek's (1994) finding that day-care grandparents were involved in assisting their children with their life goals was also found in this study where grandparents engaged in caregiving (e.g., before or after school) to enable mothers to work.

Additionally, similar to Jendrek (1993), we found that grandparents who are or have had non-legal custody of their grandchildren, worry that the children may be removed from their care. An additional worry is that when the child is removed it may be abused or neglected.

In the US (Burton, 1992; Pruchno, 1999) most grandparents experience a sense of satisfaction from helping their grandchild and that they gave their lives meaning. These phenomena were also present in this study.

Findings from the US that three-quarters of grandparents who are carers are depressed and/or anxious (Burton, 1992) was replicated in an Irish context by Fahey and Murray (1994) who found that babysitting and financial assistance caused grandparents psychological distress. However, grandparents in this study did not recount experiencing depression, anxiety or psychological distress. Additionally, it was evident from the quality of the interviews that

these symptoms were not present. What was evident was that the more caregiving the grandparent reported, the more likely they were to say that sometimes caring became 'too much'. This phenomenon was also found in the US by Jendrik (1993).

Financial Assistance: Both Fahey and Murray (1994) and The Commission on the Family (1998) found, as did this study, that Irish grandparents often gave financial assistance to their families. This was also found in the US (AARP, 1999).

Marital Breakdown: The reports of the grandparents in this study who have or had lost contact with their grandchildren through divorce and separation was similar to studies elsewhere (e.g., Fuller-Thomson, Minkler & Driver, 1997; Kivnick, 1982; Minkler, Roe & Price, 1992), particularly in relation to psychological distress and grief. These findings are also confirmed in an Irish context by The Commission on the Family (1998).

Summary: From the above examination, we can see that many of the findings in this study reflect what has been discovered previously in Ireland and elsewhere, particularly in the US. Given that the culture of the US is so very different from that in Ireland, we conclude that many grandparenting phenomena are universal. Additionally, the results of this Irish study are credible in themselves. However, there were many aspects of grandparenthood we were not able to examine, or examine in depth. These were not covered because of the small sample size dictated by the preliminary nature of the work. Some of these aspects were:

- the shift in the shape of families from horizontal to vertical,
- step grandparenthood,
- lineage (although there were indications that lineage was important),
- childhood experiences with grandparents and its impact on grandparenting later in life,
- the amount of money the different kinds of grandparents spend on their grandchildren,
- number of grandchild sets and degree of contact,
- telephone, letter and e-mail contact,
- impact of marital breakdown on grandparenting (e.g., denial of access, legal issues, etc.),
- religiosity and interaction with grandchildren,
- factors leading to full-time caregiving or non-legal custody
- the income of grandparents who are full-time carers,

- the roles of grandfathers
- caregiving and changes in mental and physical health and lifestyles,
- caregiving the children of parents with problems (e.g., drug or alcohol abusers, psychiatric problems, etc.)
- other problems faced by non-legal custodial grandparents (e.g., grandchildren with disabilities or challenging behaviours).

It is evident that the scope of this study is only the tip of the iceberg relative to issues pertinent to grandparenting. However, grandparents were allowed to express in their own terms the issues which were most relevant to their lives. Nevertheless, it is evident much research needs to be done to expand our knowledge in this area.

5.2 The Major Findings From the Current Study

Two results from this study, not mentioned previously in the Irish or international literature relative to grandparents are: (a) there may be a shift in the balance of power in the family and (b) strong family bonds exist and are possibly related to the geographical proximity of kin in this country. This latter finding may be unique to Ireland.

5.2.1 A Shift in the Balance of Power in the Family?

Over one-quarter of the grandparents in this study claimed they would not interfere in their children's lives, especially relative to child rearing and discipline. This is in contrast to the US findings of Somary and Stricker (1998) who claimed grandfathers' interactions with their families focused on offering advice on childrearing.

The perceptions of the grandparents in this study of the parents and grandparents of yesteryear was that they were formidable and a dominant influence on family life, including their grandchildren. Arensberg and Kimball (1940) showed a hierarchical structure of dominance within rural Irish families in the 1930s, which confirm this observation. At that time, mothers-in-law in three generation households were particularly dominant in all aspects of the lives of their daughters-in-law. However, this dominance had begun to dissipate by the 1960s. Larragy (1993) suggested that in that decade the effect of emigration and financial independence of the then younger generation led to their separation from the household and

its economy and, eventually, to rural decline. This trend produced a change in household composition from three-generational to two and a further diminution of the hierarchical and elder-dominated structure of the Irish family. Hannan (1977), reported that grandmothers in rural three-generation families were more likely to “play a minimal role in child rearing while they play an important role in housekeeping” (p. 10). The trend reported by Hannan indicates a role shift for Irish women, especially married women, who in that decade began to join the labour force, which by the 1990s became the norm rather than the exception it was in the early 1970s (Larragy, personal communication, September, 2000).

