

Grandparent-Adult Grandchild Relationships: Perspective of Attachment among College Students

¹Stephanie Hlebovy, ²Abel Gitimu Waithaka, ³Priscilla N. Gitimu

^{1,2,3} Youngstown State University

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine factors that influence grandparent-grandchild relationships from college students' perspectives. Data was collected among 138 adult university students, with 93 females (67.4%) and 45 males (32.6%). The participants completed two scales: Grandparent Child Relationship Scale (GPCRS) with 48 items and Adult Attachment (AA) Scale with 18 items. One-Way ANOVA showed that there was significant difference in the college student relationship with both grandmother and grandfather on positive affect, communication, involvement, anger and role confusion. One Way ANOVA also showed dependency and anxiety was significant in grandfather-grandchild relationships whereas closeness, dependency, and anxiety were all significant for grandmother-grandchild relationship.

Keywords: relationships; attachment; close; depend; anxiety; positive affect, involvement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Some individuals may not have any grandparents, and for some children, grandparents are primary caregivers. Wang and Marcotte (2007) found the number of grandparents raising their grandchildren has risen steadily in the United States. Poehlmann, (2003) proposed grandparents raising grandchildren has resulted to intergenerational transmission and formation of strong grandparent-grandchild relationship. Wang and Marcotte (2007) noted the raising cases of grandparents raising grandchildren can be attributed to high rates of failing marriage and high divorce rates have contributed to children living in a household with only one parent, causing the need for a grandparent to be around for a majority of the child's life. Also, the amount of parental incarcerations has played a huge role in grandparents raising their grandchildren (Wang & Marcotte, 2007; Breheny., Stephens., & Spilsbury, 2013)

It is imperative to look at grandparent-grandchild relationships in adulthood because so many of grandparents today play a huge role in their grandchild's life (Geurts, Ventiburg & Poortman, 2012; Wang & Marcotte, 2007). Grandparents play a huge role in education, caregiving, and even raising their grandchildren. This is happening now more than ever before and has also been making an emotional and financial impact for these grandparents as well (Geurts, Ventiburg & Poortman, 2012). The main purpose of this study is to identify the closeness in grandparent-grandchild relationship from early childhood, and identify possible continuation of attachment throughout adulthood.

According to Bowlby's theory of attachment, there are different levels of attachment for certain individuals (McLeod, 2009). There are secure, avoidant, ambivalent, and disorganized relationships (Hayashi & Strickland, 1998). Brook, Zhang, Balka, and Brook (2012) noted of intergenerational transmission theory that explains how certain traits are passed down from generation to generation and whether or not this plays any key factors in relational attachment between young adults and grandparents. Brook et al (2012) identified factors that can contribute to intergenerational transmission which can include parenting styles.

Social learning theory emphasizes the importance of parents as role models especially in early childhood and transmission occurs directly through punishment, reinforcement, or rewards (Erzinger & Steiger, 2014). Social learning theory works in conjunction with intergenerational transmission as social aspect is how parents raise their children. The transmission explains how this type of raising is passed down from generation to generation. Grandparents may not have a direct effect when it comes to intergenerational transmission, but they do in fact have an effect by how they raised their own children, and how these grandchildren will be raised (Erzinger & Steiger, 2014; Brook, Zhang, Balka, and Brook, 2012).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Poehlmann, (2003) noted that families in which grandparents raise their grandchildren has increasingly risen and has become part of family structure. According to Poehlmann (2003) in 1997, almost 5.5 million children in the United States, (7.7%) of children ages 18 years were living in homes with a grandparent and almost three-fourths of these children were living in grandparent-headed households. The major reasons for grandparent-headed household are associated with parental drug abuse, parental incarceration, teen pregnancy, and other various difficulties with parents (Poehlmann, 2003; Yardley, Mason & Watson, 2009).

