

# **GROWING UP IN SCOTLAND:** The involvement of grandparents in children's lives



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# **GROWING UP IN SCOTLAND:**

## The involvement of grandparents in children's lives

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# GROWING UP IN SCOTLAND:

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research shows that a grandparent is a key source of informal support for many parents and can be an important ally and influence in a child's life. Previous GUS reports (Anderson et al, 2007, Bradshaw et al, 2008, Bradshaw and Wasoff 2009) have confirmed the importance of grandparents as an informal source of support for grandchildren and their parents.

Grandparents themselves have campaigned for greater recognition and are increasingly acknowledged in family policy, including key Scottish Government policies.

At the same time, research suggests it is a mistake to treat 'grandparents' as a rather undifferentiated category, since not all grandparents are involved with their grandchildren. Policy makers and practitioners require some understanding of which grandparents are most likely to be an active or potential part of the informal network of care contributing to children's wellbeing.

The overall aim of this report is to provide a more nuanced understanding of variation in grandparental support to grandchildren and their parents over a child's early years in Scotland. This report addresses a number of questions:

- Who is counted as a grandparent? How many grandparents do children have? Which grandparents are most likely to interact with their grandchildren and provide support to their parents?
- Do factors increasing and decreasing children's pool of grandparents (such as age of mother at birth and repartnering of parents and grandparents) typically translate into a corresponding change in available support?
- What characteristics of grandparents and circumstances of children are associated with more involvement of grandparents?
- Does lineage (i.e. whether the grandparents are 'maternal' or 'paternal') continue to influence the level of grandparental support and do maternal grandmothers remain the dominant support givers? Is there any evidence of grandfathers becoming more like grandmothers in their level of involvement with children?

### **Family circumstances and grandparents, at age 6**

Chapter 2 describes the number and characteristics of children's living grandparents focusing particularly on characteristics likely to affect their availability to their grandchildren, such as age, employment, proximity and relationship to the child's main carer.

The number of grandparents a child has increases if a parent re-partners and the new partner's parents become grandparents, or new partners of grandparents become grandparents. At age 6, the number of grandparents children had alive ranged from none to 10.

Virtually all (99%) children have at least one living grandparent. The proportion of children with no grandparents increases with the age of their mother at birth, from 0% for mothers aged under 20 to 11% for mothers aged 40 or older.

The grandparents that are alive for the largest proportion of 6-year-old children are the mother (88%) and father (74%) of the child's main carer. Since the main carer is the child's mother in 96% of cases, most are literally the child's maternal grandparents.

Around four-fifths (78%) of children at age 6 live in a couple household with their mother and either their natural father (74%) or their mother's partner (4%) and report the parents of their father or mother's partner as grandparents. Sixty-six per cent of children have this type of grandmother and 55% have this type of grandfather. In most cases they are their paternal grandparents. Some children have another type of paternal grandparents: 17% have grandmothers and 14% have grandfathers who are the parents of a non-resident father.

Even when both maternal or paternal grandparents are alive, it cannot be assumed that they live together and are available to the child as a couple; 29% of main carers reported that their parents (i.e. the child's grandparents) were not living together.

Grandparents varied in age – from 30 to 96 years old – and employment status – 36% of maternal grandmothers and 43% of maternal grandfathers were in employment.

Less than 1% of the children are being brought up by a grandparent though 4% had a grandparent living with them. This figure was higher in lone parent households (8%) than in couple households (1%).

Eighty-seven per cent of 6 year olds have one or more grandparent living nearby (within 20-30 minutes' drive), 72% have two or more and 44% have three or more. Children in the highest income households (22%) were more likely to have no local grandparents than children in the lowest income households (8%).

At age 3, 68% of children had their 'maternal grandmother' and 55% had their 'maternal grandfather' living locally. In comparison, 49% of children had their 'paternal grandmother' and 40% their 'paternal grandfather' living locally.

### **Children's contact with grandparents, at ages 3 and 6**

Chapter 3 explores grandparent-grandchild relationships. It looks at emotional closeness, contact and interaction between grandchildren and their different types of 'maternal' and 'paternal' grandmothers and grandfathers.

Living nearby increases the likelihood of grandparents and grandchildren being in contact, being emotionally close and interacting frequently but variations between maternal and paternal grandparents, grandmothers and grandfathers emerge. About three children in five have a local, emotionally close grandparent and two in five do not.

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Higher proportions of grandmothers were in contact, emotionally close and interacting with grandchildren than the equivalent grandfathers. These patterns of interaction were much the same whether grandmothers were living alone, with new partners or living in grandparent couples. On the other hand, grandfathers living alone or with new partners have markedly lower levels of interaction with their grandchildren than grandfathers living with the grandmother.

'Lineage' – how the grandparent was related to the main carer – seems to effect levels of closeness, contact and patterns of interaction; higher proportions of 'maternal grandparents' are close and in contact than 'paternal grandparents'.

There are sometimes marked variations in patterns of interaction between grandmothers and grandchildren by the circumstances of the child's family. The proportion of grandparents with very frequent 'hands-on' interaction is often higher among lower income groups and children whose mothers were young at birth. For example, 64% of children whose mothers were under 20 at the child's birth stay overnight with their 'maternal grandparents' at least once a month compared with 12% amongst children whose mothers were 40 or over at birth (and 31% of all children).

Less than half of children with grandparents who are the parents of a non-resident father are in contact compared with over 80% of other 'paternal' grandparents. Nevertheless, some grandmothers who are the mothers of non-resident fathers are very involved with their grandchild, sometimes matching the involvement of maternal grandmothers.

Smaller proportions of repartnered grandparents see their grandchildren frequently than grandparents living on their own, but the effect is more marked among grandfathers. Also a new partnership seems to facilitate a maternal grandmother's offering of financial assistance but to depress such assistance from a paternal grandfather. This is consistent with women taking a more leading role in a couple in tending to kinship ties.

## **Grandparents' support for the child's parent**

Chapter 4 focuses on the support grandparents provide to children's parents including financial support and the provision of child care. This latter important form of support to parents also involves direct interaction with grandchildren and is also likely to strengthen grandparent-grandchild relationships.

The majority of all types of children's grandparents buy children toys, clothes or equipment at least once a year. Maternal grandparent couples and maternal grandmothers living alone or with new partners are the most likely to make such purchases and the most likely to give advice, help around the house and, along with maternal grandfathers living on their own, to give financial assistance. Living with a new partner, decreases the proportion of maternal grandfathers giving financial assistance.

Across almost all types of grandparents, the percentage providing financial support is higher in the lowest income group of families who have the greatest need of support.



GUS data have continually shown the role of grandparents as a key source of regular informal childcare for parents. When children started school, reliance on grandparents increased markedly to 67% among parents who used any childcare. However, since the number of parents making no use of childcare also increased, the proportion of all children receiving regular grandparent care remained stable at approaching two in five.

The proportion receiving some hours of weekly term-time grandparent care is highest among higher income groups, ranging from 43% in the highest income group to 24% in the lowest income group. In contrast, the proportion of children receiving longer grandparent care (for more than 14 hours a week) in school term time is remarkably consistent across income groups (between 7% and 9%). The proportion of children receiving grandparent care increases in the school holidays and is highest for children whose main carers work 35 hours a week or more, as may be expected. Receipt of childcare from a grandparent for more than 14 hours a week during the holidays also varies by income ranging from 11% of children in the lowest income group to 23% in the highest. Higher income families seem to be able to draw on extra grandparent care in the holidays even when they have no local grandparents.

### **Policy implications**

The data confirm the wisdom of an early years and parenting policy that heeds the role grandparents play. It also confirms the importance of simultaneously acknowledging that some grandparents are more involved than others, both accepting that diverse and multiple grandparents may play key roles, and the frequent hierarchy of importance culminating in the maternal grandmother as the key grandparent.

Given the significance of geographical proximity, housing allocation enabling proximity and transport enabling mobility are important issues if grandparent-grandchild relationships are to be facilitated.

Policies which extend grandparents working lives and working hours are likely to impact on the current use of grandparents as parent's first choice of flexible childcare in a significant proportion of families but may also diminish levels of grandparent-grandchild interaction that is not childcare as such.

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

A broad range of research studies have shown both that a grandparent is a key source of informal support for many parents (Glaser et al 2010, Gray et al, 2005; Gray, 2005; Dench et al, 1999, Koslowski 2009, Nandy and Selwyn 2011, Smith, 2005; Statham 2011, Wheelock and Jones 2002) and can be an important ally and influence in a child's life (Dench and Ogg 2002, Fergusson et al 2008, Glaser et al 2010, Griggs et al 2010, Huges and Emmel 2009, Nandy and Selwyn 2011). For example, the work of Hughes and Emmel (2009), an in-depth longitudinal study of grand-parenting in a low-income urban locality with high levels of deprivation, shows that grandparents are often involved in rescue and repair work on behalf of their grandchildren, such as ensuring they attend school regularly, keeping them away from risky places and helping them know right from wrong. However, the extent of care and other resources that these grandparents gave their grandchildren was sometimes invisible to local health and social care planners and providers. Financial flows from grandparent to their parenting children and grandchildren are also well documented in much of this work and in studies of older adults and adult children (e.g. Albertini et al 2007, Dendle 2011, Ermisch 2009).

Grandparents themselves, with the support of various organisations and experts, have campaigned for more recognition of the part they play in supporting their grandchildren. Specifically, lobbying has called for providing grandparents with legal rights to continued contact with their grandchild following the grandchild's parents divorce and for provisions which would enable parents to use childcare benefits to make payments to grandparents. Both of these topics have been a specific focus of research. The grandparenting component of the 1998 British Social Attitude survey (Dench and Ogg 2002, Dench et al 1999) found 44% of the grandparents reported increased contact with grandchildren around the time of parental separation (49% of maternal grandparents and 38% of paternal grandparents). Nearly half of paternal grandparents (48% compared to 9% of maternal grandparents), reported increased difficulty in keeping in touch with their grandchildren (Dench and Ogg 2002, 58). Ferguson and colleagues (2004) conducted an in-depth study of 44 families in the process of divorce and also stressed the important continuities in pre- and post-divorce behaviour. For example, it was those grandparents who were more involved with their grandchildren before family break-up who became 'substitute parents' after the divorce.