Few of the grandparents in our sample live in three-generation households. However, it is apparent that there is a conscious decision on their part not to interfere in the lives of their children, particularly relative to discipline and child rearing. This indicates a considerable shift in the hierarchy of dominance in the Irish family.

A further shift may be on the way, according to some of the grandparents in this study. They perceived their grandchildren as being or becoming the dominant members of the household. They attributed this shift in the balance of power to both parents working and the guilt they might feel because their children are cared for by childminders or are in crèches. Additionally, grandparents reported that when working parents arrive home in the evening, they are too tired to interact with their children, feel guilty and compensate by acquiescing to their demands. These two factors, according to some grandparents, lead to a shift in power from parent to child in these families. Only time will tell if this phenomenon is on the increase. If so, its implications for Irish society and family life may be a cause for concern but, as yet, unknown.

5.2.2 Strong Family Bonds

In the demographics section, we found close geographical proximity between many grandparents and grandchildren which led to frequent contact which gave great joy to most grandparents. The phenomenon of close geographical proximity may be unique to Ireland and certainly did not appear in literature from other countries to any great extent.

Unfortunately, with the housing crisis and growing traffic density, the close proximity and frequent contact patterns of grandparents and grandchildren may be about to change. Children may be forced to buy houses far away from the areas where their parents live and will have to travel long distances to work. When they have children of their own, these will be at a far greater remove from their grandparents than today's grandchildren. We do not know what the social implications of this possibility are for grandparents and grandchildren. With increasing geographical distance the ability of grandparents to act as childminders diminishes, thus adding to the problem of childminding for families in which both parents work. This will also create a problem for the State if it cannot rely on grandparents to step into the breach in the absence of formal childminding facilities. Additionally, grandparents may not have as strong a bond with their grandchildren. They may be deprived of the reciprocal caregiving (both instrumental and emotional) which is a feature of current family life in this country (Fahey and Murray, 1994; Lundström and McKeown, 1994). However, this may be an overly-pessimistic view. Larragy (1993) claimed that improved living standards and independence among older people can lead to the phenomenon of "intimacy at a distance" (p. 236). If the instance of close geographical proximity declines in the future, grandparents may find other ways of keeping in contact with their families (e.g., by e-mail and telephone).

Another feature of the extended family in Ireland in this study was the number of grandparents mentioning having grandchildren who live abroad. This is not a feature of the international literature on grandparenting and may be unique to Ireland²⁵. However, with recent trends in the Irish economy and increases in the return of Irish citizens living abroad, grandparents who have families abroad may be the last generation to experience this phenomenon on such a scale as the present generation.

²⁵ Many grandparents in the US reported having grandchildren who live in states other than the one lived in by their grandparents (AARP, 1999). However, this does not constitute living 'abroad'.

5.3 The Future

Although the AARP (1999) study asked grandparents to identify their wishes for the future, this was couched in terms of the values and ethics they would like to pass on to their grandchildren. Furthermore, they did not ask grandparents about their concerns. Therefore, a unique feature of this research, not found in the international literature, was asking grandparents about their wishes and concerns for themselves and their grandchildren for the future. This researcher has found this strategy useful in other qualitative studies (e.g., addressing issues concerning the lives of people with learning disabilities, women in prison, etc.). The reason for adopting the strategy is that people in these types of interviews rarely discuss the future relative to their hopes and aspirations (Lundström-Roche, 1981; Lundström-Roche, 1985). Using this strategy was an attempt to redress this shortcoming in the data collection. The strategy of asking about wishes and concerns proved a useful tool in this instance in assisting grandparents to talk about social policy issues²⁶. Many grandparents would not have been able to consider social policy without the prompt that they could use their wishes and concerns to develop social policies that would be relevant to them.

The wishes of US grandparents for their grandchildren were to pass on a sense of morals and integrity followed by success and ambition and religion (AARP, 1999).

