

Grandmothers: an Undervalued Resource or a Burden on the Younger Generations?

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Grandmothers: Burdens or Benefits?

A grandmother is a lady who has no children of her own, so she likes other people's little girls and boys. A grandfather is a man grandmother. He goes for walks with the boys and they talk about fishing and tractors. Grandmothers don't have to do anything but be there. They are old, so they shouldn't play hard or run. They should never say, 'Hurry up'. Usually they are fat, but not too fat to tie children's shoes. They wear glasses and funny underwear, and they can take their teeth and gums off. They don't have to be smart, only answer questions like why dogs hate cats and why God isn't married. They don't talk baby-talk like visitors. When they read to us, they don't skip bits, or mind if it is the same story over again. Everybody should have one, especially if you don't have television, because grandmothers are the only grown-ups who have time.

This comes from an essay written by an eight-year-old boy in Britain thirty years ago. It was quoted by the Archbishop of Canterbury opening a debate on The Family in Britain Today in the House of Lords. At this time a minority of grandmothers were in paid employment because economic activity rates among women in their 50s were lower (56%) than today (69%) and those who were in paid employment included a higher proportion of unmarried and childless women. This reflected the higher proportion of women born in the 1920s who had either never married or remained childless. In any case, on average grandmothers were older, reflecting the later age at which they had married and had children. At the same time this little boy's mother belonged to the post-second world war baby boom generation who had come to adulthood in the 1960s and married and had children in their early to mid twenties. On average they had larger families than either previous or subsequent generations. Similar trends were visible at this time across Western Europe and North America. His mother was unlikely to have returned to paid employment until he was at school because nearly three-quarters of mothers stayed out of the labour market at least until their youngest child reached school age (5 years old). Only 6% of mothers of pre-school children had *full-time* employment. The strategy which British women adopted to combine motherhood with paid employment was to take a part-time job once their children were in school. Throughout the 1960s the British government had actively encouraged the growth of part-time employment, particularly in the public health, welfare and education sectors in which women predominated (see Kiernan, Land and Lewis, 1998). *Full-time* workers for the public sector were recruited from overseas, mainly from former colonies (Doyal, 1980). Formal childcare provision was neglected and from the mid-1970s was reserved for children deemed to be 'at risk'. As a result informal childcare arrangements predominated (although there were important variations between localities and different minority ethnic women) (see Hunt, 1978 and Martin and Roberts, 1983). A third of employed mothers relied on their children's *grandmothers* to help with childcare and a further 12% relied on other relatives and friends.

Today in Britain over half of mothers with a pre-school child are in paid work, a quarter of them full-time. The National Childcare Strategy, launched in 1998, a year after New Labour were elected, doubled the number of childcare places by 2004 thus providing for one in four children under 8 years of age, compared with one in nine at the outset. Over the same period

nursery education places (part-time) have become sufficient for all three and four year olds whose parents want one. A third of employed mothers still depend on informal care in general and grandmothers in particular. Informal and formal childcare services are not simple substitutes for each other as even the British government is just beginning to recognise. In the updated ten-year childcare strategy published at the end of 2004, the Department for Education and Skills (where the children's minister is located) wrote:

Informal care is a popular and valuable form of care for many parents. The reasons seem to be a mixture of choice and necessity. Grandparents provide the bulk of informal care. Informal care is often valued for the high levels of trust and the levels of flexibility ... Informal care is frequently the 'glue' that holds different childcare arrangements together ... (DfES, 2004, p37)

The *proportion* of employed mothers in Britain relying on grandmothers' care has changed very little in thirty years, but the *numbers* of grandmothers involved are much greater. By the year 2000, 70% of middle-aged and older people were grandparents and a third of grandmothers are in their fifties (Grundy and Clarke, 2000). A survey cited in the government's Green Paper, *Supporting Families*, indicated that nearly half of grandparents helped to look after their grandchildren (Clarke and Roberts, 2002, p174). A more recent study conducted by MORI for the Norwich Union (the UK's largest insurance company), found that 39% of grandparents regularly helped with childcare, nearly a quarter regularly did the 'school run' and a quarter babysat several times a week, 9% on a nightly basis. A Norwich Union spokesman said:

It's clear that many families rely on the help of grandparents but with an increasing number of grandparents forced to work into retirement, this valuable source of help may not be as readily available in the future. (Norwich Union, News Release, UK: 'Over three quarters of families rely on older relatives for help around the home', 13 August 2004)

As Arnlaug Leira has argued on the basis of the Norwegian experience: "The emergence of the modern dual-earner family was dependent upon the conservation of a more traditional family form" (Leira, 1992, p160). However, it does not follow that governments are necessarily adopting policies to sustain, far less to prevent the erosion of systems of informal care as labour markets, families and households change. The British government sees no reason to include "the care that is freely given within families" (DfES, *op cit*, p37) in its new systems of childcare tax credits. The 'glue' is apparently self-generating, like so much of women's work has always been assumed to be as the early feminists noted (see for British examples: West, 1911, Rathbone, 1924 and Woolf, 1937). Moreover, they do not even see that older women's economic activity rates are of any relevance to the national childcare strategy over the next ten years. The appendix to the childcare strategy document giving background statistics describing women's position in the labour market excludes women over 54 years of age. Meanwhile the EU's employment strategy includes a target to raise the employment rates of people aged 55-64 from 40 percent to 50 percent by 2010. The OECD also defines 'prime-age' women as aged 25 to 54 years, and even when discussing the interaction of childcare and leave policies with women's labour force participation, does not consider older women. Given raising pension ages is firmly on the agenda in many countries (in Britain for example, women's pension age will be raised to 65 years in 2010) this practice

needs to be reviewed (see *Female Labour Force Participation: past trends and main determinants in OECD countries*, OECD Economics Department, May 2004). The EU has a target of 65 years for the average age of retirement in 2010.

This paper will first describe how invisible older women's care is. In the current policy debates about the pension 'crisis' taking place across the industrialised world, older men and women are portrayed as 'burdens' rather than contributors to the general welfare. Second, it discusses briefly the development in methods of measuring the extent and value of care. Third, it will illustrate the extent to which 'the dual earner family', which is becoming more common in various forms in most European countries as well as in North America and the later industrialising countries in Asia, is still dependent upon those traditional family systems in which women of all generations take responsibility for either the management or direct provision of care - or both. How is the care of mothers and grandmothers being reorganised or replaced? To answer this question it is necessary to look beyond the nuclear family as well as to childcare markets and formal systems of childcare provided by the state within various welfare regimes. These childcare markets are no longer confined to neighbourhoods or local communities but extend across regions and even nation states. There are now what Arlie Hochschild has called "global care chains" (Hochschild, 2000). However, it should be noted that it is a grandmother who is the most likely to be found at the beginning of this chain (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002).

The invisibility of care in the policy world

Along with the steady fall in fertility, longer life expectancy is starting to increase the dependency of older people on their fellow citizens in what will be stagnating or falling working age population in most regions. By 2050, the over-65s will represent between 40 and 80 percent of the labour force in developed economies, more than 40 percent in China and 25 percent in India. ('We can adapt to an ageing world', *Financial Times*, 30 May 2005)

This article by a senior economic adviser at the UBS Investment Bank is more upbeat than many on this topic and he does not propose raising the pension age to 70 years. He does however see a solution in further increasing the labour force participation of women in general and of women and men aged between 55 and 64 years in particular. Nowhere does he acknowledge that either of these strategies could have an impact on both informal and formal care economies. (In Britain a quarter of adults in their 50s (compared with 8% in their 20s) are caring for another frail, disabled or sick adult so it is not only childcare which is being overlooked.) Other experts have argued that *everyone* should adopt a longer working hours culture despite the evidence that long working hours does not necessarily equate with high levels of productivity. The UK has long working hours (see table 1) but low productivity compared with other members of the EU. In an article entitled 'Middle East and Europe: the IMF calls for longer working hours in Eurozone.' (*Financial Times*, 4 August 2004), the IMF berated members of the EU, with the exception of Britain, for choosing leisure over money by resisting attempts to reverse their hard-won reductions in the working week. "It warned that greater use of labour in the economy-more hours worked per capita-was essential to sustain welfare systems." There was no acknowledgement that women - and men - who have caring responsibilities have to make 'choices' between *care*, leisure and money. There was also a failure to recognise that these choices are affected both by the availability and cost of services provided by state welfare systems *and* of the informal care

economy. Expenditure levels on formal care services provided by and/or paid for by the welfare state may be *more* sustainable if informal care is valued and supported. There is no simple trade-off between formal and informal care systems.