The proportion of grandparents who act as providers of childcare is documented in several cohort studies including the Growing Up in Scotland study (Anderson et al, 2007, Bradshaw et al, 2008) and the Millennium Cohort study (2010, 2008). Stratham (2011) has recently reviewed evidence concerning the role of grandparents as providers of childcare. One of the recurrent findings of research is that grandparents play a particularly prominent role in providing childcare to support maternal employment in low income families.

At the same time, it is important not to assume that all grandparents will always be sources of support, since studies also find a minority of withdrawn or reluctant grandparents.

For example, 3% of those answering the grandparenting component of the 1998 British Social Attitude survey (Dench and Ogg 2002, 20) disagreed that 'grandchildren are very rewarding' and 37% agreed that they 'Would like life free from family'. Ferguson and colleagues (2004) found some interviewees at pains to downplay what it means to be a grandparent and others wishing to focus on supporting their own children rather than developing their relationship with their grandchildren.

It cannot, therefore, be assumed that all children and their parents have grandparent support. The Growing Up in Scotland study has not only documented how grandparents loom large in informal support but also identifies a proportion of families with low levels of any form of informal support, about 1 in 3 at any time (34% at age 1 and at age 5), and about 1 in 5 (19%) consistently across the years in which the child is aged 1 to 5 (Mabelis and Marryat, 2011).

British and European research indicates that the engagement of grandparents with their grandchildren tends to be gendered and grandmothers are more likely than grandfathers to be informal childcarers (Dench and Ogg 2002, Koslowski 2009). Research on divisions of domestic labour across Europe suggests that women often play a more major role as carers and 'kin keepers' in family households and in family networks, and therefore grandmothers may be likely to occupy more important support roles than grandparents. Dench and his co-authors (2002, 1999) place particularly strong emphasis on the significance of lineage; how grandparents are connected to the child, whether maternal through the child's mother or paternal, through the child's father. Their research indicated the dominance of maternal grandparents as supporters. Given that women as mothers typically play the key 'kin keeper' role in the child's family household, it is the mothers' mothers who are likely to occupy a key role among grandparents. However, there are also more recent suggestions of 'new' grandfathers in the literature, that is grandfathers who are more emotionally involved in grandchildren and more like grandmothers (Mann and Leeson 2010).

The roles grandparents play are of significance for policy makers and practitioners seeking to ensure the well being of children. Many of the authors referred to suggest that early years and parenting policy should have a broad enough scope to include the role grandparents play in giving their grandchildren the best start in life. This would include thinking around how services can support grandparents to provide physical, social, and emotional support to their grandchildren. While the specific issues of legal recognition of grandparents' rights to contact following divorce and allowing use of childcare benefits as payments to grandparents remain unresolved, policy and practitioners increasingly acknowledge the significance of grandparents. At the Scottish level, legal acknowledgement of grandparents acting as parents was extended in the Families Scotland Act 2006. Moreover, the Scottish Government's Early Years Framework launched in December 2008 recognises that children's wellbeing is reliant on a network of informal care extending beyond parents and that grandparents are often playing key parts. More support for grandparents and other informal carers who spend significant amounts of time with care of children was identified as a policy priority for action. The significance of grandparents for children is likely to be acknowledged in the National Parenting Strategy currently in preparation by the Scottish Government.

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Previous reports of the Growing Up in Scotland study (Anderson et al., 2007, Bradshaw et al. 2008) have confirmed the importance of grandparents as informal supports for grandchildren and their parents. As yet, however, grandparents have often been treated as a rather undifferentiated category. However, it is also clear from existing research that 'grandparents' are not homogenous and that policy makers and practitioners also require some understanding of which grandparents are most likely to be an active or potential part of the informal network of care contributing to children's well being. Similarly, it is important to attend to why some grandparents are more engaged and supportive than others.

## 1.2 Aims

The overall aim of this report is to provide a more nuanced understanding of variation in grandparental support to grandchildren and their parents over a child's early years in Scotland. This includes a number of questions:

- Who is counted as a grandparent? How many grandparents do children have? Which grandparents are most likely to interact with their grandchildren and provide support to their parents?
- Do factors increasing and decreasing children's pool of grandparents (such as age of mother at birth and repartnering of parents and grandparents) typically translate into a corresponding change in available support?
- What characteristics of grandparents and circumstances of children are associated with more involvement of grandparents?
- Does lineage continue to influence the level of grandparental support and do maternal grandmothers remain the dominant support givers? Is there any evidence of grandfathers becoming more like grandmothers in their level of involvement with children?

## 1.3 Data

The Growing Up in Scotland study is an important longitudinal research project aimed at tracking the lives of a cohort of Scottish children from early years, through childhood and beyond. It's principal aim is to provide information to support policy making but it is also intended to be a broader resource that can be drawn on by academics, voluntary sector organisations and other interested parties. The first sweep of field work with the birth cohort of 5,217 children aged 0 to 1 years began in April 2005. In addition to this birth cohort, a cohort of toddlers (the 'child' cohort) were also recruited but they are not discussed in this report. More detailed questions about grandparents were asked in the first, third and sixth sweeps by which time the sample size had reduced through attrition to 3,657.

At sweep 6 data are available on 3,657 children in the birth cohort (who were then aged 5 years and 10 months); at sweep 3, data are available on 4193 children (who were aged about 2 years and 10 months at the time of the interview); and at sweep 1 data are available on 5,217 children aged 10 months. For ease of reference, consideration of sweep 3 and sweep 6 data will refer to children as being aged 3 years old and 6 years old respectively.

Interviewers sought to contact the ‘main carer’ of the child. As is discussed in more detail below, in virtually all cases (99%) in the first year this proved to be the child’s natural mother. The child’s mother has continued to be the survey respondent in over 95% of cases at all sweeps.

Unless stated otherwise all differences reported are statistically significant at the 95% level or above. Statistical tests reported will be described as ‘statistically significant’ if  $p < 0.05$  but  $> 0.01$ , or as ‘highly statistically significant’ if  $p = < 0.01$ .

#### **1.4 Structure of the report**

Chapter 2 describes the number and characteristics of children’s living grandparents focusing particularly on characteristics likely to affect their availability to their grandchildren, such as age, employment, proximity and relationship to the child’s main carer. Chapter 3 explores grandparent-grandchild relationships. It looks at emotional closeness, contact and interaction between grandchildren and their different types of ‘maternal’ and ‘paternal’ grandmothers and grandfathers. Chapter 4 focuses on the support grandparents provide to children’s parents including financial support and the provision of childcare. This latter important form of support to parents also involves direct interaction with grandchildren and is also likely to strengthen grandparent-grandchild relationships.

## FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES AND GRANDPARENTS, AT AGE 6 YEARS

### 2.1 Introduction

Who counts as a grandparent? A child's grandparents are usually defined as the parents of his or her natural or adopted parents. Not all children begin life living with two parents and, in a few cases, may never know their natural father although his parents are formally grandparents. The number of grandparents a child has is then also complicated by the partnering and repartnering of his or her parents and grandparents. A new partner to a parent potentially brings his or her parents as new grandparents and a new partner to a grandparent is potentially a new grandparent. Considered arithmetically, repartnering increases the total number of 'grandparents', but it may not always increase the child's contact with people he or she knows as grandparents. Perhaps not all types of grandparents are equally likely to feel a sense of affection for or responsibility towards the child. If any of the unpartnerings/repartnerings have been fraught with discord and resentment, this may create barriers to grandparental contribution to the child's life. The simple answer to: 'Who counts as a grandparent?', in the Growing Up in Scotland study is anyone whom the main carer identifies as the child's grandparent. In practice, this was always one of the categories of grandparents shown in Table 2.3.

The involvement of grandparents in a child's life depends on various characteristics and circumstances of grandparents and grandchildren. All of the following can have some influence although some factors are typically more important than others:

- the number of grandparents alive and such characteristics as age, health and gender,
- whether grandparents live nearby and in an urban or rural area,
- how many siblings the child has and other grandchildren the grandparent has,
- the household type and socio-economic circumstances of grandparents and of the child's household, including access to employment, resources and level of income,
- the nature and quality of the relationship between the grandparents and the child's parents, particularly the mother or main carer.

We begin by identifying the child's main carer, the person in the child's home who answered the questions, and describing the child's household type at sweep 6 data collection when children were just under 6 years old. The child's household type is an important element in distinguishing sets of grandparents and the factors influencing their involvement in the child's life.

## 2.2 Children's household circumstances

Out of the original 5,217 babies recruited at the first contact, 3,657 were followed up at sweep 6 through an interview with their main carer; in the vast majority of cases (97%) this meant an interview with the child's natural mother (in 2% of cases it was the natural father, 1% another person). Overall, 19% of children have a 'lone parent' at age 6, whereas fewer, 16%, live in a home where there is only one adult (their carer). In other words, a small number of lone parents have another adult or adults living in their household (most often the child's grown-up siblings or grandparents but sometimes another relative and in a very small number of cases another non-relative). For 8% of children there are three or more adults in the household. The breakdown of children by whether the main carer is a natural parent, and, where applicable, by place of residence of other natural parent, is shown in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1 Main carer responding to the GUS sweep 6 interview classified by whether a natural parent and whether other natural parent is also resident**

	%
<b>Mother</b> respondent and natural father resident	74
<b>Mother</b> respondent, natural father <i>not</i> resident (single mother)	19
<b>Mother</b> respondent living with <b>new partner</b>	4
Father respondent and natural mother resident	2
Father respondent, natural mother <i>not</i> resident	1
Main carer is not a natural parent	1
<i>Bases</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	3,657
<i>Unweighted</i>	3,657

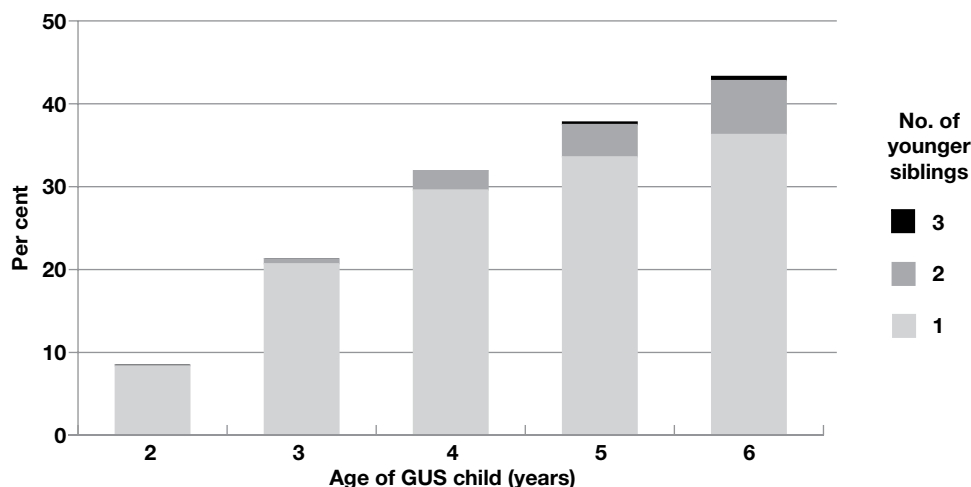
Table 2.1 shows that in total, 76% of all children live with both natural parents. The majority main carer group is natural mother, and this can be further divided into subgroups (mother living with new partner, single mother, and mother living with natural father). However, the subgroup of children where the natural father is the main carer is very small (weighted  $n=78$ ), and only approximately a quarter of these do not have their natural mother resident in the home ( $n=20$ ). Another very small subgroup are children where the main carer responding is not a natural parent, and in the majority of these cases the main carer is in fact a grandparent (16 of 22 cases).

