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### Does paternal childcare replace grandparental support in dual-earner families?

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## Does paternal childcare replace grandparental support in dual-earner families?

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Fathers' participation in childcare has been on a steady rise in recent years. This article explores whether such growing involvement is replacing grandparents' caring role or whether the two are complementary. The data used here were drawn from the *Survey on the use of parental leave in Spain*, whose coverage included 1125 working parents living with their likewise working partners and children under the age of 13 years. The results suggest that paternal and grandparental childcare tend to be more substitutional than complementary. The analysis also shows that a significant portion of dual-earner households do not routinely rely on grandparents for childcare, and that paternal and maternal grandparents do not replace but rather complement each other.

**Keywords:** grandparents; fathers; childcare; work–family balance; Spain

According to popular wisdom, in Spanish households with working mothers, grandparents are a key resource in the family–work balance. A number of surveys conducted by the country's Sociological Research Centre and its Institute for the Elderly and Social Services (Spanish initials, IMSERSO) reveal that a growing proportion of grandparents take part in caring for their grandchildren. In 1993, 15% of grandfathers and 14% of grandmothers over the age of 65 years responded that they were caring for grandchildren at the time of the interview, whereas by 2006, the percentages had risen to 26 and 23%, respectively (Meil, 2011). According to an IMSERSO survey conducted in 2010, the percentages had climbed even further to 37 and 33%, respectively (IMSERSO, 2010). Social researchers (Aguinaga, 2004; Pérez Ortiz, 2007), some of whom have even adopted the term 'grandparental slavery' (Guijarro, 2001), as well as grandparents themselves (Megías & Ballesteros, 2011), have criticised this group's increasing involvement in childcare as an undue burden on family solidarity.

In Spain, increased grandparental involvement in childcare has been associated with mothers' growing engagement in paid work, the high costs of formal childcare, the limited scope of public policies in support of families (Flaquer, 2001; Tobío, 2008), and the increase of lone parents (Meil, 2011), in which cases grandparents support is usually crucial. Literature from other countries has also identified demographic changes that are undoubtedly influencing grandparental care in Spain. First, as in Ireland (Share & Kerrins, 2009), the extension in the age of mothers' first birth (Davia & Legazpe, 2013) increases the probability of grandparents leaving employment. Therefore, they will have time to

provide childcare more frequently. Second, a higher life expectancy at birth implies that the different generations share more years of life than ever (Arber & Timonen, 2012; López Doblas & Díaz Conde, 2013).

According to Tobío (2012), lack of family policy and the need to care for small children when either parents work have led to the appearance of a newly extended family. Nevertheless, relevant advances in parental leave policies have been developed in Spain during the last three decades, and younger cohorts are more likely to take them, although its use is still minority in comparison with other European countries (Escobedo, Flaquer, & Navarro, 2012; Escobedo & Meil, 2012). The increase use of preschool childcare services has been even more intense. Over 95% of children between the ages of 3 and 6 years go to school in Spain, and institutionalisation in public or private day care centres of children under the age of 3 years have grown from 3.3% in 1991 to 28.6% in 2011 (MEC, 2012). Nevertheless, as in other countries like Ireland (Share & Kerrins, 2009), the economic cost of public childcare services is increasing in Spain, limiting the budget of the families. These higher costs, together with a reduction in the time devoted to work by the parents due to unemployment, could be changing the trend of a raising formal childcare.

At the same time, men's participation in household chores and especially in childcare also grew (García Román & Ajenjo Cosp, 2012; Meil, 2006). According to the INE's *Time Use Survey*, the percentage of men who devoted time daily to household chores and caring for the children with whom they live grew by 4 percentage points (from 70 to 74.4%) between 2003 and 2010, while the