Economic activity rates of older men and women vary greatly across Europe (see table 2). The variations between men's rates have been studied far more closely than variations between women's because there has been great concern to reverse their decline. Over the past twenty-five years it has been policy in many countries to encourage and actively support early retirement among men, thus leaving more room in times of recession for sustaining employment for young people. The entrance of the 1960s baby boom generation to the labour market in the early 1980s coincided with recession in many EU countries. The problem in Britain was exacerbated by the small proportion of young people continuing in further and higher education compared with other EU countries. Social security systems were deliberately used in order to facilitate and pay for early retirement. The decline in traditional male manufacturing industries put many men out of a job in their 50s with little prospect of finding a job. In Britain a recent Cabinet Office Strategy Unit paper on men and women in their 50s reported that only 12 percent of those who had retired early were in the top quintile of the income distribution, only a third had retired early voluntarily and the main source of income of nearly half was sickness and disability benefits. A quarter of the women were family carers. Without any sense of irony one of these 'inactive' women who was providing domestic services for her employed husband is described as follows:

She has caring responsibilities for her mother for whom she shops, cleans and provides some personal care. She also looks after her grandchildren while her divorced daughter works part-time. She is not looking for paid work. (Strategy Unit, Cabinet Office, 2000, p20)

Far from valuing this care, the authors of the report estimate that "the drop in work rates among the over-50s since 1979 costs the economy about £16 billion a year in lost GDP and costs the public purse £3-£5 billion in extra benefits and lost taxes" (*Idem*, p5).

Table 1: Number of hours usually worked per week: men and women

Country	Full-time	Part-time
Belgium	38	22
Denmark	46	20
Germany	42	18
Greece	44	22
Spain	42	18
France	40	23
Ireland	42	19
Italy	41	24
Luxembourg	41	21
Netherlands	41	19
Austria	42	22
Portugal	42	21
Finland	41	20
Sweden	41	22
UK	44	18
Iceland	50	22

Norway	39	22
EU-11	42	20
EU-15	41	20

Table 2: Variations in employment rates of women aged 50-64 years in Europe

Country	Employment rates %		% employed part-time	
	1995	2000	1995	2000
Belgium	21	27	30	40
Denmark	49	60	36	35
Germany	38	40	34	38
Greece	27	30	8	8
Spain	21	26	17	17
France	37	43	29	31
Ireland	24	35	23	31
Italy	20	23	13	17
Luxembourg	19	38	20	26
Netherlands	28	38	67	71
Austria	33	32	27	33
Portugal	41	47	12	16
Finland	48	58	16	17
Sweden	-	70	-	-
UK	49	53	44	44
Iceland	83	83	4	47
Norway	63	67	48	43
EU-11	31	39	28	34
EU-15	-	35	-	32

Source: Eurostat Yearbook 2002, *People in the Labour Market*, Table 1, pp105-6.

In a recent OECD report *A Caring World: the new social policy agenda*, the consequences of rising female participation rates are discussed. It is assumed that these rates will, and indeed *should* rise further and as a result "fewer women will be in a position to offer informal help" (OECD, 1999, p20). This could be offset not only by "a more flexible distribution of work, leisure and care-giving over the life-cycle [permitting] care to be given during career breaks and combined with more flexible working patterns" but also that "given the improved health status of the elderly, the amount of informal care (including for children) provided by the retired themselves could increase substantially in the future" (*Idem*). On the one hand this ignores the evidence that increased female activity rates have not necessarily been accompanied by a reduction in informal care by women of working age, although in some countries, at least, depending on the extent of formal childcare provision, there has been a shift between the generations as more grandmothers have been drawn into caring for their grandchildren or at least being 'the glue' which holds the whole care infrastructure together. But on the other hand, it is not new for grandmothers, as will be discussed below, to be an integral part of children's care. In a country like the UK where formal childcare provision, although improving as described above, still lags behind that achieved by many other countries in the EU, more mothers *and* grandmothers than ever are combining care and paid employment in the formal labour market (Land, 2004). However, in Britain they pay a heavy price if they are not highly educated and skilled, because many have to accept lower pay, poorer training and career prospects followed by an impoverished old age (Evandrou and Glaser, 2003; Arber and Ginn, 2004). The average hourly rate of pay of women in part-time employment in the UK is 43 percent of that of a man in full-time employment (Rake *et al*,

2004). Research conducted in 2000 found the female part-time workers were the most stressed of all groups of workers (Taylor, 2001, p15).