It is particularly interesting when wishes and concerns are categorised into social, familial and individual that wishes were only familial and individual whereas concerns were only in the social and familial categories. This result highlights the fact that wishes are more personal, neutral and aspirational and even individual ones can be shared with a stranger (researcher). Social wishes may be so aspirational as to be inconceivable and therefore not mentioned. On the other hand, concerns about individuals or individual issues are more concrete, real and personal, and therefore cannot be shared with a stranger.

²⁶ That is the prompt of being promoted to being a Government Minister.

Wishes: The wishes of grandparents centred around such familial issues as a stable family background for their grandchildren and that their grandchildren would keep up their religion. In the US, King and Elder 1999 found a relationship between involvement with grandchildren and religiousness. This was not the case in this study. However, because of the small sample size, this relationship may exist but was undetected.

The individual wishes expressed by the grandparents were that their grandchildren would have a good education, happiness, health and good jobs.

It is not surprising in the current Irish climate of divorce, separation and single parenthood that so many grandparents wish that their grandchildren will have a stable family background.

The wishes of the diverse groups of grandparents who were identified at the beginning of Chapter 4 are quite different from the mainstream grandparents. Those who have or had been denied access to their grandchildren wished for a restoration of contact and to be involved in all their rites of passage. Those with non-legal custody wanted a more caring, sensitive legal system. Rural grandparents wanted better transport facilities and grandparents who are members of the Travelling community wished for better living conditions, respect and crime-free lives for their grandchildren.

Concerns: The concerns of grandparents are very palpable. In the social category they concerned drug and alcohol abuse and sexual promiscuity. In the familial category they were concerned about materialism, discipline and the detrimental influence of TV, especially when it was watched unsupervised.

The major concern for many of the grandparents in this study was the prevalence of drug abuse throughout this country and, to a lesser extent, alcohol abuse. Marital breakdown and single parenthood also impacted on their concerns. Some grandparents believe that incest is more of a possibility in the sexually promiscuous climate that exists currently in Ireland (i.e., that if children do not know the identity of both parents there is a possibility they could cohabit or marry a half brother or sister).

Again, the concerns of the diverse groups identified at the beginning of Chapter 4 are different from those of more mainstream grandparents. Grandparents who are denied access worry that their grandchildren will be turned against them or that they may be being abused by their parents or caregivers. Those who have non-legal custody worry about what will happen to their grandchildren when they are no longer able to care for them through death or serious illness. Additionally, some fear their grandchildren will be removed from their custody by abusive or inadequate parents. Members of the Travelling community worry about the impact of racism on the employment prospects of their grandchildren.

5.4 Social Policy Issues

Several major social policy issues and implications arose out of these grandparents' reactions to the prompt of being promoted to a Government Minister. These issues can be classified into general laws, social policies and practices and those which are particular to grandparents in diverse circumstances (e.g., those who have or had been denied contact with their grandchildren, have non-legal custody of their grandchildren, are parents of teenage parents, are members of the Travelling community, etc.).

5.4.1 General Social Policy Issues

A further breakdown of grandparents' general social policy issue statements identifies three distinct types of issues. Those concerning: (a) grandparents, (b) grandchildren and (c) both.

Issues Relevant to Grandparents: That grandparents considered their value as a resource, their importance within the family and their contribution to society needs recognition, may indicate that they consider that these issues are currently ignored in Irish society. Additionally, these grandparents intimated they had more to offer, in today's society where both parents may be working outside the home. Certainly, with the issue of childminding for working parents reaching crisis proportions, more thought might be given to harnessing grandparents as a resource in a more systematic way. From the recommendations made by grandparents it would seem that many of them consider their talents under-utilised. However, the data revealed there is also the need to protect grandparents from being exploited.

From some of the recommendations made by these grandparents, they believe there is a lack of respect for them emanating from some government departments and agencies. This lack was illustrated in grandparents being unable to discover exactly what their legal and social rights are and through being subjected to inappropriate comments by State employees. This finding is not unique to this study but was also a finding in Russell and Corcoran (2000). From these comments and criticisms, it seems that extra resources may need to be invested into explaining citizen's rights in a clearer, more straightforward fashion. Additionally, training or re-training of State employees may need to be implemented to ensure that they always act respectfully towards citizens.

Rural grandparents had specific recommendations that their transport difficulties be addressed by the provision of adequate rural transportation systems either in the form of buses or a subsidised taxi service. Rural medical emergency transportation was also considered in need to improvement by these grandparents.

Finally, grandparents wanted improvements in their pensions and other schemes (i.e., fuel allowances) to make their lives more comfortable.