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amount of time devoted rose by 24 min (from 2 h and 8 min to 2 h and 32 min). The gender gap continues to be wider; however: on average, almost all women (91.2% in 2010) devoted nearly 2 h (1:57) more to such chores than men. In the age group of 25–44 years, the gender gap in the percentage of people caring for children daily dropped from 20 percentage points in 2003 to 15.6 in 2010, while the difference in the time devoted also slide from 47 to 39 min. When men's participation in household chores was measured not by time-use statistics but in terms of the interspousal distribution of such chores and childcare, a gradual decline was observed in the proportion of families organised around the traditional model, together with an increase in men's involvement in all typical domestic tasks. Surveys conducted in Madrid in 1995 and 2003 on a representative sample of women with children under the age of 13 years asked respondents about the interspousal distribution of 13 routine household chores and 12 childcare-associated tasks. For each and every task defined, the proportion of women claiming to perform it exclusively declined, while the percentage reporting that they shared the chore with their spouse equally rose in nearly all of them. Further to the definition of households as traditional, collaborative, or quasi-egalitarian, the aforementioned findings showed a 22% decline in traditional households and a 7% dip in collaborative households, while the quasi-egalitarian group soared by 186% (Meil, 2006).

While the relationship between a mother's occupational status and grandparents' role is well documented in the literature, the effects of a father's occupational status and his willingness to care for children on grandparental support have been studied less thoroughly. The present article aims to analyse whether the change in gender roles towards greater paternal participation in childcare has translated into less grandparental involvement. To put it another way, it aims to determine whether the change to a more egalitarian family life style has meant lesser dependence on intergenerational solidarity and safety nets. The question is if the new extended family model attributed by Tobío (2012) to mothers' growing participation in the labour market should be viewed as a mere transitional phase. The alternative explanation would be that intergenerational support is an expression of a family-oriented care model characterised by intense and permanent intergenerational relations, irrespective of the distribution of household chores and the presence or absence of other resources to balance work and family life.

### Literature review

Most international studies on the involvement of grandparents in childcare report on the impact of mothers' (see Borra & Palma, 2009, for instance) or both parents' (see Igel & Szydlik, 2011) occupational status without

specifying gender. In Spain, no studies have been conducted to relate maternal and paternal occupational status, paternal involvement in childcare, and grandparental support in the latter. Implicit in these shortcomings is the theoretical assumption that care revolves around the mother–son/daughter twosome, in which mothers establish and coordinate the household's childcare resources, including, most prominently, fathers and grandparents.

While no quantitative studies have been conducted in Spain to determine whether greater paternal involvement in childcare entails less intense grandparental engagement, qualitative analyses do shed some light on the subject. Romero-Balsas, Muntanyola-Saura, and Rogero-García (2013) found that fathers who took longer leave to care for their children were reluctant to allow grandparents to participate intensely in caring for their grandchildren. Grandparents themselves have been observed to feel less useful when fathers devote more time to their children (Pérez Ortiz, 2007).

In other countries, most studies exploring the relationship between grandparental childcare and the distribution of paid and unpaid work within the couple do not distinguish grandparents' support from other non-parental caregivers (Bittman, Craig, & Folbre, 2004; Craig, 2007; Van Dijk & Siegers, 1996). In Italy, other family members' (essentially grandparents') participation in childcare has been observed to be related to greater paternal involvement in routine care (such as nappy changing, bathing, or feeding) (Tanturri & Mencarini, 2009). Bittman et al. (2004) found that in Australia non-parental childcare was related to a more egalitarian distribution of this task within the couple. Equality in this case did not stem from any significant rise in fathers' participation, however, but from the partial replacement of mothers' care by others. According to that study, most paternal care involved supervision and presence rather than physical or more intense participation. Another study in Australia showed that the existence of non-parental caregivers had no effect on working mothers' 'free time without children', for they usually re-invested that time in remunerated employment (Craig, 2007). For men, however, this support did lead to more 'free time without children' (Craig, 2007). In a qualitative study on Portuguese fathers, Wall, Aboim, and Marinho (2007) showed that grandparents favoured greater intracouple equality, both in terms of remunerated work and of childcare.