Children that felt abandoned by their parents when living with grandparents had an avoidant attachment to their non-custodial parents (Poehlmann, 2003). Grandchildren living in grandparents headed household tended to display more behavioral issues and less likely to receive health services. In contrast, these children living with grandparents displayed very little difference from their counterparts when it came to employment, education, and other physical and mental stressors (Breheny, Stephens & Spilsbury, 2013; Poehlmann, 2003). Wang and Marcotte (2007) found that the majority of grandparents caring for grandchildren are generally older and poorer than their counterparts and majority being African American grandmothers (77 percent.). Geurts, Van Tilburg, and Poortman, (2011) noted that 22 percent of grandparents in the United States are involved in various care-giving acts with their grandchildren. About 33 percent of grandmothers compared to 26 percent of grandfathers are involved with some kind of care for grandchildren. Smorti, Tschiesner, and Farneti (2012) explained that grandmothers display more symbolic activities with their grandchildren whereas grandfathers focused more on sports and physical activity. Grandmothers carried out more activities with grandchildren than grandfathers, and paternal more than maternal and indicated that this confirms more traditional roles and values regarding the grandparent-grandchild relationship (Smorti, Tschiesner, and Farneti, 2012).

Grandparent plays a significant role in many families and their relationship with grandchildren can be a special one (Horwood, 2004; Thiele & Whelen, 2006). There are benefits in well-being and morale for grandparents who identify and play their role as grandparents (Shapiro, 2004). Participation in the grandparent role helps them to participate in social life, form strong family ties and become a productive members of the family and society (Breheny, Stephens & Spilsbury, 2013). Many grandparents provide childcare for their grandchildren on regular basis due parental work commitment, enabling both family care and working parents (Horwood, 2004). In some case, childcare is a socially prescribed obligation of the contemporary grandparent role in fa family setting (Breheny, Stephens & Spilsbury, 2013). Grandparents who have primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren are increasingly on research and social agenda internationally. The reasons for this increase may be as a result of children neglect/or abuse, family violence, irretrievable breakdown in the relationship between children and the parents, inability for the parent to care for the children, which may arise from mental illness, or drug abuse (Boetto, 2010; Purcal, Brennan, Cass & Jenkins, 2014).

Grandparents who are caring for their grandchildren are likely to be financially disadvantaged (Brandon, 2004). Grandparent's income is significantly affected by changes in employment due to taking on the care of the grandchildren. Most scale back employment when grandchildren join the household (Worrall, 2009). Housing also is a key concern for grandparent. Grandparent kinship caretakers often bear the cost of establishing a suitable care environment for the grandchildren which may entail furnishing a bedroom, renovating or even moving house and outfitting and equipping a child for school and out of school activities (Yardley, Mason & Watson, 2009). Health may deteriorate after grandparents take on the primary care role of the grandchildren. Research has shown observed increased stress and the exacerbation of pre-existing health conditions on the side of the grandparents who are primary caretakers (Yardley, Mason & Watson, 2009). Grandparent are generally older than the parents and age-related health conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, heart diseases, back problems and high blood pressure are more often reported (Nandy & Selwyn, 2011).

The social isolation of the grandparents who primarily take care of their grandchildren is another significant finding (Farmer, 2009; Yardley, Mason & Watson, 2009). Due to their care responsibility, they are often limited in their ability to participate in social activities with their peers. At the sometime, grandparents caretakers have reported difficulties in connecting with and relating to younger parents in schools or playgroups (Yardley, mason & Watson, 2009; Purcal, Brennan, Cass & Jenkins, 2014).

It is well documented that grandparent –grandchild relationship is important during grandchild's childhood (Harper, 2005). In the United States, 22% of the grandparents engage in caregiving activities and 2% raise their grandchildren (Bryson & Casper, 1999; Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005). In European countries, 33% of grandmothers and 26% of the grandfathers care for their grandchildren on regular basis (Hank & Buber, 2009). Little attention has been given to the importance of grandparent-grandchild relationship when grandchildren are adults (Rosenthal, 2000). Regular contact between grandparent and grandchildren declines when children grow older (Silverstein & Long, 1998). This relationship continue to be highly valued, personally meaningful and potentially important (Kamp, 2005; Wegner & Burholy, 2001).