Since the early 1990s when the full-time employees in the UK worked on average the shortest weekly hours in the EU, the UK has developed a 'long hours culture' and now work the longest hours. Even those dual earner families who are 'cash-rich' are often 'time-poor'. Evidence from the recent *Future of Work Programme* funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, confirmed that grandmothers are much less likely to be 'adults with time' than the grandmother of the little boy quoted at the beginning of this paper. The researchers in this programme found that "the survey evidence is devastating in its record of the slump of feelings among the over-50s towards their work" (Taylor, 2001, p13). In particular "the intensification of work and the lengthening of working time are imposing a particularly heavy burden among those women who are the least powerful" (*Ibid*, p16). Overall, by 2000 only 29 percent of all women were completely or very satisfied with the hours they worked compared with 51 percent in 1992. The reduction in satisfaction was particularly noticeable among semi-skilled and unskilled manual working women. In 2000 only 22 percent were completely or very satisfied compared with 57 percent in 1992.

These research findings are from studies conducted in 2000 and since then 'family-friendly' policies to assist parents 'balance' their 'work' and 'life' have been introduced in the UK. These are modest by EU standards, for example parents with children under 8 years of age have the right to *request* to work flexibly, including shorter hours, but employers can refuse. The introduction of paid paternity leave and some unpaid parental leave reflects concern to alter the distribution of care between mothers and fathers of young children. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has just completed a consultation on proposed policies to improve 'work-life balance' including parents of older children or carers of frail or disabled adults. There are also proposals for transferring some paid maternity leave to fathers. Carers of adults may be included in the right to request to work flexibly but there is no mention of grandmothers in relation to childcare. Meanwhile the UK government is still refusing to sign up fully to the EU Working Time Directive restricting working to a maximum of 48 hours a week and is insisting on keeping the right of individuals to opt out of the EU Working Time Directive restricting working time to a weekly average of 48 hours.

The policy rhetoric has shifted and accepted that "child-rearing and paid work are *complementary* rather than *alternative* activities" (OECD, 2000, p16). Family policies are now based on a 'family employment' rather than a 'family wage' model. However, like those based on a family wage model, they still rest on a very narrow understanding and an inadequate analysis of the relationship between families, markets and state policies. For example, the OECD report sees no contradiction in advocating "active ageing policies" which would involve healthy older people remaining in the labour market for longer, i.e. at least to age 65 years, at the same time as looking to healthy older people *after* retirement to contributing more to the informal care of adults and their grandchildren. But this may not fit in with demographic structures. After all, currently in the UK for example, half of all grandmothers are *under* 65 years. The family policy proposals are narrowly framed. For example, the report acknowledges that employed lone mothers experienced greater problems than employed mothers with partners, not only because the labour market does not take sufficiently into account their caring responsibilities but also because "social arrangements ... often continue to take for granted the flexibility and availability of a mother's time (e.g. the time schedule of schools, the offer of childcare services, the opening hours of shops, public offices etc)" (*Ibid*, pxx) but there is silence on the need to *change* these social arrangements

so that they are more easily synchronised with the lives of mothers - and other carers. (In Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, girls of average ability and below were *taught* time management with respect to their future domestic responsibilities.

A second element of realism needs to be introduced in claims on the pupils' time. Real housewives have to take children to and from school, keep appointments, and fit in their cooking, sewing and cleaning and their own recreation with demands which are outside their control. (Newsom Committee, 1963, p137))

Twenty years later Laura Balbo, in her article '*Crazy quilts: rethinking the welfare state from the women's point of view*' compares women's work with making patchwork quilts.