### Methodology

The information used here was drawn from the *Survey on the use of parental leave in Spain*, which contains information about participation in caring for children under the age of 13 years by the actors concerned. A representative sample of 4000 people between the ages of 25 and 60 years interviewed by telephone between January and

March 2012 served as a basis for defining a subsample of 1125 respondents who, at the time of the interview, had remunerated employment, lived with their partner, and had children under 13 with at least one living grandparent. The questionnaire was designed by the authors' research group and the survey was performed by the University of Granada's survey institute, Centro de Análisis y Documentación Política y Electoral de Andalucía.

Most sources and research on grandparental childcare used the grandparents themselves as respondents. Here, however, the vantage point was one of the parents of the targeted children. Unlike other studies, in which only mothers were interviewed (such as Van Dijk & Siegers, 1996), this survey covered respondents of both sexes.

The dependent variable was the *frequency of general maternal or paternal grandparental support in caring for the respondent's children*; when support was provided by both sides of the family, the data for the most frequent source of care were included. The possible responses were *daily, weekly, several times a month, several times a year, or never*. The first step was to conduct a descriptive analysis, by type of relationship (maternal or paternal grandparents), of the frequency of grandparental participation in caring for children under the age of 13 years. In the second step, two linear regression models were formulated to compare the main working hypothesis (existence of a substitutional relationship between paternal and grandparental childcare). The dependent variable selected for the first model was the *time devoted to childcare on a normal working day (excluding children's sleeping hours)*. The dependent variable selected for the second model was the *frequency of routine grandparental childcare*, with numerical values of 1 (never) to 5 (daily). Two types of variables were included in the models to control for the possible effects of other relevant factors:

- (a) *Family- and family member-related variables.* Age of the youngest child; number of children: '1' = 1, '2' = 2 and '3, or more' = 3; mother's working hours: 'less than 35' = 0, '35 or more' = 1; father's working hours: 'less than 35' = 0, '35 or more' = 1; income measured as one of the six brackets; and respondent's sex: 'male' = 0, 'female' = 1. Men's involvement in household chores was defined as the sum of the replies to the question about who performed a series of five tasks (1 = the woman always, 5 = the man always). Where a third party performed the task, it was tallied as if it were shared equally by the two partners.
- (b) *Context- and other care resource-related variables.* The children have lunch at school: 'no' = 0, 'yes' = 1; 'distance in hours to the closest grandparents'; hours of paid housekeeping per week: '10 h or less or no housekeeper' = 0, '10 h or more' = 1.

## Results

### *Frequency of grandparental child care in dual-earner families*

Grandparental involvement in childcare when both parents work is a widespread situation. As shown in Table 1, one-third (31%) of the families with children under the age of 13 years claimed to receive such support daily, while a further quarter (24%) reported weekly assistance. In other words, just over half (55%) responded that they received routine support, while the other 45% received help only sporadically or not at all.

As in other studies (Attias-Donfut, 1995; Pérez Ortiz, 2007; Tobío, 2012), maternal grandparents were found to be more frequent caregivers than paternal grandparents, whose support was not, however, merely sporadic or non-existent. Indeed, 14% of the respondents reported daily and 21% weekly involvement by paternal grandparents, that is, just over one in three dual-earner families benefited from this assistance.

Moreover, assistance from paternal grandparents was not observed to replace maternal grandparental support. In other words, the former did not stand in for the latter: rather, the two were complementary, as substantiated by the high positive value (0.38) of the Pearson correlation coefficient for support from both sides. Consequently, more frequent maternal grandparental assistance was attendant upon more frequent support from paternal grandparents, and vice versa. Of the families with living grandparents on both sides, 7% claimed to receive aid daily from both, whereas 28% received only token support (never or several times a year).

Daily grandparental involvement in childcare was found to be most intense for very small children, especially 0- to 2-year olds (39%), and somewhat less intense in the 3- to 5-year bracket (30%) (Table 2). At these ages, no or only sporadic assistance was observed to be very rare and primarily distance related. The older the children,

Table 1. Frequency of grandparental childcare in dual-earner families with children under the age of 13 years (in per cent) Spain 2012.

