

Introduction

The goal of this paper is to expand our knowledge on the grandparenting norms, expectations and practices, with a special emphasis on the grandparenting at a distance and across national borders. This study will provide a unique insight into the emotional care and financial support from the grandparents to the grandchildren, apart from the better studied personal childcare provision. The country of data collection is Poland, where the society combines strong intergenerational and family care obligations with intense outmigration.

In a rapidly ageing population, such as the one of Poland (Okólski, 2018), it is surprising how little do we know about the important social role of the older age groups – grandparenthood. The population of grandparents in Poland can be estimated at 9.5 million, compared to 6.9 million children¹. Over 57% of Polish grandparents look after their grandchildren, at least occasionally (Neuberger & Haberkern, 2014, p. 177). According to a 2012 survey 20.1% Poles aged 65+ resided with grandchildren in the same household (based on Szatur-Jaworska, 2012, pp. 422–423). On the other hand, over 253 thousands of Polish nationality children lived abroad (as of 2011 Kaczorowski, 2015), most probably away from their grandparents.

Longer life expectancy and lower fertility mean that generations coexist longer, often late into grandchildren's adulthood but at the same time there are fewer grandchildren per a grandparental couple. Both of these phenomena, characteristic for the contemporary 'beanpole' family, call for investing more in particular grandparent-grandchild relationships as they are more likely to be maintained for several years (i.a. Bengtson, 2001). Spatial mobility, both of parents with small children and of adult grandchildren affects the maintenance of such grandparental relationships, calling for the grandparents' agency and even inducing their mobility at later ages (Baldassar & Merla, 2014).

It is widely held, and in Poland even more than in other countries (75% of Polish SHARE respondents, compared to over 60% in the pooled sample), that looking after grandchildren is grandparents' duty (Krzyżowski, 2011, p. 61). In the Polish SHARE sample of 2006 wave 43% of grandparents looked after their grandchildren every week and 13% nearly every day (Krzyżowski, 2011, p. 67). The impact of looking after grandchildren on the quality of life of people aged 50 or more modelled on SHARE data (Neuberger & Haberkern, 2014) seemed to be mediated by the cultural expectations regarding the grandparents' obligation to provide grandchild care, which require more engagement from grandparents in familialistic welfare regimes. Based on this, the current research aims to explore the quality of life and self-perception of oneself as a grandparent of those Poles who, against the above social norm, do not provide personal grandchild care because their grandchildren live far away or in another country. The survey will explore the normative beliefs on grandparenting, expectations

¹ Author's estimate based on share of people with grandchildren among those aged 50+ in the Survey of Health Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) 2015 results for Poland (Myck, Najsztab, Oczkowska, & Chłoń-Dominiczak, 2017, p. 23) and population structure for 2015 (Central Statistical Office, 2017, table 14).

regarding relations with grandchildren and actual practices of grandparents with grandchildren in different locations in Poland and abroad.

The scholars of transnational families have developed multiple categories related to migrant family practices, such as caring at a distance, virtual co-presence, or grandparents on the move (Baldassar, Nedelcu, Merla, & Wilding, 2016; Baldassar, Wilding, & Baldock, 2007; Nedelcu & Wyss, 2019). The presented research will assess how these categories apply to internally separated families. The idea that mobility and absence are inherent features of family lives in the full range of family forms (Baldassar & Merla, 2014) applies to domestic migrations as well. Distance is a feature that unites internal and international mobility, especially within the EU where the geographic span of internal and international mobility may be similar. In addition the infrastructure for international travel may be more efficient than for internal journeys. This calls for looking at the role of distance in family practices and in the maintenance of intergenerational ties in both internally and internationally mobile families.

The research aims to study how contemporary grandparenting norms are negotiated and practices adapted to the spatial mobility of family members. By looking at a wide age-range of grandparents with families participating in internal and/or international migration this research intends to contribute to bridging the gap between the literatures on transnational families and contemporary transformation of family practices.

Method

The research will be based on a national survey designed purely to collect unique information on grandparenting norms and practices' adaptation to spatial mobility. The survey will cover a nationwide sample of 1000 grandparents aged 50+, with grandchildren living in proximity, at larger distances in the same country and in different locations abroad. It has to be underlined, that individuals may have complex family configurations with a combination of local, distant and transnational grandchildren. The survey will address this complexity, inquiring individuals about their grandchildren in different locations, allowing to compare activities, communication patterns, transfers and grandparents' perception of relationship quality with his/her grandchildren differentiated by the place of residence (distance and presence of a border)

The questionnaire design draws upon literature on grandparenting and transnational families. It also builds upon the results of the author's previous multi-sited qualitative research among Polish migrants in the UK and their parents and other seniors living in migrant-sending localities (Radziwinowiczówna, Rosinska-Kordasiewicz, & Kloc-Nowak, 2018). By adding specific international migration oriented questions the survey design will allow for a systematic comparison of family relationships and practices in transnational and internally mobile families with what is already known on grandparents in general population from SHARE and GGS studies.

Expected findings

This is research in progress, so currently we can only signal the expected findings and planned analyses, to be completed before confirming the conference abstract.

While in the literature on transnational families there are many studies on the provision of personal childcare by grandparents hosting grandchildren or visiting them abroad, this research will also include emotional care and financial support from the grandparents to the grandchildren, as the types of care which may last long into their adulthood. We intend to deepen the understanding of how geographic distance affects grandparenting and how this is mediated by inequalities due to age, socio-economic characteristics and ICT literacy of the members of the grandparental generation. Next, we will search for a specific effect of having grandchildren resident abroad, beyond what can be attributed to the lack of geographic proximity of the members of different generations of the family. While international migration entails additional obstacles (legal and language barriers, time zones) for maintaining contact and emotional closeness, it may also involve a higher propensity of family members to engage in virtual co-presence e.g. as a way to symbolically overcome the border or as a response to the emotional needs of international migrants.

One of the specific aims of the survey is to measure grandparents' communication practices, especially those mediated by modern ICT. Looking to fill in the niche in the literature, we undertake to analyse the patterns and factors associated with the use of innovative ICT by ageing persons in their grandparental relations with grandchildren living in a distant Polish location, compared to transnational grandchildren.

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