The relationship with an adult grandchild contributes to grandparent's well-being because of the grandparent's attachment to their role (Reitzes & Mutran, 2004). It is argued that the meaning of this single role includes senses on continuity on carrying the family line, extension of self and satisfaction by contributing to the children well-being (Hayslip, Henderson & Shore, 2003). Adult grandchildren contribute to their grand-parent well-being because they can be a source of pride and grandparent can drive enjoyment and companionship from the relationship with their adult grandchildren (Harwood & Lin, 2000; Tomlin, 1998). Adult grandchildren can contribute to grandparent's well-being by providing support as many older people maintain contact with younger generation only within the family context (Piercy, 1998; Hagestad & Uhlenbarg, 2006). Adult grandchildren can assist grandparents in need of care indicating intergenerational relationship in general is beneficial for grandparent's well-being (Cantor, 1979).

The person network consists of all people with whom an individual has frequent and important contact. People in person's network form a potential source of social support (Geurts, Ventiburg & Poortman, 2012). Inclusion of adult grandchild into grandparent network provides strength to the grandparent-adult grandchild bond. It has shown that grandparents who build up strong relationship with their grandchildren during childhood are more likely to continue this relationship into adulthood than grandparents who had distant relationship, as strong bonds are established during childhood (Geurts, Ventiburg & Poortman, 2012; Taylor, Robia & Lee, 2005).

The quality of adult grandchild-grandparents relationship was higher when grandparent had extensively cared for their grandchild during childhood (Brown, 2003). The relationship in childhood is important because it likely to enable continuation of the relationship when both parties advance in age (Harwood, 2001). The older generation strives to maintain continuity in intergenerational relationships, while the younger generations tend to exaggerate difference to facilitate separations from family of origin (Aquilino, 1999). A strong bond between grandparent and grandchild at early stage of the relationship may ensure continuity at later stage even through discrepancies in the developmental stages become increasingly prominent (Brown, 2003).

Geurts, Ventiburg and Poortman (2012) noted of some family characteristics that may affect the grandparent-grandchild relationship such as: grandparent's number of grandchildren, partner status, contact with adult children, geographic proximity to grandchildren and adult child's partner status. Having many grandchildren constrain the importance of the relationship and lessen the opportunities for contact with each individual grandchild (Elder & Conger, 2000). Regular contact with an adult child increases opportunities for an adult grandchild-grandparent relationship to improve and greater geographic proximity between grandparent and grandchild increase likelihood of a strong bond in the relationship (Brown, 2003).

Grandparent's age, gender and health has a higher likelihood to influence the relationship with adult grandchild. Grandparents tends to evaluate kin's relationships as more emotionally rewarding than other relationships due to their age and they try to have more frequent contact with grandchildren (Lyyra, Lumme-Sandt, Tiikkainen & Heikkinen, 2010). Grandmothers are more likely to identify an adult grandchild in their relationship than grandfathers because women are generally more involved in kin's relationships than men (Michalski & Shackelford, 2005). Also because the grandmother role is concerning relationship is more prescribed by gender norms that the grandfather (Reitzes & Mutran, 2004). Physical and cognitive health problems may impose restrictions of older adult's capacities to engage in interaction relationship with their adult grandchildren (Geurts, Ventiburg & Poortman, 2012)

Mansson (2012) examined how grandparents express affection for their young adult grandchildren and noted that grandchildren do develop an emotionally close attachment to their grandparents. This relationship is extremely important to grandchildren when they are young because there is a continuation in adulthood that affects morals, values, and attitudes towards education and many other factors (Taylor, Robia & Lee, 2005; Mansson, 2012). Actively, the grandparents ask their young adult college students about academic work, romantic relationships and plans for their futures. Many grandparents also showed concern by asking their own children about their grandchildren (Mansson, 2012; Michalski & Shackelford, 2005). Grandparent-grandchild relationship is indeed important for attachment, closeness, and psychological well-being for young college students and the bond plays an important role in educational development and the forming of future relationships (Mansson, 2012). The main purpose of this study is to identify the closeness in grandparent-grandchild relationship from early childhood, and identify possible continuation of attachment throughout adulthood.