	Maternal grandparents (%)	Paternal grandparents (%)	Any grandparent (%)
Daily	25	14	31
Weekly	22	21	24
Several times a month	19	18	17
Several times a year	16	19	13
Never	18	29	15
Total	100	100	100
Number of cases	1098	1071	1125

Source: *Survey on use of parental leave*, 2012. Autonomous University of Madrid.

Table 2. Frequency of grandparental childcare in dual-earner families with children under 13 years, by age of youngest child. Spain 2012.

	0–2 (%)	3–5 (%)	6–8 (%)	9–12 (%)	Total (%)
Daily	39	30	26	22	31
Weekly	27	27	21	18	24
Several times a month	17	22	18	14	17
Several times a year	9	11	16	21	13
Never	9	11	19	25	15
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Number of cases	424	257	195	247	1123

Source: *Survey on use of parental leave*, 2012. Autonomous University of Madrid.

the more sporadic support became, and although a fairly high proportion (22%) of families with children from 9 to 12 received assistance daily, support was merely sporadic for nearly a majority (46%).

Overall, although grandparental childcare was found to be very common, daily support of this nature was not the most frequent 'solution' to balancing family life and work when both parents had remunerated employment. That result was observed in all stages of the family cycle, for even in the 0- to 2-year-old bracket, daily grandparental assistance was absent in nearly two of every three (61%) families.

#### *Fathers' involvement in childcare in dual-earner families*

Ninety-nine per cent of fathers in dual-earner families claimed to engage in childcare daily, for 3.95 h on average. That is 1.7 h fewer than the mean time devoted by women in such families (5.67 h).

Conversely, men devoted more time to paid work than women, with a mean of 41.7 compared with 35.2 h weekly. The perception of equality in the distribution of work (paid and unpaid) varied widely, depending largely on the sex of the respondent. Fifty-two per cent of the women deemed that they work more than their partners overall, and 40% felt that the two tasks occupied more or less the same amount of time. Only 27% of men felt that their partners worked more hours, while 58% believed the distribution to be more or less equitable. Most respondents found the uneven distribution of responsibility acceptable, for only 18% of women and 3% of men judged it to be wholly unsatisfactory.

As shown in Table 3, the time devoted by fathers to childcare depended on the time they are available: that is, the more hours they spent on paid work, the fewer they devoted to childcare ( $\beta = -0.225$ ). The time invested did not depend on the unpaid workload; however, neither the number of children nor the number of hours worked by their partners was related to the time devoted by men to their children. As the youngsters grew, however, the amount of time devoted declined ( $\beta = -0.156$ ). In another vein, work and family harmonisation strategies were also related to the time devoted to childcare. When children had lunch at school or the family had paid housekeeping for at least 10 h a week, fathers spent less time on childcare ( $\beta = -0.145$  and  $-0.132$ , respectively). The intensity of grandparental involvement was also inversely related to fatherly involvement ( $\beta = -0.066$ ), indicating that the one tended to replace the other. More generally, mutual replacement was observed between fatherly care and other means of reconciling family and work life. Involvement in household chores was, moreover, closely related to the time devoted to childcare, a finding consistent with earlier reports (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010).

Table 3. Linear regression model for the number of hours devoted by fathers to childcare in dual-earner families with children under the age of 13 years.

	Non-standardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients		
	<i>B</i>	Standard error	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	Sig.
(Constant)	5.725	0.672		8.520	0.000
Age of youngest child	-0.089	0.018	-0.156	-4.901	0.000
Number of children	0.044	0.106	0.013	0.416	0.677
Number of hours worked by men	-0.675	0.092	-0.225	-7.320	0.000
Number of hours worked by women	0.127	0.076	0.052	1.687	0.092
Degree of men's involvement in household chores	0.168	0.024	0.237	7.114	0.000
Children have lunch at school	-0.101	0.049	-0.066	-2.060	0.040
Paid housekeeping $\geq 10$ h/week	-0.624	0.133	-0.145	-4.686	0.000
Frequency of grandparental childcare	-0.844	0.209	-0.132	-4.044	0.000
Income level	-0.078	0.049	-0.052	-1.598	0.110
Sex: female	-0.073	0.138	-0.017	-0.527	0.598

Note:  $N = 920$ ;  $R^2 = 0.182$ .