Because many goods and services are produced outside the family by other institutions (firms, schools, hospitals and so on) and because access to them requires time and flexibility on the part of 'clients', someone has to do the work of dealing with agencies, adapting to their often complex, time-consuming rigid and bureaucratic procedures. (Balbo, 1986, p49)

Workplaces now require workers to be more 'flexible' than in the past when many work regimes were more standardised and predictable. Those who have to synchronise 'work' and 'home' have an even more complex task, especially if the childcare provision employed mothers use is *not* flexible. Grandmothers can provide some much needed flexibility if they are not employed themselves.

The report also notes that lone mothers' economic activity rates are associated with the availability and affordability of formal childcare services. Thus it is not surprising that lone mothers in the UK now have low economic activity rates compared with many other EU countries. However, lone mothers in the 1950s and 1960s in Britain had *high* economic activity rates, higher than those of married mothers. They were also more likely to work *full-time* than married mothers. (In 1960 only 17 percent of lone mothers were dependent on means-tested benefit.) This was not because Britain had extensive formal childcare arrangements but because widows' pensions had generous earnings disregards (and these were even abolished in the mid-1960s when a Labour government was elected) *and*, most unmarried mothers were co-resident with their mothers. Grandmothers were providing the essential childcare but from the end of the 1970s lone mothers had an easier access to social housing for the first time, and moved out of the parental home. Because housing allocations policy was blind to the need to keep lone mothers in close proximity to supportive family and friends, and grandmothers' childcare was invisible, these mothers found it harder to take employment, even if the jobs were there. The increase in unemployment generally in the 1980s particularly affected the growing proportion of the lone mothers who were young with few or no educational qualifications (see Kiernan, Land and Lewis, 1998). Formal childcare services therefore are only part of the story of the childcare jigsaw.

Measuring and understanding care at the macro level

An important reason for being able to place a monetary value on informal care is to increase its visibility and by placing it alongside the cost of formal care services show its magnitude. As Douglas Wolf writes:

There are several reasons to develop estimates of the implicit monetary value of informal care. Such estimates call attention to the full set of resources devoted to long-term care needs. They are especially important to the extent that public policy recognises or interacts with informal care. Estimates of the economic value of informal care are also useful insofar as they illuminate the distribution within the population of this type of value-producing activity, particularly with respect to gender and race. (Wolf, 2004, p114)

His article is one of a very useful and interesting collection of articles edited by Folbre and Bittman, called *Family Time, the Social Organisation of Time* published in 2004. The contributors examine the interface between time use and family policy. While Wolf's contribution is focused on the care of adults, particularly older adults, it is interesting that within the volume as a whole, which discusses care at every stage in the life course, older men and women are seen more as receivers than as givers of care when exchanges across the generations are discussed. 'Grandmothers' or 'grandparents' are not found in the index!

In the past decade there has been much greater interest in time use and time budget surveys and at both national and international level they have become much more sophisticated and extensive. In addition to numerous national studies, there is now an EU-wide study. Time spent on caring activities *and* time spent in the presence of the child or adult needing care are now recorded and it is recognised that care is very often (particularly by women) combined with other activities, especially with domestic work. The analysis of 'secondary' activities and knowledge of in whose presence these take place allow a more nuanced understanding of care (see for example the work of Gershuny, 2000 and Bittman, 2004). The development of Household Satellite Accounts has made it possible to estimate the value of household production at the macro level. In Britain in 2000 the annual value of childcare and the social care of adults, elderly sick or disabled was estimated to be £281 billion. This represented over a quarter of total household production. This far outweighed the cost of formal childcare (£8 billion) and adult care services (£10 billion) and the cost of foregone revenue in taxes and benefits of older 'inactive' adults who are contributing to this care.