3. METHOD

Research Questions:

RQ 1: Does Grandfather Child relationship influence college student adult attachment?

RQ 2: Does Grandmother Child relationship influence college student adult attachment?

RQ 3: Is there a significance difference on high and low Grandfather Child Relationship?

RQ 4: Is there a significance difference on high and low Grand-Mother Child relationship?

Materials:

The Grandparent-Child Relationship Survey (GCRS) was used in this study. It consisted of 48-item designed to measure adult children's perception of the grandparent- adult grandchild relationship. The GCRS instrument has been standardized in a university population and has excellent consistency and good predictive validity. The Adult Attachment Scale was another instrument used in this study. It consisted of 18-items designed to measure adult attachment style dimensions including comfort with closeness and intimacy, comfort with depending on others, and worry about being rejected or unloved. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale.

Procedure:

The study consisted of a self-report questionnaire. The investigator distributed the surveys to students in specific classes after receiving permission from their professors in a university college in the United States. The Investigator explained the purpose of the study to the participants prior to data collection. The data was analyzed using SPSS. Data was collected from 138 participants and it took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the survey.

4. RESULTS

RQ 1: Does Grandfather Child relationship influence college student adult attachment?

Table 1

		N	Mean	Std. Dev	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
AASCLOSE	Low GrandFA Relationship	44	3.6780	.80003	1	.375	.593	.444
	High GrandFA Relationship	41	3.8110	.79079	83	.633		
	Total	85	3.7422	.79366	84			
AASDEPEND	Low GrandFA Relationship	43	2.7442	.84151	1	4.815	6.853	.011
	High GrandFA Relationship	42	3.2202	.83492	83	.703		
	Total	85	2.9794	.86697	84			
AASANXIETY	Low GrandFA Relationship	44	2.9962	1.10874	1	9.442	8.269	.005
	High GrandFA Relationship	42	2.3333	1.02476	84	1.142		
	Total	86	2.6725	1.11333	85			

One-way ANOVA comparing High and Low grandfather child relationship was carried out on three scales Close, Depend and Anxiety. A significant difference was found on Depend ($F(1, 83) = 6.853, P < .05$) and Anxiety ($F(1, 84) = 8.267, P < .05$). Tukey's *HSD* was used to determine the nature of the differences between high and low grandfather child relationship. This analysis revealed that on Depend student with Low Grandfather relationship scored lower ($M = 2.744, sd = .842$) than those with High Grandfather Relationship ($M = 3.220, sd = .835$). On Anxiety scale student Low Grandfather relationship also scored lower ($M = 2.333, sd = 1.024$) than those with High Grandfather relationship ($M = 2.996, sd = 1.108$). No significant difference was found on the scale of Close between High and low Grandfather Child relationship.

RQ 2: Does Grandmother Child relationship influence college student adult attachment?

Table 2

		N	Mean	Std. Dev	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
AASCLOSE	Low GrandMO Relationship	57	3.4357	.79604	1	6.707	11.201	.001
	High GrandMO Relationship	54	3.9275	.74957	109	.599		
	Total	111	3.6749	.80888	110			
AASDEPEND	Low GrandMO Relationship	55	2.7333	.79453	1	7.689	11.179	.001
	High GrandMO Relationship	55	3.2621	.86281	108	.688		
	Total	110	2.9977	.86724	109			
AASANXIETY	Low GrandMO Relationship	57	2.8041	1.07788	1	7.813	7.148	.009
	High GrandMO Relationship	55	2.2758	1.01086	110	1.093		
	Total	112	2.5446	1.07408	111			

One-way ANOVA comparing High and Low grandmother child relationship was carried out on three scales Close, Depend and Anxiety. A significant difference was found on Close ($F(1, 109) = 11.201, P < .05$), Depend ($F(1, 108) = 11.178, P < .05$) and Anxiety ($F(1, 110) = 7.148, P < .05$). Tukey's *HSD* was used to determine the nature of the differences between high and low grandmother child relationship. This analysis revealed that on Close scale student with Low Grandmother relationship scored lower ($M = 3.436, sd = .796$) than those with High Grandmother Relationship ($M = 3.928, sd = .7496$). On Depend scale student Low Grandmother relationship also scored lower ($M = 2.733, sd = .8628$) than those with High Grandmother relationship ($M = 3.262, sd = .7946$). On Anxiety student Low Grandmother relationship scored higher ($M = 2.804, sd = 1.078$) than those with High Grandmother relationship ($M = 2.275, sd = 1.0108$).