### Grandparental childcare and division of household chores in dual-earner families

As explained in the methodology section, linear regression analysis was performed to ascertain whether the redefinition of gender roles in the family has an impact on the frequency of grandparental assistance. Further to the results of that analysis, given in Table 4, when both parents worked outside the home, sharing more of the household work between them did not necessarily mean resorting less frequently to grandparents. Grandparental involvement was less frequent ( $\beta = -0.073$ ) only when fathers devoted more time to their children. Men's greater involvement in household chores, by contrast, was not associated with grandparental childcare in any way, whatsoever, despite the high correlation between engagement in household chores and in childcare. The reason for these divergent findings may lie, on the one hand, in the fact that grandparental involvement generally focuses on childcare and does not include household chores although assistance in the latter is not uncommon (Meil, 2011). Moreover, household chore redistribution patterns were observed in which men participated primarily on the weekend or at night and engaged more in household chores than in childcare, due to long working hours, in some cases in addition to long commutes or geographical mobility.

Fatherly childcare was observed, then, to have a substitutional effect on grandparental care, much was found in connection with other work–family balance resources, such as hiring a housekeeper or arranging for children to have lunch at school. The more time devoted by fathers to childcare, when children had lunch at school and when the family had a paid housekeeper, the lower was

grandparental involvement in childcare, as shown by the significance levels for the respective linear regression coefficients listed in Table 4. Grandparents' substitution by fathers was nonetheless limited and lower than for the other childcare alternatives, as shown by the lower standardised value of the  $\beta$  coefficient:  $\beta = -0.073$  compared with  $\beta = -0.099$  for the lunch at school variable and  $\beta = -0.113$  for the housekeeper for at least 10 h a week variable. The reason for the limited scope of this substitutional effect between fathers and grandparents may very likely be attributed to work and family scheduling compatibility, for grandparents typically become involved when parents are away from home. Since paying a person for childcare can be adapted to family needs and time constraints, the substitution effect was logically higher for this variable. The same remark applies to the lunch at school variable, for grandparents' support typically consists of bringing the children home from school and fixing their lunch while their parents are at work.

Somewhat surprisingly, the time devoted by men to remunerated work was observed to be unrelated to the frequency of grandparental assistance. The estimator for this relationship was not statistically significant, regardless of whether working hours were measured as a continuous (in 10-h intervals) or a dummy (full-time versus part-time work) variable. One possible explanation may be that shorter working hours need not necessarily imply more time for childcare and therefore less need for outside support, for men may prefer to spend their non-working time in other ways. The more relevant variable, then was not working hours, but the time devoted to childcare.

For women, by contrast, the time spent in remunerated employment was associated with the amount of

Table 4. Linear regression model for frequency of grandparental childcare in families with two working parents and children under the age of 13 years.

	Non-standardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients		
	<i>B</i>	Standard error	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	Sig.
(Constant)	4.665	0.357		13.068	0.000
Age of youngest child	-0.098	0.011	-0.266	-8.607	0.000
Number of children	-0.204	0.068	-0.093	-3.012	0.003
Man works $\geq 35$ h/week	0.053	0.213	0.007	0.250	0.803
Woman works $\geq 35$ h/week	0.165	0.093	0.054	1.774	0.076
Degree of men's involvement in household chores	0.009	0.016	0.019	0.557	0.578
Time devoted by men to childcare	-0.047	0.021	-0.073	-2.288	0.022
Children have lunch at school	-0.276	0.087	-0.099	-3.189	0.001
Distance in hours to closest grandparents	-0.055	0.014	-0.113	-3.782	0.000
Paid housekeeping $\geq 10$ h/week	-0.599	0.135	-0.142	-4.456	0.000
Income level	-0.045	0.032	-0.046	-1.419	0.156
Sex: female	-0.017	0.089	-0.006	-0.192	0.848