Overall, 28% of children have no siblings in the household, 69% have one or two siblings, and 3% have three to eight. By age 6, 43% of children had experienced the addition of one or more younger siblings to the household (36% one, 7% two or more). Figure 2-A shows the timing of addition of siblings across the cohort study. It can be seen that a first younger sibling is most common between the ages of 2 and 4 years, and a second younger sibling between the ages of 4 and 6 years. Some households include additional non-sibling children, which means that at age 6 only 20% of the birth cohort children are the only child in the home (compared to 28% who have no siblings), and 7% of homes include three or more children in total.

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**Figure 2-A Percentage of children with a younger sibling in the household by cohort child's age**



Base: All families who participated at sweep 6 (weighted/unweighted n = 3,657)

Other household factors potentially associated with the number of living grandparents a child has and which, therefore, appear in analyses that follow include: area deprivation, household income, the urban-rural classification of area of residence, and maternal age at the child's birth. These variables are highly interrelated<sup>1</sup>.

## 2.3 Number of living grandparents

At age 6 years, the percentage of the original birth cohort with at least one living grandparent was close to 99%, and 80% of children have three or more living grandparents. The number of grandparents alive per child ranged from none (1%) to a median of 4 (44%), and up to 10. The number of children with no grandparents increases with the age of mother at birth from 0% for mothers under 20 years of age to 11% for mothers of 40 years or older. Between ages 3 and 6 there is a small decrease in the number of grandparents. At age 6, a greater proportion of children have less than four grandparents than at age 3 (48% compared with 42%).

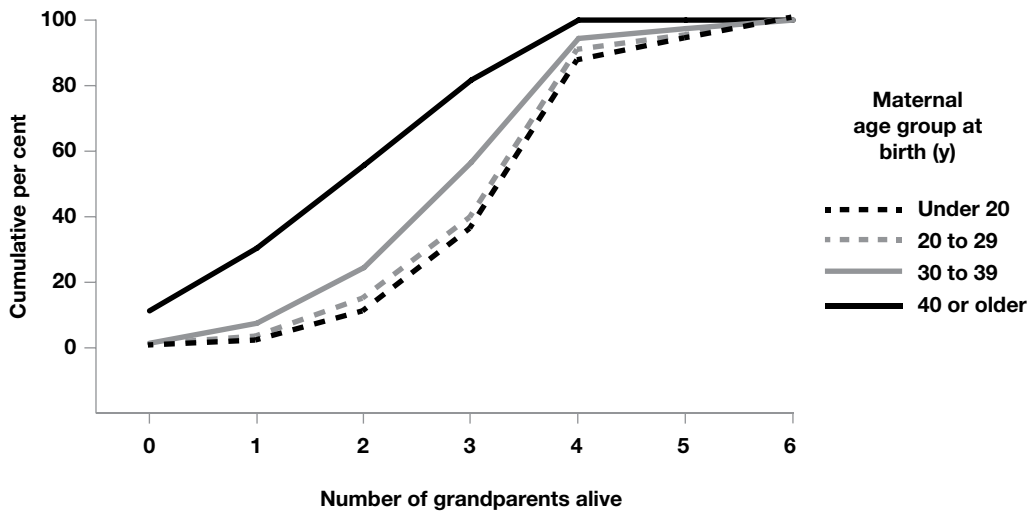
**Table 2.2 Percentage of children with 0 to 6 or more grandparents, at age 3 and age 6**

Number of grandparents	% at age 3	% at age 6
0	1	1
1	3	4
2	12	15
3	26	28
4	49	44
5	5	4
6 or more	4	4
<i>Bases</i>		
<i>Weighted</i>	4,191	3,640
<i>Unweighted</i>	4,191	3,645

<sup>1</sup> Further information on the relationship between these variables is available on request.



**Figure 2-B Cumulative distributions of number of living grandparents by maternal age at birth, at age 6**



Base: All families (weighted/unweighted n = 3,610)

Figure 2-B shows separately for each age band (of the mother at the child's birth) the cumulative distribution of number of grandparents from none to six or more. The cumulative distribution line for children of oldest mothers is much to the left, indicating that far more of their children have fewer living grandparents. Similarly, but less extreme, for mothers aged 30-39. This graph shows that number of grandparents is positively associated with younger maternal age at birth.

One obvious way in which age of mother at birth is related to the number of grandparents is that the older the mother at birth, then the older the grandparents are likely to be, and hence the greater the risk of one or more grandparents having died. However, young age at birth is also related to partnership changes, which in turn increases the pool of grandparents. In general, those children in households where their parent has a new partner resident have more (living) grandparents (29% with five or more compared with 7% in other children).

The GUS data also show a significant association between the number of grandparents and area deprivation (more grandparents if *less* deprived) and with household income (more grandparents if *higher* household income). A plausible explanation for these associations is that people living in less deprived areas and with higher incomes, on average, live longer than people living in deprived areas and on low incomes, which would suggest children in the least well-off families will have the greatest attrition in number of grandparents. However, at age 6, lower household income and higher area deprivation are also strongly associated with having mother (main carer) living with a new resident partner and younger maternal age at birth of child. Therefore the association between socio-economic deprivation and young motherhood points to an association between deprivation and younger grandparents, who are more likely to survive. Rates of relationship dissolution are also higher among the socio-economically disadvantaged groups, increasing the rates of repartnering and, therefore, raising the total number of children's grandparents. The inter-relationships between these variables and number of grandparents are complex.

In the next graph we explore the combined effect of maternal age at birth and deprivation on the number of living grandparents, by focussing on only the largest subgroup of children

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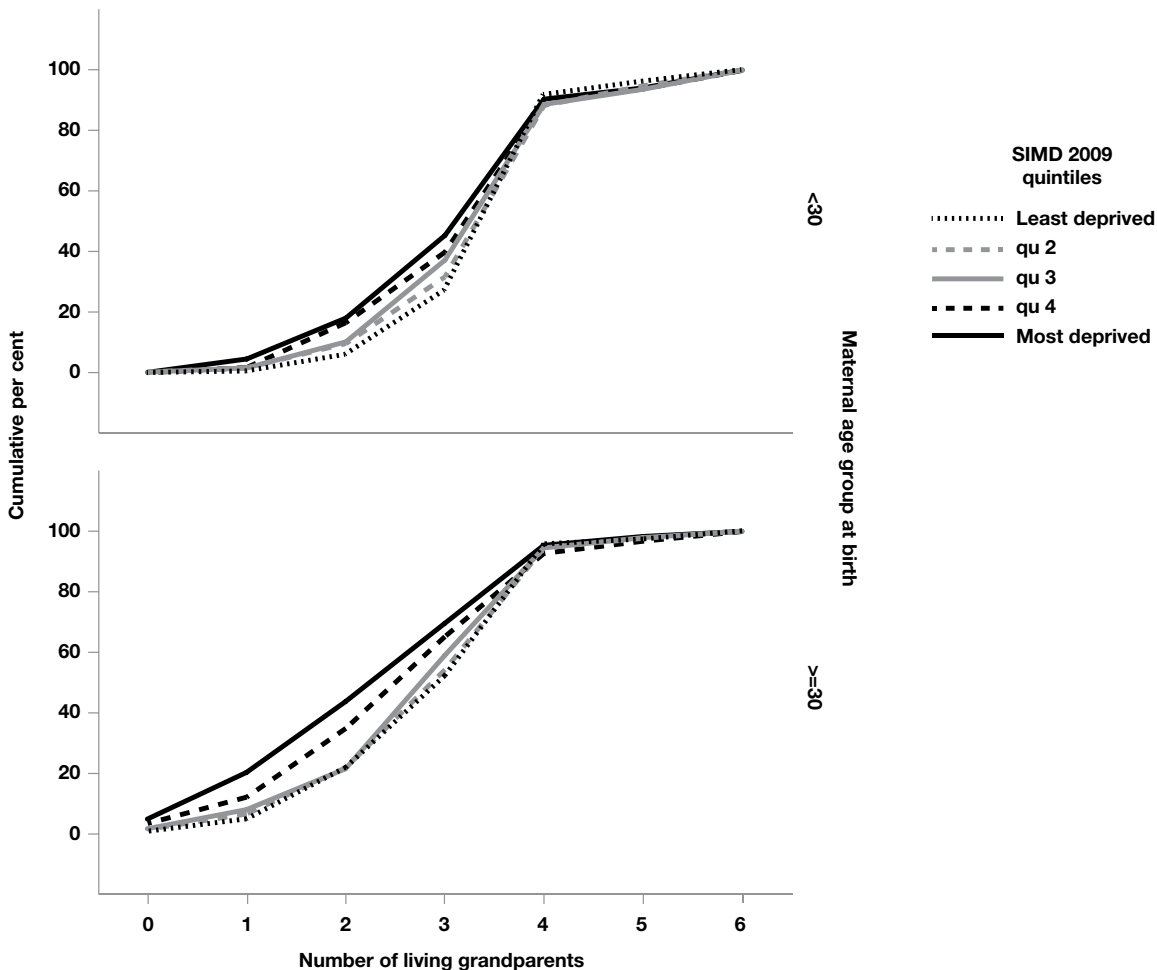
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(those living with both natural parents), a subgroup where parent re-partnering can not affect number of grandparents. The lines in Figure 2-C trace the cumulative distributions of the number of living grandparents (from none to six or more) for families living in areas with different levels of deprivation.