RQ 3: Is there a significance difference on high and low Grandfather Child Relationship?

Table 3

		N	Mean	Std. Dev	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
FAPositiveAffect	Low GrandFA Relationship	44	4.0657	1.59894	1	117.248	84.481	.000
	High GrandFA Relationship	43	6.3876	.43736	85	1.388		
	Total	87	5.2133	1.65380	86			
FAInvolvement	Low GrandFA Relationship	44	3.2462	1.26086	1	136.543	122.04	.000
	High GrandFA Relationship	43	5.7519	.79796	85	1.119		
	Total	87	4.4847	1.64121	86			
FACommunication	Low GrandFA Relationship	44	3.0273	1.34101	1	155.080	124.08	.000
	High GrandFA Relationship	43	5.6977	.82966	85	1.250		
	Total	87	4.3471	1.74315	86			
FAAnger	Low GrandFA Relationship	44	5.7045	1.67859	1	16.721	10.179	.002
	High GrandFA Relationship	43	6.5814	.66306	85	1.643		
	Total	87	6.1379	1.34832	86			

One-way ANOVA comparing High and Low grandfather child relationship was carried out on four scales Positive Affect, Involvement, Communication and Anger. A significant difference was found on Positive Affect ($F(1, 85) = 84.481, P < .05$), Involvement ($F(1, 85) = 122.04, P < .05$), Communication ($F(1, 85) = 124.08, P < .05$) and Anger ($F(1, 85) = 10.179, P < .05$).

$P < .05$) Tukey's *HSD* was used to determine the nature of the differences between high and low grandmother child relationship. This analysis revealed that on Positive Affect student with Low Grandfather relationship scored lower ($M = 4.066$, $sd = 1.599$) than those with High Grandfather Relationship ($M = 6.388$, $sd = .4371$). On Involvement scale student Low Grandfather relationship also scored lower ($M = 3.246$, $sd = 1.261$) than those with High Grandfather relationship ($M = 5.752$, $sd = .798$). On Communication student with Low Grandfather relationship scored lower ($M = 3.027$, $sd = 1.341$) than those with High Grandfather Relationship ($M = 5.698$, $sd = .8297$). On Anger scale student Low Grandfather relationship also scored lower ($M = 5.705$, $sd = 1.6786$) than those with High Grandfather relationship ($M = 6.581$, $sd = .663$).

RQ 4: Is there a significance difference on high and low Grand-Mother Child Relationship?

Table 4

		N	Mean	Std. Dev	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
MOPositiveAffect	Low GrandMO Relationship	57	4.4927	1.4395	1	100.24	86.54	.000
	High GrandMO Relationship	56	6.3765	.47726	111	1.158		
	Total	113	5.4263	1.4293	112			
MoResentRoleConfusion	Low GrandMO Relationship	57	5.6579	1.4210	1	45.609	43.53	.000
	High GrandMO Relationship	56	6.9286	.24175	111	1.048		
	Total	113	6.2876	1.2023	112			
MOIdentification	Low GrandMO Relationship	57	3.8187	1.3334	1	127.88	101.74	.000
	High GrandMO Relationship	56	5.9464	.85227	111	1.257		
	Total	113	4.8732	1.5452	112			
MoCommunication	Low GrandMO Relationship	57	4.4687	1.4725	1	98.575	77.902	.000
	High GrandMO Relationship	56	6.3367	.58834	111	1.265		
	Total	113	5.3944	1.4609	112			