Issues Relevant to Grandchildren: The need for quality education for all Irish children was a policy mentioned by many grandparents. Additionally they recommended courses currently not on the curriculum (e.g., driving and swimming lessons) and an greater input by schools informing students about the dangers of drug abuse. As many of the grandparents in this study did not go further than the Primary Certificate, it is obvious that they are aware of the implications for children of educational shortcomings in modern Ireland. Therefore, they consider quality education for their grandchildren of prime importance in improving the lives of their grandchildren.

In an Ireland where drug abuse is rife and after school some children are unsupervised because both parents work, the provision of after school activities is a social policy issue grandparents consider important. Indeed, some grandparents, especially grandfathers, may be willing to assist in providing or supervising these activities. After school activities may also

be a way of promoting surrogate grandparenting in which older people mentor the younger generation and pass on skills (e.g., baking, carpentry, needlework, leatherwork, etc.) which otherwise may be lost.

The neglect of some children by our society was a policy issue mentioned by some grandparents. These areas of neglect included children's health, homelessness and the sexual abuse of children, especially those who are homeless.

Issues Relevant to Both Grandparents and Grandchildren: Social policy issues grandparents mentioned under this heading concerned health, emergency services, housing, financial difficulties when legal battles were resorted to.

Grandparents want mediation rather than the courts to try to resolve matters of access, custody and what may be malicious allegations made by warring parents. They are also adamant that the interests and wishes of the child in any family disputes must be paramount.

It is evident that the social policy issues of grandparents cover a broad range of societal issues which stem from their wishes and concerns about society, their families, their grandchildren and themselves.

Specific Policy Issues

Most of the specific policy centred around legal issues, many of which arose out of the changing face of Ireland relative to divorce, separation, single parenthood and teenage pregnancy.

Issues Relevant to Marital Breakdown, Divorce and Separation: Changes in Irish society in this area impacted heavily on grandparents. Divorce, especially in sons' families, sometimes led to grandparents being denied access to their grandchildren and considerable legal wrangles which caused bitterness. These parents believe considerable legislation is needed relative to access for separated parents and grandparents. Additionally from their experiences of the courts and social workers it is obvious to them that many shortcomings in family law matters need to be addressed with urgency.

Issues Relevant to Single and Teenage Parenthood: Changes in sexual mores have led to a substantial increase in single and teenage parenthood. Grandparents whose children are single parents contributed substantially to their grandchildren's care. Grandparents whose children are teenage parents consider they become parents again in middle age. These grandparents, together with those whose children are involved in marital breakdown see the need for considerable changes in the law and social policy pertinent to their problems. This also needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Issues Relevant to Grandparents who are Members of the Travelling Community: These grandparents worry that social exclusion, poor housing and racism will negatively impact upon the lives of their grandchildren. They believe that their community should be involved in choice of where they and how they should live. Additionally, they believe that racism and exclusion towards Travellers needs to be eradicated.

From the legal provisions for grandparents in the US and Scotland, examined in Chapter 2, it is evident that Ireland is only beginning to accept that marital breakdown, single parenthood and teenage pregnancy are facts of life in Ireland. It is evident from the grandparents in this study that legal and other interventions are urgently required to protect children, their parents and when necessary, their grandparents. Furthermore, according to many grandparents who have experienced some of the negative social changes mentioned above, the best interests of the child needs to be placed paramount in all issues relating to them. Finally, access to family mediation as provided in Scotland and recommended by the grandparents, should be examined and a way of providing a system tailored to the Irish situation needs to be implemented urgently. Although family mediation has been available in Ireland since 1998, it was unknown to the grandparents in this study. This indicates that the service needs more publicity.

5.5 A Proposed Classification of Irish Grandparents

Based on the responses of the grandparents in the various segments, themes and variables throughout the previous chapter, we can tentatively suggest a classification system for

grandparents based on their degree of caregiving, involvement with their grandchildren and their feelings about being grandparents. Five different categories of grandparents are identified:

Non-Involved Grandparents: This category of grandparent, contains those who by their own volition are not involved in their grandchildren's lives and others who are more senior, whose families are so large that contact with their extended family has dissolved. This is especially the case when their grandchildren have grown up, got married and established their own households. Some input with the former sub-category of these grandparents, pointing out the joys of grandparenthood may induce involvement. The families of the latter sub-section of non-involved grandparents could be encouraged to build up a relationship with other senior grandparents, to their and their grandparents' advantage. Failing this, becoming a 'surrogate' or 'community' grandparent, suggested by one grandfather in the previous chapter, may be possible. Research in the US and Japan (Chamberlain, V. M., Fetterman, E. & Maher, M., 1994; Yamazaki, T, 1994) has shown that older people and young children benefit from contact with each other. A pilot study, replicating some of the better aspects of these intergenerational programmes should be attempted to examine their performance in an Irish context.