Grandparents of children with mothers under 30 at the child's birth are shown in the top graph and grandparents of children with mothers age 30 or over at birth in the lower graph. The further the lines are to the left, then the fewer living grandparents the child has. In both graphs, it is the children from the most deprived households that have the fewest grandparents.

The spacing of the lines gives a graphical indication of disparities in the number of grandparents alive by deprivation group. That is, it provides evidence for an association with deprivation. Among children with older mothers (30 years plus), this is evident across the range of numbers of grandparents, from 0 to 4. Among children with younger mothers, the spaced lines are most evident at 1 to 3 grandparents. The selection of children living with both parents only means any differences in lines can not be due to parent re-partnering. This suggests that there is a greater degree of (premature) mortality among the grandparent pool for families living in more deprived areas.

**Figure 2-C Cumulative distributions of number of living grandparents by area deprivation, separately for older and younger maternal age at birth, natural parent couples only, at age 6.**



Base: Natural parent couple families only. Mothers aged under 30 at child's birth – weighted n = 1,143, unweighted n = 1,038; Mothers aged 30 or older at child's birth – weighted n = 1,581, unweighted n = 1,852

## 2.4 Gender and lineage of grandparents

As well as considering the total pool of grandparents, it is also important to understand who is and who is not within that pool. This section begins to distinguish among living grandparents potentially available to the child by their gender (i.e. *grandmothers* and *grandfathers*) and how they are connected to the child – via the main carer responding or the main carer’s partner, or a non-resident natural parent. The next section discusses characteristics which might impact on grandparents’ availability as a support for the child including their age, geographical distance and whether or not they are in paid employment.

Table 2.3 shows the percentage of children with particular categories of living grandparent when the child was aged 3 and aged 6 years old. Main carers were asked about all living grandparents whether or not they had contact with them. The grandparents include the parents of the main carer, and, given that this is usually the child’s mother, they can be thought of as mainly maternal grandparents. Grandparents also include the parents of the main carer’s partner who is most often the child’s father, hence they are usually paternal grandparents, although, in some cases, the mother’s co-resident partner is not the child’s father. The table also separately identifies the parents of a child’s non-resident parent, who is typically the child’s natural father. In some cases, these grandparents are acknowledged even if the father has never lived with the mother. Grandparents can also be extended to the partners of grandparents who have repartnered and they are included in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3 Percentage of children with type of grandparent (in terms of relationship to main carer), at age 3 and age 6.**

Relationship of grandparent to main carer	% at age 3	% at age 6
Mother	91	88
Father	78	74
Partner’s mother	75	66
Partner’s father	64	55
Child’s non-resident parent’s mother	10	17
Child’s non-resident parent’s father	8	14
Mother’s partner	9	8
Father’s partner	5	5
Partner’s mother’s partner	5	4
Partner’s father’s partner	4	3
Child’s non-resident parent’s mother’s partner	1	1
Child’s non-resident parent’s father’s partner	1	1
<i>Bases (all children with grandparents)</i>		
<i>Weighted</i>	4,158	3,597
<i>Unweighted</i>	4,158	3,600

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While it might be useful to distinguish main carers who are mothers from the minority who are not, it is also plausible to suggest that the parents of the main carer are the grandparents likely to be in the front line as the main carer's helpers with parenting. A father bringing up children alone, for example, is more likely to call in help from his parents than the absent mother's parents (Barker 1994). Hence, from the perspective of the main carer, his or her parents are in the same position as the maternal grandmother and grandfather are when the main carer is the mother. In this sense 'maternal grandmother', 'paternal grandmother' etc. are being used as theoretical constructs rather than literally the mother of the child's mother or the mother of the child's father.

Even when both maternal grandmother and grandfather or paternal grandmother and grandfather are alive, it cannot be assumed that they live together and are available to the child as a couple. Twenty-nine per cent of main carers reported that their parents were not living together. Main carers similarly reported either permanent divorce/separation or never living together for 22% of their partner's mothers and fathers and 33% of the child's non-resident parent's parents.

## 2.5 Characteristics of living grandparents

When the children were aged 6, grandmothers ranged in age from 30 years old (a main carer's father's partner and a partner's father's partner) to 96 (a partner's mother). Grandfathers ranged in age from 36 years old (a non-resident parent's father) to 91 (a main carer's father). The typical age was in the early to mid-sixties for biological parents of resident parents, 60 for the parents of a non-resident parent and in the fifties for the new partners of grandparents. The average (mean and median) age of grandfathers is typically about two years older than grandmothers. Maternal grandparents are slightly younger than paternal grandparents, as would be expected given that many of the child's fathers are slightly older than the child's mother.

**Table 2.4 Age distribution for grandparents of differing relationship to child's main carer, when child is aged 6**

Relationship of grandparent to main carer	30-59 %	60-69 %	70-79 %	80-100 %	Bases	
					Weighted	Unweighted
Mother	44	31	13	2	3,221	3,211
Father	37	42	19	3	2,694	2,683
Partner's mother	30	46	20	3	2,368	2,498
Partner's father	24	47	26	4	1,955	2,064
Child's non-resident parent's mother	52	35	12	1	513	429
Child's non-resident parent's father	46	34	14	2	406	335
Mother's partner	63	28	8	1	273	251
Father's partner	71	27	2	–	159	157
Partner's mother's partner	43	38	18	2	160	160
Partner's father's partner	59	30	10	2	107	116
Child's non-resident parent's mother's partner	70	30	–	–	18	16
Child's non-resident parent's father's partner	73	24	3	–	26	23

While very elderly grandparents may be more likely to be frail, younger grandparents are sometimes less available because they are in employment. The main carer was asked about the employment status of each of the child's living grandparents at sweep 6. Thirty-six per cent of their mothers and 43% of their fathers were employed. There is likely to be less reliable reporting of employment in categories of grandparents other than the main carer's own parents. Although employment is strongly related to age, some older grandparents are still working, more so men than women.

**Table 2.5 Percentage of maternal grandparents in employment when child is aged 6 by grandparent's age**

Relationship of grandparent to child's carer	% Employed				All ages
	30-59	60-69	70-79	80-100	
<b>Mother</b>	59	23	4	2	36
<i>Bases</i>					
<i>Weighted</i>	1,411	1,320	430	60	3,224
<i>Unweighted</i>	1,172	1,468	500	71	3,215
<b>Father</b>	70	38	8	3	43
<i>Bases</i>					
<i>Weighted</i>	997	1,120	510	67	2,724
<i>Unweighted</i>	810	1,217	580	76	2,704

### 2.5.1 Co-resident grandparents

Only a tiny proportion of the birth cohort have a grandparent as their main carer. At age 6, less than 1% of children are being brought up by a grandparent. An additional 3% of the birth cohort living with one or more parents had a grandparent living in their household at this age. Living in a three-generational household with a grandparent and parent was more common for children of lone parents. Grandparents were present in 8% of lone parent households compared to 1% of households where the child's carer was living as a couple. The proportion of lone parents living with the child's grandparents was higher when the children were aged 1 (Bradshaw et al. 2008) and has declined over time. Children of lone mothers under the age of 20 at birth and of unemployed lone mothers were particularly likely to be living with a grandparent at age 1 and this was still the case at age 3 although the proportions had declined. By age 6, children of unemployed lone parents were no more likely than those of working lone parents to live with a grandparent.

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## 2.5.2 Proximity of grandparents

Proximity, that is living nearby, has been shown to make a significant difference to the likelihood of grandparents being involved in regular contact and routine childcare (Dench and Ogg 2002). GUS data indicate that the majority of children have at least one grandparent locally, defined as within 30 minutes' drive. Eighty-seven per cent of 6 year olds have one or more grandparent living locally; 72% have two or more, 44% have three or more and 26% have at least four grandparents living locally. The proportion with at least one grandparent nearby is the same as it was when the children were aged 1 (Bradshaw et al, 2008). The proportion of children with four or more grandparents living locally varies markedly by the age of their mother at birth and this pattern also remains consistent as the child ages (see Table 2.6).

**Table 2.6 Percentage of children who had four or more grandparents living locally by child's age and age of mother at child's birth (of all those with grandparents)**

Age of child	% having 4 or more local grandparents				All ages
	Under 20	20-29	30-39	40+	
<b>10 months</b>	41	35	24	5	29
<i>Bases</i>					
<i>Weighted</i>	404	2,185	2,420	165	5,179
<i>Unweighted</i>	350	2,094	2,552	177	5,177
<b>Age 3</b>	38	37	23	6	29
<i>Bases</i>					
<i>Weighted</i>	321	1,708	1,976	129	4,158
<i>Unweighted</i>	221	1,560	2,209	147	4,158
<b>Age 6</b>	41	33	19	5	26
<i>Bases (all children with grandparents)</i>					
<i>Weighted</i>	271	1,465	1,732	102	3,597
<i>Unweighted</i>	160	1,301	1,994	122	3,600

It has already been noted that children of older mothers are more likely to have no living grandparents. The age of mother at birth is also associated with other factors that make a difference to the likelihood of grandparents living nearby. Age at birth is known to vary by social class, levels of education and geographical mobility. Mothers who were in their teens at birth are less likely to have higher education or to be geographically mobile and, as we saw before, larger proportions have had periods of co-residence as mothers with their own mother. Using a measure of household income or local area deprivation to compare the most and least privileged groups at age 3 confirms that the least privileged main carers are more likely to have local mothers, 'maternal grandparents', than the most privileged main carers. Twenty-eight per cent of main carers in the most deprived quintile had their mother living locally compared with 19% in the least deprived. Thirty per cent of main carers in the bottom quintile for household income per adult had their mothers living locally compared with 13% for the top quintile for household income per adult.

Table 2.7 shows that the proportion who have no local grandparents at age 6 is much higher for children living in high income households than for children in more economically disadvantaged circumstances, but differences in the proportions with four or more local grandparents are not large.

**Table 2.7 Percentage of children with local grandparents by household income, at age 6**

No. of grandparents living locally	Bottom Quintile (<£11,944) %	2nd Quintile %	3rd Quintile %	4th Quintile %	Top Quintile (≥£37,500) %	All incomes %
None	8	8	13	20	22	13
One to three	69	61	58	55	57	61
Four or more	22	31	29	25	21	26
<i>Bases (all children with grandparents)</i>						
<i>Weighted</i>	859	746	611	587	579	3,597
<i>Unweighted</i>	674	719	649	679	682	3,600

As may be expected, proximity of grandparents also varies by rurality. Children growing up in remote small towns, accessible and remote rural areas have a slightly higher likelihood of having no local grandparents (18%) than children in urban areas and accessible towns (12%). This effect is more marked among children in rural/remote areas born to mothers over 30, 26% have no local grandparents compared with 16% of children with mothers over 30 in urban areas and accessible towns.