Notes: Categories used for the *frequency of grandparental childcare* variable: 1 = never; 2 = several times a year; 3 = several times a month; 4 = weekly; 5 = daily.  
*N* = 990; *R*<sup>2</sup> = 0.137.

grandparental assistance: the longer their working hours, the more frequent was the support provided. The relationship was not observed to be clear or proportional, however. When working hours were regarded as a continuous variable (measured in 10-h intervals), then no association with frequency of grandparental support was found.

In addition to the foregoing, the analysis revealed that distance between grandparents' and parents' abodes was related to the frequency of the support: the closer they lived, the more frequent was the assistance received. This finding is widely documented in the literature on intergenerational relations (Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1998; Hank & Buber, 2007; Meil, 2011). Moreover, and more surprisingly, the results showed that the frequency of assistance declined not only with rising children's age, but also with their number: the larger the family, the less frequent was grandparental support. These figures suggest that more frequent support is provided not only in the early years of the grandchild's life, but also for the first few grandchildren. The inference is that as a family grows, rather than increasing support to confront a heavier workload and the greater obstacles to balancing work and family, generations opt for other solutions for harmonising family life and work. Grandparental support consequently becomes more sporadic.

## Conclusions

Two processes have been changing family relations in recent years, albeit at a different pace: women's access to the labour market and men's more intense participation in domestic spheres. For many Spanish mothers, access to paid work has been supported by grandparental assistance in childcare. This study confirmed that families with two working parents often benefit from grandparental childcare and that paternal grandparents' support does not replace but rather complements maternal grandparents' assistance. Nonetheless, the present results show that most families do not routinely resort to this solution and that grandparental care forms part of a broader context of pluralised childcare resources in Spain, including formal childcare services and more intense fatherly involvement. This growing tendency to resort to a number of types of childcare solutions questions the contention that a new extended family model is developing (Tobío, 2008).

Men's greater involvement in childcare may, in turn, be changing couples' organisational patterns and consequently the need for outside assistance. The primary aim of this study was to analyse the extent to which fathers are replacing grandparents as the actors who favour women's access to the labour market. The findings suggest that since families where men participate more intensely require less intergenerational support, fatherly and grandparental childcare tend to be more

substitutional than complementary. Consequently, if men continue to become more involved, families' need for grandparental assistance may be expected to decline. Grandparents' participation also declines in the presence of paid support, such as hired housekeepers or school enrolment. The inverse relationship between the time invested by fathers in childcare and the frequency of grandparental support also suggests that one of the drivers of greater fatherly involvement in childcare may be the availability or otherwise of intergenerational support.

This study is subject to certain limitations. First, the survey used lacked detailed information on the grandparents concern identified in the literature as significant (such as sex, occupational status, or civil status) that would have contributed to refining the results. Second, the estimates of the time fathers devote to childcare are biased by the sex of the respondent, for women tend to underestimate and men to overestimate men's participation (Kamo, 2000). As respondents' reports on the time devoted are based on their perceptions rather than actual logs or diaries, the values are overestimated (United Nations, 2005). Consequently, the values shown are mere estimates of the actual time devoted by fathers to childcare. Third, the data are cross-sectional. Longitudinal information would help identify trends in grandparental childcare.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the findings significantly enhance the understanding of grandparental childcare in Spain. They suggest that as fathers' role intensifies, grandparents' role in child rearing may decline. This would mean that the change to a more egalitarian family model in terms of the distribution of childcare between the partners would lessen the dependence on intergenerational solidarity. If that proves to be the case, the implication is that for support to be more respectful of grandparents' quality of life, men need to play a more intense role in caring for their children and further resources are needed to enable families with children to balance their family- and work-related obligations. Nonetheless, the extent to which grandparental involvement deters men's greater participation in childcare and whether fathers participate more intensely when grandparental support is not available are still open questions.

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