The time use studies and labour market studies provide useful data at the aggregate level for measuring time spent on care and time spent in the labour market. These studies, however, do not reveal the complexity of the relationship between families, markets and state policies, neither do they tell us how these complexities are managed or by whom within the family. To do this requires a reconceptualisation of 'the family' as well as of 'markets'. Too often family relationships and exchanges beyond the household are ignored although the rise in lone parenthood has made the policymakers aware of the issue of exchanges in *cash* for the *maintenance* of children whose parents are no longer co-residents. Tax and benefit systems in the past have acknowledged and facilitated the flow of money between the generations and obligations to maintain across the generations still vary between countries (Millar and Warman, 1998). Feminism across the industrialised world has helped to put the question of how childcare is shared between mothers and fathers onto the policy agenda with varying degrees of success, but the question of how the care of *children* is shared across *the generations* is rarely explicitly acknowledged. It is interesting to note that in the rich and

growing literature on families, family policies and welfare regimes to which feminists have made a major contribution, there is considerable discussion of how *gender* relations both determine and are determined by economic and social policies as well as by ideological and cultural changes in society. However, in the discussion of relationships between the *generations* there is far less, if any, discussion of how care, as well as cash which is more often acknowledged, flows down between older and younger generations as well as upwards. The focus is on the care older people *need* rather than give. For example, neither 'grandmothers' nor 'grandparents' are found in the indexes of *Family Time, the social organisation of care*, edited by Folbre and Bittman (2004), as already mentioned but are not found either in *Gender and the Welfare State, Care Work and Welfare in Europe and the USA* (Daly and Rake, 2003), *Gender, Welfare State and the Market* (Boje and Leira (eds), 2000) and *Solidarity between the Sexes and the Generations* (Knijn and Komter, 2004). Grandmothers are in fact present in these books. Indeed in the last book listed there is a chapter by Constanza Tobio devoted to social care and inter-generational solidarity which includes the care given by grandparents to their grandchildren.

Caring: the micro level

When researchers look for grandparents they quickly find they are a very important source of childcare even where formal public childcare services are well established and widely available. Constanza Tobio contrasted France, where public daycare services are well established and extensive and two-thirds of couple households are dual earner households (Tobio, 2004, p155) with Spain where mothers did not enter the labour market in large numbers until after the end of the Franco regime and childcare services are very undeveloped. She found nevertheless that grandparents provided significant amounts of childcare, especially for very young children, in both countries. She draws on a recent study of grandparents in France, which found that 85 percent of grandmothers and 75 percent of grandfathers regularly cared for their grandchildren, despite the fact that two out of three grandmothers were employed themselves. Professional families were less likely to rely on grandparents although care from grandparents "is especially intense between inactive (*sic*) grandmothers and active mothers developing a professional career" (Tobio, 2004, p158). She also found that

Contrary to what might be expected, *care for small grandchildren by grandparents is increasing rather than decreasing*. For example, among the older generation, respondents whose children were born between 1930 and 1950, spending school vacations with their grandparents was less common than among the following generations. In the past, grandparents as caregivers were a resource for difficult times (war, death of parent, divorce etc) but they now seem to be a common resource for normal times. (*Idem* - emphasis added)

In Spain, where mothers' entry into paid employment occurred much later there are fewer family-friendly policies. State childcare provision is sparse. Over half of Spanish grandmothers, irrespective of social class, are taking care of their grandchildren while their daughters work. They are a substitute for rather than a complement to public childcare services. Half of maternal grandmothers were taking care of pre-school children if they lived in the same town. Over two-fifths of maternal grandmothers looked after children after school either in their own home or the child's home. A fifth were involved in escorting their grandchildren to school (*Ibid*, p157). Grandmothers often involved grandfathers and as

Dench and Ogg (2002) found in the British context, a grandfather's help and involvement depends heavily on the grandmother's ability and willingness to organise him. They also helped when children were ill and during the school holidays. In other words: "Grandparents are not just filling gaps; if mothers are employed they are often the main caregivers of their grandchildren, a provisional solution for a generation in transition, the first generation of Spanish working mothers" (p158).