Questions about the proximity of specific grandparents were asked when children were aged 3 (these were not repeated at age 6). These showed that over two-thirds of children (68%) then had a local 'maternal grandmother' and more children had this grandparent living locally than any other type of grandparent (see Table 2.8).

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**Table 2.8 Percentage of all children who have local grandparents, with grandparents of certain types (in terms of relationship to main carer), at age 3<sup>2</sup>**

Relationship of grandparent to main carer	%
Mother	68
Father	53
Partner's mother	49
Partner's father	40
Child's non-resident parent's mother	8
Child's non-resident parent's father	6
Mother's partner	7
Father's partner	3
Partner's mother's partner	3
Partner's father's partner	2
<i>Bases (all children)</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	4,158
<i>Unweighted</i>	4,158

<sup>2</sup> See also Table A2 in the Appendix.



## CHILDREN'S CONTACT WITH GRANDPARENTS, AT AGES 3 AND 6 YEARS

### 3.1 Introduction

Not all grandparents are experienced as emotionally close to their grandchildren or involved with their grandchildren's lives and it is important to understand which grandparents are most likely to play an active and supportive part. While geographical proximity was described in more detail in the previous chapter, this chapter explores emotional closeness, contact and interaction between different types of 'maternal' and 'paternal' grandmothers and grandfathers. This attention to the gender and 'lineage' of grandparents answers the questions concerning whether maternal grandmothers remain the most involved grandparent and whether grandfathers are becoming more like grandmothers in their involvement. The data are provided by the main carer rather than children or grandparents themselves.

No formal measurement of the impact of grandparent-grandchild relationships on outcomes for children is provided. This topic may be taken up when the children are older. The impact of childcare provision on child outcomes has been explored in other reports (Bradshaw and Wasoff 2009). To disentangle and measure of the impact of grandparental involvement and support is difficult. For example, the small numbers of children brought up by grandparents have sometimes experienced very difficult circumstances which may have adverse effects independently of grandparental help. The impact of modest amounts of grandparental involvement is difficult to separate from other factors and the theoretical grounds for focusing on a particular measurable aspect of the grandparent-grandchild relationship is under developed. Nevertheless, it is interesting that Griggs and colleagues (2010) provide a recent example of research in England and Wales documenting a positive association between the well being felt by older children (aged 11 to 16) and their reports that their grandparents are involved in their hobbies and interests, in their schooling and education and talk to them about their future plans.

### 3.2 Emotional closeness to grandparents

Questions at age 3 allowed exploration of children's emotional 'closeness' to specific grandparents according to whether they lived nearby. For all types of grandparents, living nearby enhances the likelihood of being regarded as 'close' to the grandchild by the main carer. Table 3.1 also clearly shows that not all grandparents are equal in terms of the likelihood of being close, even if they are local. As found in the work of Dench and Ogg (2002) both the gender of the grandparent and their lineage, whether 'maternal' through the main carer or 'paternal', through the main carer's partner, seem to make some difference to the proportions who are close.

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The child's maternal grandmother is the grandparent most likely to be described as close. She is almost always described as so when she lives locally; 94% of main carers' mothers living nearby were described as close to their grandchild. In the minority of cases, where somebody other than the child's mother is the main carer, their mother is typically like a maternal grandmother; 90% of main carers' mothers living locally who are not literally maternal grandmothers are, nevertheless, described as close.

Maternal grandmothers are the most likely to be close even if living further away. Fifty-three per cent of main carers' mothers are described as close despite living more than 30 minutes' drive away. This compares with 30% of 'maternal grandfathers' and 25% of 'paternal grandmothers' who live at a distance.

**Table 3.1 Percentage of children with geographically local grandparents of certain types and whether those living locally are described as emotionally 'close', at age 3<sup>3</sup>**

Relationship of grandparent to main carer	% who live locally	% of local grandparents who are 'close' to child	Bases (grandparents who live locally)	
			Weighted	Unweighted
Mother	68	94	2,845	2,768
Father	53	85	2,228	2,186
Partner's mother	49	81	2,071	2,119
Partner's father	40	73	1,675	1,721
Child's non-resident parent's mother	8	52	316	253
Child's non-resident parent's father	6	46	255	206
Mother's partner	7	82	275	251
Father's partner	3	61	114	112
Partner's mother's partner	3	68	143	143
Partner's father's partner	2	62	69	73
<i>Bases (all children with grandparents)</i>				
<i>Weighted</i>	4,158	–	–	–
<i>Unweighted</i>	4,158	–	–	–

Moreover, although the overwhelming majority of children have at least one living grandparent and most have at least one local grandparent, the proportion without a local and 'close' grandparent is larger than these aggregate figures suggest. For example, only a slender majority, 58% of all children, had a close relationship with a local maternal grandmother, the key grandparent, at age 3 (91% have a living maternal grandmother, 68% of whom live locally and 94% of whom are close). The equivalent figure cannot be given at age 6 but a slightly higher estimate is arrived at by noting that 85% are in contact with a maternal grandparent and around 73% see their maternal grandparent weekly, suggesting a total of 62%.

<sup>3</sup> See also Table A3 in the Appendix.

### 3.3 Grandparents in regular contact

Contact between a grandparent and a grandchild can mean seeing each other occasionally or very frequent and 'hands-on' interaction. The proportion of children who have contact with a grandparent through their mother or main carer is larger than the proportion with local and close grandparents. However, contact between the child's carer and the grandparent is, not surprisingly, associated both with 'closeness' between the grandchild and grandparent and geographical proximity. Table 3.2 shows contact with particular numbers of grandparents as a percentage of all children with any living grandparent between ages 1 and 6. Over time the proportion of the families with contact with only one grandparent creeps up and those in touch with four or more declines but change is very gradual, and is likely to reflect the decline in the number of grandparents alive between ages 3 and 6.

**Table 3.2 Number of grandparents that families are in regular contact with, at child's age 10 months, 3 years and 6 years**

Number in regular contact with	Child's Age		
	10 months %	Age 3 %	Age 6 %
0	2	2	2
1	8	9	11
2	22	23	25
3	25	24	26
4 or more	44	42	36
<i>Bases (all children with grandparents)</i>			
<i>Weighted</i>	5,204	4,193	3,597
<i>Unweighted</i>	5,204	4,193	3,600

Levels of contact were also dependent on the type of grandparent. The first column of Table 3.3 shows firstly the proportion of the whole sample who are in contact with particular types of grandparents. This includes children who have no possibility of contact because the specified grandparent is no longer alive. The second column of the table therefore shows the corresponding percentage restricted to children with living grandparents of that type. The highest rate of contact is, as might have been predicted, with the main carer's mother, or 'maternal grandmother' – at 96% – and the lowest is with the mother and father of a non-resident parent – at 45% for these grandmothers and 42% for these grandfathers. Carer's fathers ('maternal grandfathers'), and carer's partner's mothers ('paternal grandmothers'), have equal levels of contact at 88%, and carer's partner's fathers ('paternal grandfathers'), have slightly lower levels of contact at 83% (see Table A.1 in the Appendix for a more detailed breakdown of these figures).

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**Table 3.3 Percentage of families who are in contact with grandparent, separately by grandparent type (in terms of relationship to the main carer), at age 6**

Relationship of grandparent to main carer	% of all children	% of those with a grandparent in category	Bases (children with grandparent in category)	
			Weighted	Unweighted
Mother	85	96	3,224	3,215
Father	66	88	2,724	2,704
Partner's mother	58	88	2,398	2,527
Partner's father	45	83	2,003	2,108
Child's non-resident parent's mother	8	45	611	501
Child's non-resident parent's father	6	42	509	410
<i>Bases (all children)</i>				
<i>Weighted</i>	3,657	–	–	–
<i>Unweighted</i>	3,657	–	–	–

### 3.3.1 Grandparent-grandchild interaction

Table 3.4 shows that the grandparents most likely to have more frequent interaction with their grandchildren are mother's parents and, by inference, particularly mother's mothers. The data do not allow us to distinguish between the contribution of grandparents living together as a couple but when living alone, there are clear differences in the proportions of involved grandmothers and grandfathers.

Questions about interaction between the grandparent and the grandchild were asked of all the various types of grandparents identified as having some contact with the child's carer. For all types of grandparents in contact, the majority see their grandchild at least once a month. There are marked differences, however, in the proportion of different types of grandparents who see their grandchild at least once a week or who are involved on a monthly basis in more active ways, such as looking after the child, babysitting or having the child stay overnight. Analysis of data when the child was aged 3 and aged 6 suggest that the differences between types of grandparents are stable over time.

Table 3.4 confirms the typical significance of 'lineage' and gender. Of all grandparents who are in contact with the child's family, a higher proportion of 'maternal grandmothers' routinely interact with their grandchildren on a weekly and monthly basis than 'paternal grandmothers' who are the parents of the carer's partner.

The pattern of involvement of grandparents connected to the child by his or her non-resident father is rather different. Non-resident father's parents are typically only acknowledged as grandparents when there is some contact between the non-resident father and the child. Some of these grandmothers are very involved with their grandchild. The percentage of non-resident father's parents who are actively involved is often very similar to maternal grandparents. The percentage who babysit at least once a month, 42%, and have the child over night, 43%, is even slightly larger than the equivalent figures among the 'maternal grandparent' couple. The parents of non-resident fathers are similar to other paternal grandparents in the proportions who are never involved in such activities. For example, 38% never babysit and 41% never have the child overnight; the equivalent figures for 'paternal grandparents' (partner's mother and father who live together) are 31% and 40%, compared with 21% and 26% for 'maternal grandparents'.

Note that a smaller proportion of repartnered grandfathers than grandfathers living on their own see the child weekly or once a month; repartnering appears to have less impact on grandmothers frequently seeing their grandchildren. One activity that higher proportions of grandmothers and grandfathers living together or with new partners participate in than grandmothers or grandfathers on their own is taking children out. This may be an activity that feels easier to manage in a couple relationship.