One-way ANOVA comparing High and Low grandmother child relationship was carried out on four scales Positive Affect, ResentRoleConfusion, Identification and Communication. A significant difference was found on Positive Affect ($F(1, 111) = 86.542$, $P < .05$), ResentRoleConfusion ($F(1, 111) = 43.533$, $P < .05$), Identification ($F(1, 111) = 101.74$, $P < .05$) and Communication ($F(1, 111) = 77.902$, $P < .05$) Tukey's *HSD* was used to determine the nature of the differences between high and low grandmother child relationship. This analysis revealed that on Positive Affect student with Low Grandmother relationship scored lower ($M = 4.493$, $sd = 1.439$) than those with High Grandmother Relationship ($M = 6.377$, $sd = .4773$). On ResentRoleConfusion scale student Low Grandmother relationship also scored lower ($M = 5.658$, $sd = 1.421$) than those with High Grandmother relationship ($M = 6.929$, $sd = .2417$). On Identification student with Low Grandmother relationship scored lower ($M = 3.819$, $sd = 1.333$) than those with High Grandmother Relationship ($M = 5.947$, $sd = .8533$). On Communication scale student Low Grandmother relationship also scored lower ($M = 4.469$, $sd = 1.472$) than those with High Grandmother relationship ($M = 6.337$, $sd = .5883$).

5. DISCUSSION

The findings in this particular research displayed significant statistical differences on dependency and anxiety on the college student's attachment between the grandfather-grandchild relationship but closeness was not significant. These results are important because it is clear that the grandfather-grandchild relationship is affected by certain factors. Smorti, Tschiesner, and Farneti (2012) noted the importance of particularly traditional gender roles. The authors explained the view that men are breadwinners for the family and women are naturally caregivers. Dependency in this particular research could mean that young and older adult college student's depend financially on their grandfather's when it comes to tuition and other expenses, which may cause anxiety on the student's end of not being able to repay debts to their grandfather's. The student may have felt financially dependent on grandfather's, but do not have an emotionally close bond to them (Smorti, Tschiesner, & Farneti, 2012).

Research findings in this study showed the grandmother-grandchild relationship, closeness, anxiety, and dependency were all equally important whereas the grandfather-grandchild relationship and closeness displayed no statistical importance. This again proves Bowlby and Ainsworth's (1982) and McLeod's (2009) studies on attachment, women are generally more nurturing by nature. The woman is supposed to be the caregiver and the male a provider, leaving the mother (this case being the grandmother) at home with children to provide more matriarchal tasks. This would further explain why closeness was important and worth noting for the grandmother versus grandfather. Results also showed less anxiety than it did with the grandfather however more dependency was found in the grandmother relationship than grandfather relationship with adult grandchildren.

The research findings proved that when it comes to the grandfather-grandchild relationship and high and low factors, positive affect, involvement, communication, and anger were indeed all significant among the college students. It turned out that all of these results were highly significant. Poehlmann (2003) explained that father involvement (also pertaining to grandparents) is highly important for the relationship and will be affected either one way or another as a child reaches a college student level.

There was significant difference on High and low on all scales with Grandmother-adult grandchild relationship. The findings results focused on different aspects such as positive affect, resentment role confusion, identification, and communication. All results were significant showing very important statistical differences. When it pertains to grandmother-grandchild relationships, different factors were focused on because most of the time a grandmother will be more involved in their grandchild's life than the grandfather. Smorti, Tschiesner, and Farneti, (2012) revealed that grandmothers display more symbolic roles and activities such as communication whereas grandfathers are more interested in sports and physical activity. These results confirm that grandparent-grandchild relationships mostly play the traditional values and concepts that have existed in the society (Smorti, Tschiesner, and Farneti, 2012).

6. CONCLUSION

The study showed that there is significant statistical difference in the college student's age and the relationship with their grandmothers. The Adult Attachment Scale results revealed that dependency and anxiety were significant with the grandfather relationship, and closeness, dependency, and anxiety were significant for the grandmother relationship. The findings showed that positive affect, involvement, communication and anger were all significant when it came to the grandfather relationship with the college students. The research also showed that positive effect, resentment role confusion, identification, and communication were all significant in the grandmother relationship.

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