A fascinating, qualitative study of the first generation of mothers employed outside the home was recently undertaken by a South Korean doctoral student, Yun-Jung Kim. She also found that many were heavily dependent upon their mothers for help with childcare. Moreover, it was the dual earner professional couple, both employed full-time, who were most dependent upon the grandmother. The grandmother was much more likely to be the *maternal* grandmother because in a society still imbued with Confucianism, women once married have a duty to serve their mothers-in-law even if they are not co-resident. Thus paternal grandmothers are much less likely to offer to care for their grandchildren. Indeed they may well disapprove of their daughters-in-law taking paid employment at all. However, since industrialisation, starting in earnest in the early 1960s, women have been drawn into the labour market and their earnings can be used to buy additional education for their children. In 1961 a third were in paid employment, by 2000 this had increased to nearly half. Married women's increased economic activity rates accounted for most of the increase (Sung, 2003, p345). The whole family has an interest in investing in the education of the younger generation because educational success is the means by which families can sustain and improve their social and economic position. Mothers who showed first that they were dutiful daughters-in-law - and this could mean moving in with them - could then sometimes call upon their mothers-in-law to help with childcare. In other words they were doing so for the sake of the *grandchildren*. The maternal grandmothers, in contrast, were more likely to see the childcare they provided as a continuation of the support they wanted or felt obliged to give, their *daughters*. Over half of those who were receiving childcare help from their mothers expected that when the time came they would also help *their* daughters in this way. (In the British context, Elizabeth Roberts noted in her study that women who had been helped by *their* mothers were much more likely to be willing to help their daughters with childcare than those who had had to struggle on their own.) In South Korea very few (7 percent) of women are employed part-time (meaning less than 35 hours a week). Men *and* women work long hours so the dual earner couple requires substantial help once they have children. There are some childcare centres provided mainly by employers used mainly by mothers from the lower socio-economic groups. The private sector is expanding nursery provision but places can be costly. Professional mothers are much *more* likely to depend on grandmothers because they have the space for her to move in with them or the grandparents themselves live near enough (or in some cases were able and willing to move closer - proximity is not fixed) and again have the space in their homes for the children to live with them during the week or for even longer periods. Mothers who are much less firmly committed to their careers and do not have the support from their families may interrupt their employment while they have very young children. Although maternity leave has recently been increased from 60 to 90 days, very few take their full entitlement because to do so sends a signal to employers and colleagues that they are not committed employees. A 'long hours culture' is very strong in South Korea and there is little debate about involving fathers in childcare. Fathers were notable for their absence in this study.

Families, markets and state at the micro level

Detailed, qualitative studies are invaluable in describing complex and varied relationships between families, households and the wider community and economy. Listening to women talking about the experiences of straddling the informal care economy with the world of paid employment can be very illuminating. For example, Miriam Glucksman's study involved interviewing women living in north-west England who had been employed during the 1930s and 1950s in a cotton town where there was a tradition of women in some occupations, in this case weaving, remaining in full-time employment throughout marriage *and* motherhood. (Marriage bars were prevalent in Britain in the twentieth century until the end of the second world war. Women could be required to resign from the civil service, teaching and many other occupations when they married.) In order to understand better how the dual earner family managed, she developed the concept of "the total social organisation of labour" (TSOL). This she defined as "the manner by which all the labour in a particular society is divided between and allocated to different structures, institutions, activities and people" (Glucksman, 2000, p19). Her analysis therefore included time spent on activities within the home, the workplace and the wider locality. She noted the different rhythms or temporalities involved as well as where different activities were located. By also interviewing casual women workers she was able to tease out the relationship between them and the weavers for whom, amongst other things, they often provided childcare.

She notes that time can be thought of as something to be used or spent or as a resource - something to be made or given. While both casual workers and the cotton weavers worked under time pressure and against the clock both in the workplace and the home, they experienced it in different ways, not least because of the variations in the extent and form of their control over the disposal of their time. The weavers relied heavily on kin and neighbours to provide childcare and other domestic services. Like Yun-Sung Kim's South Korean professional women, at the beginning of this century the weavers in the middle of the last century often farmed out their children with relatives or neighbours whom they paid, sometimes collecting them every night but more often bringing them home only for the weekend.

The tradition of married women working was thus sustained, or made viable, in different ways. That it relied in part on facilities that were external to the household demonstrates the necessity of broadening analysis from an exclusive focus on its internal dynamics to a consideration of the relation of households to both the community sector and family neighbourhood networks. (p69)

Gluckman also learned how casual workers, despite thinking of themselves, in contrast to the weavers, first as mothers rather than workers, actually spent as much time as the weavers working for pay. "Many engaged in numerous forms of work, often combining multiple part-time jobs, like night cleaning and childminding or canteen and laundry work" (p56). Their activities sustained their *husband's* employment as well as that of the weavers. In this sense they were "constantly juggling different forms of temporality" and she argues that these multiple temporalities which they were negotiating "bear an uncanny resemblance to those marshalled as evidence of the 1990s 'new times' and temporalities" (p125). In other words, rather than belonging to a 'pre-modern' era, "theirs was a post-modern existence before its time" (*Idem*).