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**Table 3.4 Grandchild-grandparent interaction when child is aged 6<sup>4</sup>**

Relationship of the child's main carer to the child's grandparent	Sees child at least once a week	Sees child at least once a month	Looks after child at least once a week	Looks after at least once a month	Baby-sits at least once a month	Stays overnight at least once a month	Took child out in the last year	Bases (children with type of grandparent)	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	Weighted	Unweighted
<i>'Maternal' grandparents</i>									
Carer's mother and father (living together)	74	86	48	68	40	31	72	1,720	1,776
Carer's mother (who lives alone)	72	85	40	57	40	26	54	1,145	1,110
Carer's mother and her partner	73	82	38	58	41	33	63	237	217
Carer's father (who lives alone)	47	67	14	27	14	14	31	569	538
Carer's father and his partner	30	59	9	25	17	11	48	117	117
<i>'Paternal' grandparents</i>									
Carer's partner's mother and father (who live together)	59	80	31	49	26	19	58	1,275	1,384
Carer's partner's mother (who lives alone)	55	75	22	38	22	16	41	711	736
Carer's partner's mother and her partner	42	75	20	32	20	20	54	120	124
Carer's partner's father (who lives alone)	38	61	11	18	8	4	20	311	314
Carer's partner's father and his partner	29	62	14	20	12	13	38	70	77
Non-resident parent's mother and father (who live together)	66	89	36	56	42	43	59	148	120
Non-resident parent's mother (who lives alone)	55	82	32	55	37	44	47	120	100
Non-resident parent's father (who lives alone)	32	71	9	16	12	19	33	57	47
Any one or more of the grandparent types	78	89	50	68	43	34	71	3,597	3,600

The involvement of each type of grandparent also varies by the age of the mother at the child's birth and household income, factors which are inter-related. For example, while 31% of children stay overnight at least once a month with their 'maternal grandparents', the carer's mother and father, it is 64% amongst children whose mothers were under 20 at birth and 12% amongst children whose mothers were 40 or over at the child's birth.

<sup>4</sup> See also Table A4 in the Appendix.

Children living in low-income households are the most likely to see their 'maternal grandmother' every day. However, 7% of children in the lowest income group have a grandparent living in their household, compared with 2% of children in the second lowest group, 1% in the middle group and less than 1% in the higher categories.

**Table 3.5 Frequency of child's contact with carer's mother and father (living together) by equivalised household income, at age 6**

How often child sees carer's mother and father	Bottom Quintile (<£11,944) %	2nd Quintile %	3rd Quintile %	4th Quintile %	Top Quintile (≥£37,500) %	All incomes %
Every day or almost every day	43	43	39	28	27	36
At least once a week	37	37	34	38	40	37
At least once a month	9	10	12	16	16	13
At least once every three months	3	4	8	13	13	8
Less than once every three months	7	5	7	5	4	5
Never	1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1
<i>Bases</i>						
<i>Weighted</i>	315	356	290	323	328	1,720
<i>Unweighted</i>	249	357	314	373	383	1,776

### 3.3.2 Grandmothers and grandfathers

More grandmothers than grandfathers interact frequently with their grandchild. The questions asked in GUS do not give a separate picture for grandmothers and grandfathers when they live together, so we cannot tell whether these grandparents are equally involved with their grandchildren. However, when they live apart we can distinguish between grandmothers and grandfathers in terms of levels of interaction with child.

Higher proportions of grandmothers living on their own or in new partnerships have frequent interaction with the child than of grandfathers living on their own or in new partnerships. Differences between grandparenting couples and grandparents with new partners or alone suggest that divorce, separation and widowhood can depress levels of weekly contact and childcare. Nevertheless, the patterns of interaction of grandmothers who were alone or with new partners remained close to that of grandmothers living in grandparent couples. On the other hand grandfathers living alone or with new partners have markedly lower levels of interaction than grandfathers living in couples. Differences between grandmothers and grandfathers hold for both maternal and paternal grandparents.

## GRANDPARENTS' SUPPORT FOR THE CHILD'S PARENT

### 4.1 Introduction

Research has repeatedly shown that grandparents provide informal support for many families and sometimes step into parenting roles when parents are unable to care for their children for whatever reason (Anderson et al, 2007, Bradshaw et al. 2008, Glaser et al 2010, Gray et al, 2005; Gray, 2005; Dench et al, 1999, Koslowski 2009, Nandy and Selwyn 2011, Smith, 2005; Statham 2011). The Growing Up in Scotland study asks about a range of types of support including buying toys, clothes and equipment for the child, giving financial assistance, providing advice, helping around the house as well as exploring grandparental provision of childcare in some detail.

### 4.2 Financial and other support

A grandparent buying toys, clothes or equipment for a grandchild is a form of interaction between grandparent and grandchild as well as a form of support to parents. As can be seen in Table 4.1, the overwhelming majority of all types of grandparents make such purchases for their grandchildren 'at least once a year' (between 65 and 90%). The main carer's partner's father who is living on his own was the near exception to this rule. Around half (52%) are reported as having bought their grandchild a toy, clothes or equipment in the last year.

The majority of maternal grandmothers give advice to parents but more modest proportions of other grandparents do the same. About half of maternal grandmothers also give some help around the house.

Financial assistance is most likely to come from maternal grandparents living as a couple or maternal grandfathers living on their own. Women living on their own often have less financial security than men on their own. A new partnership seems to facilitate a maternal grandmother's offering of financial assistance but to depress a paternal grandfather's offering of assistance. This is consistent with women taking a more leading role in a couple in tending to kinship ties. A non-resident parent's parents are the grandparents who are least likely to give financial assistance.



**Table 4.1 Support from grandparent to parent in the last year, at age 6<sup>5</sup>**

Relationship of main carer grandparent	Bought toys etc. %	Gave advice %	Helped around house %	Helped financially %	Bases	
					Weighted	Unweighted
<i>'Maternal' grandparents</i>						
Carer's mother and father (living together)	90	65	54	40	1,720	1,776
Carer's mother (who lives alone)	86	56	47	35	1,145	1,110
Carer's mother and her partner	88	66	47	43	237	217
Carer's father (who lives alone)	65	37	32	37	569	538
Carer's father and his partner	67	38	17	22	117	117
<i>'Paternal' grandparents</i>						
Partner's mother and father (who live together)	78	41	34	23	1,275	1,384
Partner's mother (who lives alone)	74	39	24	24	711	736
Partner's mother and her partner	75	38	23	22	120	124
Partner's father (who lives alone)	52	22	14	22	311	314
Partner's father and his partner	67	27	9	18	70	77
<i>Child's non-resident parent's parents</i>						
Child's non-resident parent's mother and father	82	28	11	13	147	119
Child's non-resident parent's mother (who lives alone)	82	26	15	19	118	99
Child's non-resident parent's father (who lives alone)	74	20	13	11	57	47
Any one or more of the grandparent types	89	61	54	43	3,597	3,600

There is a clear relationship between low household income, the age of mother at the child's birth and the percentage of grandparents providing financial help. Young mothers are over-represented in the lowest income group and the greater likelihood of the low income group receiving financial assistance is illustrated in Table 4.2.

Across almost all types of grandparents, the percentage providing financial support is higher in the lowest income group of families.

<sup>5</sup> See also Table A5 in the Appendix.

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**Table 4.2 Financial assistance from grandparents when child was aged 6, by income category of grandchild's family**

Relationship of main carer to grandparent	Bottom Quintile (<£11,944) %	2nd Quintile %	3rd Quintile %	4th Quintile %	Top Quintile (>=£37,500) %
<i>'Maternal' grandparents</i>					
<b>Carer's mother and father (living together)</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>Bases</i>					
<i>Weighted</i>	315	356	290	323	328
<i>Unweighted</i>	249	357	314	373	383
<b>Carer's mother (who lives alone)</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>23</b>
<i>Bases</i>					
<i>Weighted</i>	325	237	199	166	153
<i>Unweighted</i>	251	218	207	192	184
<b>Carer's father (who lives alone)</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>30</b>
<i>Bases</i>					
<i>Weighted</i>	166	139	81	85	67
<i>Unweighted</i>	127	123	84	95	81
<i>'Paternal' grandparents</i>					
<b>Partner's mother and father (who live together)</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>
<i>Bases</i>					
<i>Weighted</i>	147	239	230	284	300
<i>Unweighted</i>	128	244	250	334	352
<b>Partner's mother (who lives alone)</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>
<i>Bases</i>					
<i>Weighted</i>	116	146	126	142	133
<i>Unweighted</i>	93	146	133	161	159
<b>Partner's father (who lives alone)</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>13</b>
<i>Bases</i>					
<i>Weighted</i>	58	62	63	57	53
<i>Unweighted</i>	44	62	65	65	63

Table 4.3 shows that younger mothers are more likely to receive financial assistance from all types of grandparents than older mothers.

**Table 4.3 Financial assistance from grandparents when child was aged 6, by age of mother at birth**

Relationship of main carer to grandparent	Under 20 %	20 to 29 %	30 to 39 %	40 or older %
<i>'Maternal' grandparents</i>				
<b>Carer's mother and father (living together)</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>39</b>
<i>Bases</i>				
<i>Weighted</i>	100	722	860	33
<i>Unweighted</i>	61	669	1,001	40
<b>Carer's mother (who lives alone)</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>Bases</i>				
<i>Weighted</i>	109	458	524	39
<i>Unweighted</i>	64	386	601	47
<b>Carer's father (who lives alone)</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>21</b>
<i>Bases</i>				
<i>Weighted</i>	75	270	212	9
<i>Unweighted</i>	43	233	248	11
<i>'Paternal' grandparents</i>				
<b>Partner's mother and father (who live together)</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>16</b>
<i>Bases</i>				
<i>Weighted</i>	50	496	694	34
<i>Unweighted</i>	34	479	827	43
<b>Partner's mother (who lives alone)</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>13</b>
<i>Bases</i>				
<i>Weighted</i>	43	274	369	23
<i>Unweighted</i>	26	252	428	28
<b>Partner's father (who lives alone)</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>Bases</i>				
<i>Weighted</i>	18	130	149	11
<i>Unweighted</i>	13	115	172	13

### 4.3 Childcare

A number of studies have emphasised that grandparents continue to have an important role as childcare providers when children start school. Table 4.4 shows increased reliance on grandparents when children are in primary school, compared to the pre-school years. At age 6, 44% of children are not routinely using any childcare (neither during school term nor during school holidays) but over half (56%) are, and of those who are using childcare, 67% use grandparent care. This heavier reliance on grandparent care is likely to reflect grandparents' capacity to be flexibly timed to fit the school week, and to accommodate school holidays. It does not mean an overall increase in children in grandparent care, because when children start school, the proportion of parents using no childcare also increases. The proportion of children in grandparent care remains broadly stable overtime at about two in five children (37% at age 6).