Proscribed Grandparents: This category of grandparent has faced or is facing very painful issues around separation from their grandchildren, legal and family disputes. Many are financially strapped by having to pay legal fees they cannot afford. This group of grandparents need every bit of help they can get from the State to alleviate their burden of grief and distress.

Custodial Grandparents: This category of grandparent encompasses those who have taken over the role of surrogate parent and those who have teenage children who have become pregnant and the grandparent/s are therefore parenting two generations. They face very painful issues surrounding their rights concerning non-legal custody and the fears, sometimes founded, that a psychologically distressed mother or father may remove the child from the

grandparents' custody. This removal may be to the detriment of the grandchild, who may be abused and/or neglected by their parent/s. The mothers of teenage parents have to face anomalies in the law (e.g., the removal of the single parent allowance in favour of their child), which upsets the financial and other balances of power within the family. This is particularly pertinent when the teenage parent is under the age permitted for sexual activity and still under the guardianship of his or her parent/s. Careful attention needs to be given to these complex familial matters in order to ease the burden for this category of grandparent.

Conscientious Grandparents: This category of grandparent gives generously of their time and, sometimes, finances, in the pursuit of helping their families. Some of these grandparents, usually grandmothers, become over-involved with caregiving to the detriment of their quality of life and health. This group should be recognised by the State for the superb roles they play in maintaining family solidarity and at the same time assisting the economy by providing informal child care. Those who are over-conscientious need to know that there are times to say 'no' and to be able to have some guilt-free time for themselves.

"Supergrans"²⁷: These grandparents have all the attributes of conscientious grandparents. In addition, their relationships with their grandchildren are based on equality. They engage or have engaged in what they call 'crazy' or fun activities. They in turn receive both instrumental and emotional support. These 'supergrans' should be encouraged for their efforts, not only with their grandchildren, but because they are promoting a positive attitude towards ageing among the younger generation. These are the grandparents to emulate and this needs recognition and promotion.

5.6 Conclusions

These chapters have described the world of grandparents as they see it. It is evident that many of their characteristics and perceptions are similar to grandparents elsewhere. However, in some instances they are also unique.

Because Ireland is facing rapid social change fuelled by a booming economy, these grandparents expressed great concern that some of the more negative effects of these changes may affect the lives of their grandchildren.

They worried that changes in family structure may lead to materialism. When two parents work they worry that the family hierarchy is changing and children's wishes and demands dominate.

The effects of drug and to a lesser extent alcohol abuse on their grandchildren is a source of great concern and they believe that children should be offered after-school activities to woo them away from these temptations.

Changes in sexual mores and marital breakdown has led to changes which impact on all family members, including grandparents. By their comments, it is evident that a considerable amount of legislation and social policy initiatives are urgently required to take into account these changes in family life and to regulate for equity for all involved.

Social policy issues which emerged strongly from this study are:

- Parenting programmes are required to assist working parents with the perceived guilt they feel on leaving children in day care while they work²⁸.
- An out-of-school and after-school initiative should be in place to assist working parents.
- The Family Mediation Service should offer assistance to grandparents when couples separate to help them iron out visitation with their grandchildren.

²⁷ And possibly grandfathers who did not emerge in this study but who might emerge if other more wide-ranging and systematic methods of sampling were used.

²⁸ This recommendation is similar to that in the Commission on the Family (1998) which recommends that research should steer the development of "parent education programmes for Irish families who are coping with parenting difficulties" (p. 88).

- Some Government Departments need to strengthen their customer information service and also ensure that customers are treated with esteem and that their dignity is not eroded while seeking assistance from Departments.

It is obvious from the very tentative beginnings this study has made into understanding the lives of grandparents in Ireland that much remains to be done. There is clearly a need for more research to flesh out our understanding of the grandparents in some of the diverse circumstances identified in Chapter 4, especially those whose lives have been affected by changes brought about by the social problems of drugs, alcohol, marital breakdown, single and teenage parents.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Methods

Appendix B: Interview Preamble

Appendix C: Letter about the qualitative study to generate respondents

Appendix D: Demographic Questionnaire

Appendix E: Tables from which figures in Appendix A were generated