Jane Wheelock, Elizabeth Oughton and Susan Baines, the authors of a recent study of informal or complementary childcare, which turned out to be "overwhelmingly grandparenting", also argues for looking at intergenerational relationships beyond the household. The study took place in the north-east of England which had once been dominated by traditional heavy industries employing male manual labour. They found that half of their sample of employed mothers relied on regular childcare from grandparents, particularly to complement formal care.

They concluded that what they call complementary childcare is "a gift of caring time given by grandparents to parents". Although most did not want to be paid, some had given up paid employment in order to help a daughter or daughter-in-law to take a paid job. "There can then be very complex patterns of cross-cutting shifts between paid and unpaid work between the generations" (p28). Paternal as well as maternal grandparents were involved, so too were some grandfathers.

Their second study was based on small enterprises and the households who worked in and depended upon them. It was also carried out in a rural area in north-east England. Most of the business households consisted of two married or cohabiting adults. The rest were lone parents or couples in which one partner worked outside the business. Their empirical data on childcare arrangements also showed the importance of care provided by grandparents. They concluded, as Miriam Gluckman had done with respect to the weavers, that these self-employed family businesses "were often unsustainable without unpaid, unmeasured work from a household institution that has porous or flexible boundaries. In other words, they depend on an integration of household and paid and unpaid work that was considered anachronistic in the very recent past" (p37). They concluded by asking whether we can afford to pay so little attention to the flexible way that people in households behave in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

This paper has looked at the extent to which grandmothers are involved in the regular care of their grandchildren while their daughters or daughters-in-law are in paid employment. The development of the dual earner household in many industrialised countries is being underpinned in many ways by the older generation. As families change and family breakdown becomes more common in many societies, grandparents can sometimes find themselves taking over from, rather than just supporting, parents. In their study of care and family life of older children, Julia Brannen, Ellen Heptinstall and Kalwari Bhopal describe how the children were often close to their maternal grandparents because "maternal grandparents had often provided crucial help, both practical and expressive when their parents' marriages broke down." (Brannen et al, 2000p.137). Ferguson and his colleagues in Wales, studied the role of grandparents during divorce, looking particularly at the ways in which they supported their grandchildren during this time. Many became heavily involved in childcare and for some this was more than they would have chosen but they believed parenting does not stop when children become adults. The researchers warn the policy makers that "policy reform cannot just be aimed at ensuring that grandparents are encouraged to do more and more to support their families....the fact that some grandparents are over-committed may simply be a symptom of a lack of options for mothers who wish to return to work" (Ferguson et al, 2004, p142) In other words policy makers need to understand "the intricacy of grandparent-grandchild relationships in divided families and how best to balance

the interests of family members.”(p143) Once again a fuller comprehension of the interdependence of formal and informal economies is needed.

In some circumstances children are living permanently with their grandparents. Research on kinship care in the United States estimated that between 2.3 million and 4.3 million children live without their parents in the homes of relatives, of these 1.5 million live with their grandparents alone (Hegar and Scannapieco (1999) p 23). African American children accounted for half of these children. Between 1960 and 1995 the proportion of all American children living in homes without their parents more than doubled to 4.3% (*idem*). The increase is associated with the rise in the use of crack cocaine and other drugs, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and crime and prison. “Additional causal factors may include economic realities that make it difficult for young parents to succeed without help from older relatives in the form of money, housing or relief from parenting responsibilities” (*idem*). For ‘parenting responsibilities’, read ‘care’.

Today it is unlikely that the grandmother described by the little boy at the beginning of this paper would have as much time as she had thirty years ago, wherever she was living. Policies based on the assumption that today’s grandmothers should be making a bigger contribution to the formal economy by taking up paid employment in greater numbers are based on a failure to see, let alone understand, that the changes the younger generation are experiencing both in the labour market, the family and their economies of care, could not be sustained without the substantial help of the older generation.

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