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**Table 4.4 Percentages of types of childcare used at ages 3 to 6**

Type of childcare	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5 pre-school and in school		Age 6
			Pre-school	In school	
	%	%	%	%	%
Grandparents	50	39	38	67	67
Other relatives	8	7	7	13	11
Private nursery/crèche	34	23	19	2	2
Childminder	11	8	8	11	10
Local authority playgroup	9	4	3	–	–
Local authority nursery	8	15	13	–	–
Ex-partner	3	3	4	6	7
Sibling	1	1	1	1	1
Friend/neighbour	3	3	3	8	6
School nursery	2	53	62	–	–
Breakfast club	–	–	–	6	7
After school club	–	–	–	16	20
Does not use childcare	24	2	3	45	44
<i>Bases (those using any childcare)</i>					
<i>Weighted</i>	3,207	3,933	2,524	567	2,044
<i>Unweighted</i>	3,264	3,942	2,287	629	2,105

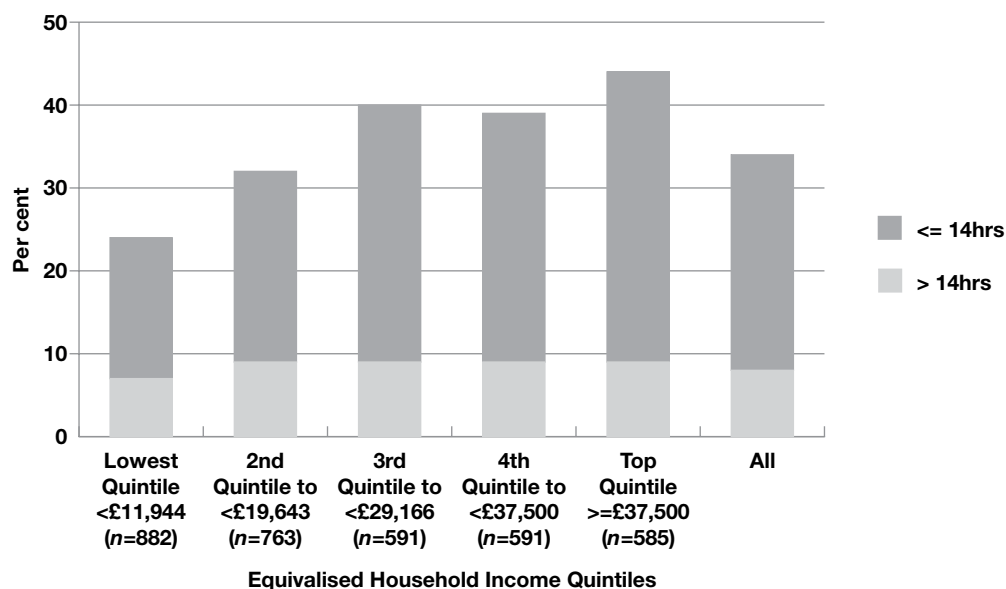
Note: some of the less common types of childcare (e.g. nanny) are not displayed. Childcare use includes pre-school.

For well over half of those using grandparent care (57%), grandparent providers are responsible for all the childcare the child receives. More specifically, where there is only one childcare provider (35% of children), this is a grandparent in 61% of cases.

For children receiving any regular childcare at age 6, there is a difference between term time and school holidays, with only 55% receiving care in school holidays (50% in both). In term time the median number of hours of care by grandparent providers is 6 hours per week (the lowest quarter of the distribution having up to 3.5 hours care, and the highest having 14 hours or more), but in school holidays the median number of hours care by grandparent providers is more than double at 15.5 hours per week (the lowest quarter of the distribution having up to 7 hours care and the highest up to 24.5 hours or more).

Considering *all* cohort children, not just those receiving regular childcare, the proportion receiving any weekly term-time grandparent care increases with household income, ranging from 24% in the lowest income group to 43% in the highest (see Figure 4.A). However, the proportion in grandparent care *for more than 14 hours a week*, 8% overall, is remarkably consistent across income groups (constrained between 7% and 9%). The proportion of children in grandparent care for more than 14 hours a week is slightly higher for children in lone parent families (13% compared compared with 7%) and for children whose main carer works full-time (15% if working 35 hours a week or more, compared with 9% working part-time and 5% not working).

**Figure 4-A Percentage of all children aged 6 who are receiving grandparent care during school term, up to and over 14 hours per week, by household income**



Base: All children, weighted n = 3,441, unweighted n = 3,458

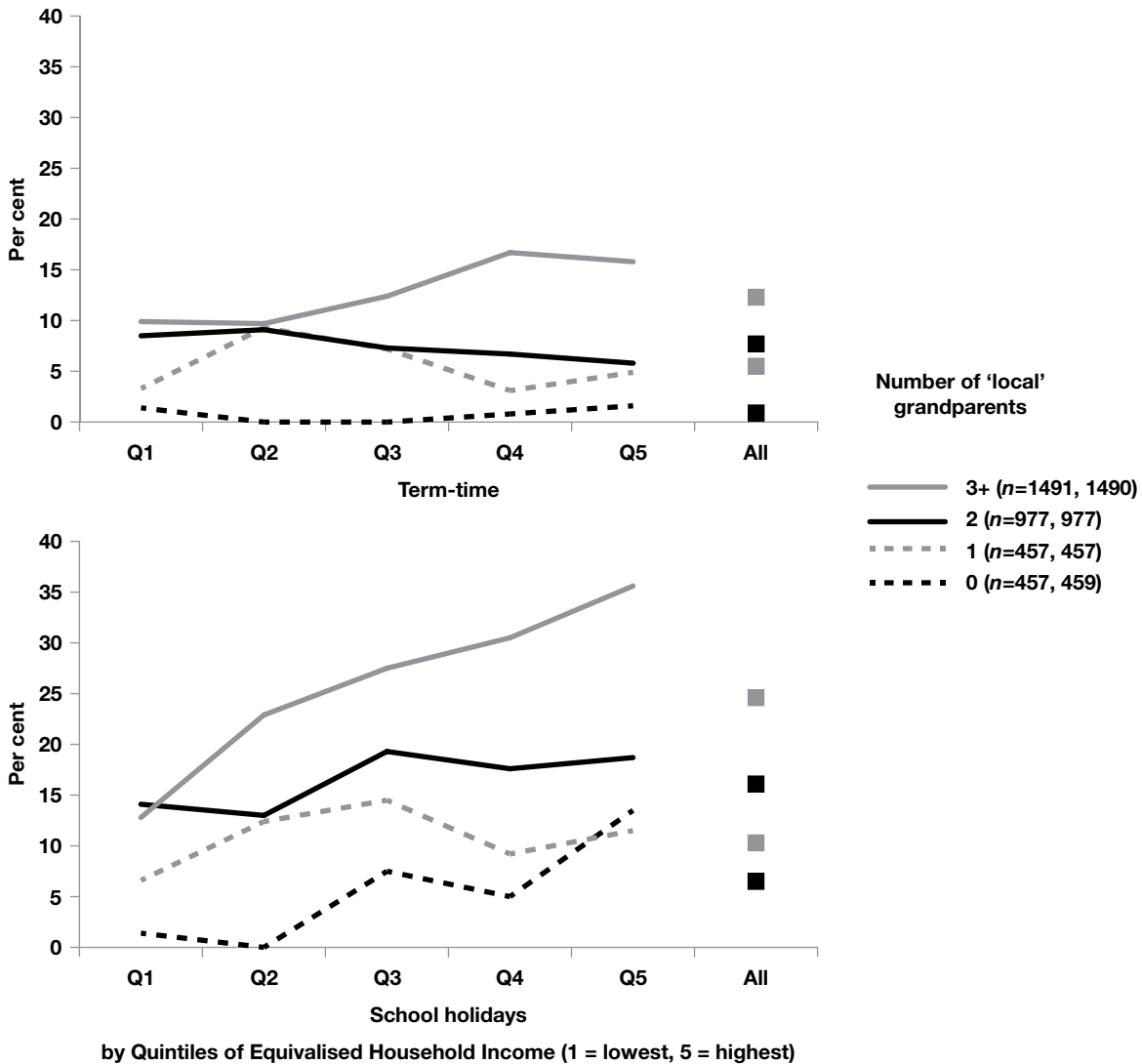
In the school holidays, the proportion of all cohort children in grandparent care for more than 14 hours a week is slightly higher overall (17%), comprising 85% of those children in grandparent care for more than 14 hours during term time, 32% of those in grandparent care for 14 hours or fewer in term time, and 2% of those receiving no grandparent care in term time. Overall, holiday grandparent care for more than 14 hours per week varies more markedly than term-time care across income groups (ranging from 11% in the lowest income group to 23% in the highest), indicating that high-income groups are more likely to make additional use of grandparents in holiday periods. The proportion of children in holiday grandparent care for more than 14 hours a week is also strongly associated their main carer's hours of employment (30% if mothers work 35 hours a week or more, 20% if part-time, 6% if not working).

An obvious limiting factor to grandparent childcare provision is the number of living grandparents a child has, and their proximity to the child's home, the latter likely to be a particular issue in term time. Figure 4-B shows, separately for term time and school holidays (left and right panels), the proportion of all children receiving more than 14 hours grandparent childcare, by household income, with children divided into subgroups (4 differently coloured lines) according to number of grandparents living 'locally' (i.e. up to 30 minutes' drive away). It is striking how the overall rates increase in the school holidays, for all categories of 'local' grandparents, including 'no local grandparents'. The greater use of grandparents by higher income groups is most evident for term-time care where there are three or more local grandparents, and for holiday care, for all categories but particularly those with no local grandparents or three plus. In the school holidays, those in the lowest income group and with no local grandparents are likely to be the least able to increase their grandparent care, while those in high-income groups seem able to increase grandparent care regardless of the number of local grandparents.

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**Figure 4-B Proportion of children who are receiving over 14 hours per week grandparent care, by household income quintiles and all incomes, all children aged 6, separately for term time and school holidays**



Base: All children, weighted n = 3,382, unweighted n = 3,383

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Grandparents remain important in most children's lives across the early years, and for families using childcare reliance on grandparent care increases when children go to school. However, some grandparents are much more important than others.

At age 6, only 1% of children have no living grandparents but twice as many, albeit only 2%, have no contact with grandparents. Nineteen per cent of 6-year-olds have one or two grandparents but a higher proportion, 36%, are in contact with only one or two grandparents. On the other hand, 28% have three grandparents and, 26% are in contact with three, while 52% have four or more but only 36% are in contact with this many.

The majority of children have at least one local grandparent described as close, typically the maternal grandmother. On the other hand, about two out of five children have no local maternal grandparent or other local grandparent described as close although many households are maintaining close ties over distance.

Repartnering, which increases children's pool of grandparents, does not necessarily translate into an increase in support available. When grandfathers repartner the new grandparent units created are less likely to be actively interacting and providing support than their equivalents who have not repartnered. The depressing effect on grandparent involvement is less for new units created when grandmothers repartner. On the other hand, the main factor which decreases children's pool of grandparents, older maternal age at birth, is associated with lower levels of interaction with and support from grandparents.

The evidence on who is involved with the child and giving support confirms the significance of lineage and gender, and continues to point to the maternal grandmother as the key grandparent. While there are many examples of other types of grandparents providing support, higher proportions of maternal grandmothers regularly see the child and maternal grandmothers are the most likely to look after the child.

Factors increasing and decreasing children's pool of grandparents (premature mortality, age of grandparent and therefore likely mortality and ill health, rates of repartnering) vary by the child's socio-economic circumstances. The loss or gain of a grandparent will not always change the child's overall support since not all living grandparents are in contact. Some grandparents matter more than others. The loss of a child's maternal grandmother, the mother of the main carer is likely to be particularly significant, a loss most likely to be sustained by older mothers, albeit, among young mothers, the risk is higher in areas of multiple deprivation.

Geographical proximity, along with gender and 'lineage', is the characteristics most obviously associated with whether grandparents will be close, actively involved and supportive.

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Grandparents who are most involved with the child are generally also the most likely to give support to parents. Income support is more frequently given to children in low-income families and the proportion of children with very frequent 'hands-on' interaction with grandparents is also higher among lower-income groups. In contrast, the proportion of children receiving some regular grandparent care is higher among high income groups. In school holidays high-income groups seem able to draw on additional grandparent care even if they have no local grandparents.

When it is possible to distinguish grandmothers and grandfathers, grandmothers are more involved than grandfathers. Comparing grandparent couples with those living alone, and those alone with those living in new partnerships, shows that the effects of partnership are modified by gender. The loss of a partner and re-partnering has a more negative effect on grandfathers involvement and support.

Lineage continues to influence the level of grandparental support and maternal grandmothers remain the dominant support givers when children are aged 3 and 6, shown by the data on emotional closeness, contact and types of interaction. The evidence does not support the theory that grandfathers are becoming more like grandmothers.

The Growing Up in Scotland study is a study of children and their families and has not spoken directly to grandparents. However, it clearly illustrates that simply gathering data about an undifferentiated grandparent may be unhelpful. It cannot be presumed that because children have lots of grandparents they have lots of support.

## 5.1 Policy implications

The data confirm the wisdom of an early years and parenting policy that heeds the role grandparents play. It also confirms the importance of simultaneously acknowledging that some grandparents are more involved than others, both accepting that diverse and multiple grandparents may play key roles, and the frequent hierarchy of importance culminating in the maternal grandmother as the key grandparent.

When commissioning data about grandparents, it is clear that gathering information about undifferentiated grandparents may be unhelpful.

Given the significance of geographical proximity, housing allocation enabling proximity and transport enabling mobility are important issues if grandparent and grandchild relationships are to be facilitated. Free or low-cost and practically usable public transport for children and elderly people may be particularly important in low-income families with no car and no local grandparents. Housing able to accommodate visiting grandparents or visiting grandchildren is also likely to be an issue for some families.

Policies which extend grandparents working lives and working hours are likely to impact on the current use of grandparents as parent's first choice of flexible childcare in a significant proportion of families but may also diminish levels of grandparent-grandchild interaction that is not childcare as such.



Opening parent education programmes to grandparents, grandfathers as well as grandmothers, might both further show grandparents their contribution is being recognised and valued, and help encourage the 'new grandfathers' that some authors suggested were on the horizon. It may also enable the extension of grandparents' repertoire of skills and confidence.

If the incomes of grandparents reduce in value this is likely to impact on the financial support they give, including the forms of financial support several types of grandparents extend to grandchildren in low-income families.

Recent advocacy of enabling payment of grandparents for childcare, and of giving legal status to grandparental rights of access to their grandchildren following parental separation are likely to remain recurrent issues.

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**A.1 Additional background on grandparent interaction and support**

**Table A.1 Child’s carers’ contact with grandparent generation (expanded version of Table 3.3)**

<b>Relationship of grandparent to main carer</b>	<b>% of cohort in contact with</b>	<b>Number in contact (weighted)</b>	<b>Contact as % of grandparents in this category</b>	<b>Number alive (weighted)</b>
Mother and father (who live together)	47	1,720		
Mother (who lives alone)	31	1,145		
Father (who lives alone)	16	569		
Mother and her partner	6	237		
Father and his partner	3	117		
<b>Total in contact with mother</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>3,102</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>3,324</b>
<b>Total in contact with father</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>2,406</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>2,724</b>
Partner’s mother and father (who live together)	35	1,275		
Partner’s mother (who lives alone)	19	712		
Partner’s father (who lives alone)	9	311		
Partner’s mother and her partner	3	120		
Partner’s father and his partner	2	70		
<b>Total in contact with partner’s mother</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>2,107</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>2,398</b>
<b>Total in contact with partner’s father</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>1,656</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>2,003</b>
Child’s non-resident parent’s mother & father (live together)	4	148		
Child’s non-resident parent’s mother (who lives alone)	3	120		
Child’s non-resident parent’s father (who lives alone)	2	57		
Child’s non-resident parent’s mother and her partner	–	6		
Child’s non-resident parent’s father and his partner	–	7		
<b>Total in contact with child’s non-resident parent’s mother</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>611</b>
<b>Total in contact with child’s non-resident parent’s father</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>509</b>

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**Table A.2 Additional to Table 2.8: Which grandparents live locally for those children with any local grandparents, at age 3**

Relationship of grandparent to main carer	Local %
Mother	79
Father	62
Partner's mother	58
Partner's father	47
Child's non-resident parent's mother	9
Child's non-resident parent's father	7
Mother's partner	8
Father's partner	3
Partner's mother's partner	4
Partner's father's partner	2
<i>Bases (all children with any grandparents living locally)</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	3,587
<i>Unweighted</i>	3,539

**Table A.3 Additional to Table 3.1: Which grandparents are emotionally close for those children close to any grandparent, at age 3**

Relationship of grandparent to main carer	Local %
Mother	85
Father	62
Partner's mother	55
Partner's father	41
Child's non-resident parent's mother	5
Child's non-resident parent's father	4
Mother's partner	7
Father's partner	3
Partner's mother's partner	3
Partner's father's partner	2
<i>Bases (all children close to any grandparent)</i>	
<i>Weighted</i>	3,958
<i>Unweighted</i>	3,960

**Table A.4 Variation on Table 3.4: Grandchild-grandparent limited interaction, at age 6**

Relationship of the child's main carer to the child's grandparent	Sees child less than once in 3 mths %	Never sees child %	Looks after child less than once in 3 mths %	Never looks after %	Never baby-sits %	Never stays over-night %	Never takes out %	Bases	
								Weighted	Unweighted
<i>'Maternal' grandparents</i>									
Carer's mother and father (living together) A	7	1	23	14	21	26	28	1,720	1,776
Carer's mother (who lives alone) C	7	–	33	23	32	36	46	1,145	1,110
Carer's mother and her partner G	9	–	32	21	26	27	37	237	217
Carer's father (who lives alone) D	19	5	67	54	65	71	69	569	538
Carer's father and his partner H	23	2	62	44	50	61	52	117	117
<i>'Paternal' grandparents</i>									
Carer's partner's mother and father (who live together) B	10	1	38	26	31	40	42	1,275	1,384
Carer's partner's mother (who lives alone) E	12	1	51	39	45	58	59	711	736
Carer's partner's mother and her partner I	9	1	51	36	46	51	46	120	124
Carer's partner's father (who lives alone) F	24	2	76	68	72	82	80	311	314
Carer's partner's father and his partner J	20	–	67	48	58	61	62	70	77
<i>Child's non-resident parent's parents</i>									
Non-resident parent's mother and father (who live together) K	6	1	35	31	43	38	41	148	120
Non-resident parent's mother (who lives alone) L	9	1	40	33	47	38	53	120	100
Non-resident parent's father (who lives alone) M	19	5	82	78	78	80	67	57	47

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**Table A.5 Additional to Table 4.1: Support from grandparent to parent, at ages 3 and 6**

Relationship of main carer to	Bought toys etc.		Helped around house		Helped financially		Bases			
	Age 3	Age 6	Age 3	Age 6	Age 3	Age 6	Age 3		Age 6	
Grandparent	%	%	%	%	%	%	Weighted	Unweighted	Weighted	Unweighted
<i>'Maternal' grandparents</i>										
Carer's mother and father (living together)	100	90	54	54	40	40	2,121	2,167	1,720	1,776
Carer's mother (who lives alone)	87	86	43	47	39	35	1,215	1,187	1,145	1,110
Carer's mother and her partner	91	88	48	47	44	43	626	599	237	217
Carer's father (who lives alone)	62	65	24	32	34	37	336	318	569	538
Carer's father and his partner	72	67	30	17	26	22	169	168	117	117
<i>'Paternal' grandparents</i>										
Partner's mother and father (who live together)	82	78	33	34	28	23	1,663	1,759	1,275	1,384
Partner's mother (who lives alone)	75	74	22	24	24	24	834	861	711	736
Partner's mother and her partner	88	75	31	23	15	22	164	165	120	124
Partner's father (who lives alone)	48	52	13	14	21	22	372	380	311	314
Partner's father and his partner	64	67	10	9	13	18	95	100	70	77
<i>Child's non-resident parent's parents</i>										
Child's non-resident parent's mother and father	84	82	12	11	18	13	102	84	147	119
Child's non-resident parent's mother (who lives alone)	81	82	18	15	17	19	102	86	118	99
Child's non-resident parent's father (who lives alone)	42	74	2	13	12	11	37	30	57	47

Note: The data definitions are slightly different at each age point. The figures for age 3 represent the proportion of parents who said the grandparent or grandparents ever currently helped out at all. In contrast, the figures for age 6 represent the proportion who had helped out in the last year.





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